

ELI FOR LIFE

When I applied to ELI, I was honestly thinking (as I'm sure that many of you are) that this would be a great resume builder. I did not even consider whether or not I would actually learn anything. Then I found out that we had to meet at 9:00 on a Saturday morning for a seven hour orientation, to say the least, I was a little discouraged. I had a friend that was also going through the class and I remember our phone conversation the night before went something like this... "I can't believe we have to spend our whole Saturday in class." She replied "You know everyone else in the class is probably looking forward to it. There are all going to be perfectionists and overachievers." The only thing that excited me at first was the free donuts; however, the hours flew by and I actually had a lot of fun. I drove home that day thinking that maybe I could actually get something out of this class. Maybe I wouldn't want to focus on the doing the least I could to get a good grade. Maybe I could learn something that I could continue to use throughout my life.

After orientation, I was a little surer of what to expect from the lectures, but still really didn't not know what to expect from the class. It seems hard to believe, but the lectures actually went by fast the majority of the time. The time sped by mainly because we got a lot accomplished within it. One of our biggest accomplishments, as a class, was the planning of our Sunbridge Project. Sunbridge is a nursing home for people who no longer have Medicare left. We threw a Halloween party for the patients at Sunbridge which was a huge success. Also, I learned my leadership personality style and discovered that it was much different than I had thought. I found the lecture about

mindfulness to be very helpful, considering that as a college student, I have very little. We did a ROPES course in which we focused on teamwork skills. The diversity lecture was also very beneficial, due to the fact, that this was a constant subject in our class. However, what we did as a class means nothing without the learning aspect. Next, I want to focus on what I actually learned about myself and abilities through the class.

It seems a little unrealistic, but I actually feel that I learned something during every class period. Therefore, I want to focus on one class discussion, our class project, and my individual project, in which I consider the most rewarding. In the Leadership Type discussion, we took a questionnaire in order to figure out our particular leadership style. I really didn't expect this to be exact or even to be accurate, but this interpreted my particular style more effectively than I could have. I learned what I needed to focus on, in order to be successful in leadership positions, as well as in everyday life. In the past, I felt that I could be a leader in some settings, while remaining passive in other settings. This proved untrue, due to the fact that as I developed my leadership skills, my personal life also underwent construction. I thought that is aspect was particularly evident, because of the analysis given by my classmates and leaders. It seemed like everyone's behavior and style became clear after listening to them talk about their particular leadership style. As a result, it became easier for me to see how others viewed me as a leader. Not only did this lecture help me be a more effective leader; it also pointed out flaws in my ability to be a sincere listener and be an organized student. Therefore, this two-hour session taught me to be a more influential leader, how to improve my relationships with others, and how to more effectively manage my priorities.

Next, I learned a lot during our class project. As I mentioned before, our class project was to plan and throw a Halloween Party for the residents at Sunbridge nursing home. During the planning part of this project, I learned to be flexible and the ability to make contacts. It seemed difficult enough to find one day in three months, in which everyone in class could participate. However, we had more difficulty deciding on a particular project. Some people in our class were intimidated by the elderly and did not feel comfortable working with them. The majority of the class liked this project; consequently, everyone agreed. I never dreamed that organizing just 23 people would be so difficult and time-consuming. This experience taught me patience, as did being one of the main contacts with Sunbridge. Alice Dehner also acted as a middle man between our class and Sunbridge. I even found it hard to get in touch with her and even harder to figure out a time that she could meet with our class. The person I tried to contact at Sunbridge was also difficult to get in touch with. A week before our project, I still had not answered questions that classmates had concerning the project. But all the trouble was most definitely worth it, our project went really well. I left that day feeling like I could make a difference. The patient that I hung out the majority of the day was named John. John was 86 and chose to live in a cheaper nursing home, so he could pay for his wife to live a more expensive nursing home. John hadn't seen his wife in two years and the last time he saw her she didn't know him, due to Alzheimer's disease. He was one of the most inspirational people I have ever met and I plan to visit him again before I go home for Christmas. Many people in our class had similar experiences with patients there. This was an experience that I will never forget and helped me to reconstruct my leadership style. I discovered that I wanted service to be central in all my leadership

motives. Forget holding important positions or being the president of every club possible, no one is going to care about any of that when I'm dead and gone. I redefined my goals and focused on changing my behavior in order to have more experiences like I did with John. In hopes, that I impacted John's life as much as he did mine.

Finally, my individual project (which I am still in the process of doing), was probably the most important part of my ELI experience. My project was centered on educating and supporting family members caring for persons living with Alzheimer's disease. I had difficulty finding a facility that would find my project useful and actually let me do my project. This project taught me that I am not half as busy as I think I am. I would have never completed something like this without ELI, due to other time commitments. Through working with people who really have trouble understanding, it strengthened my communication skills. It also taught me how to better encourage and support people, which I will need if I continue to pursue a physical therapy degree. I also learned to listen to others and concentrate on their needs above my own.

By far, ELI was the most beneficial class I've taken thus far in college. I feel that what I have learned I will continue to use throughout my education and life.

I am a bottom line type person. The bottom line for me is that ELI has put me one step closer to achieving my goals. Not just because it will look good on my transcript or because I will have recommendations from the leaders involved, but because it challenged me to think differently and pursue areas that I did not even consider before. It even led me to think about different opportunities involved with my future career. When I went to college, I told my parents that I wanted more than just a degree. I wanted life-

long friends (which I also made in ELI), to have the best time of my life, and to figure out whom I was. With the time commitment involved in school, it is easy to get sidetracked with your next test or final paper, ELI reinforced in me that I need to do more than the average student in order to accomplish my goals. The bottom line is if you consider yourself anything but average this class is for you, no matter what your style. I loved this class and I would just like to thank Rhonda, Rachel, Melinda, and Joe for making this such an awesome experience.