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ELI Final Report

ELI, what an experience. It's difficult to describe in words what the class, and more specifically the people that I have had the opportunity to meet through the class, have meant to me. What a wonderful way to be introduced to the University of Kentucky. College can be a very daunting, looming shadow in the distance for someone, like me, from a small town who is moving to a much larger city, and adjusting from a school with about 500 students to a school with over 30,000 students. Also, from a town with only one stoplight and no McDonald's, to one of the largest cities in the state. The University of Kentucky had a newspaper that was published more frequently than my county's newspaper. All these facts, coupled with the academic and financial pressures that college can put on a person, can lead to a very stressful transition to college life. Thankfully, ELI helped to smooth the transition for me and I was able to adjust very quickly and efficiently to this new lifestyle. How? In many ways. First, remember the camaraderie that you always felt, sitting in a high school class, looking around, seeing so many of the familiar faces that you had grown up with? Then, picture the college classroom. In a new building, completely new people, some older and much more mature and experienced than you. In a university as big as UK, this is bound to be the picture in almost all of your classes, at least during the first couple

of weeks. What ELI did for me, was to provide me with a solid base of great friends and people that I could count on. We sat in a very relaxed and casual environment, allowing each of us to get to know one another on a personal level. It was just like that scene from high school, camaraderie among a group of friends. And these weren't just any friends, there were the present and future leaders of the University of Kentucky. I remember asking myself how I would ever find out about all the opportunities that were available to me at UK. I even voiced this question to several people and nobody really gave me a solid answer that I was satisfied with prior to coming to the university. ELI was the answer to that question. Not only did I discover the many organizations and clubs on campus, but I have a direct contact with the president of one, the secretary of another, and the leader of another. How? They're all in ELI! This was awesome to me.

At the risk of being redundant, remember back in high school? That kid. That kid that was in everything, that was the president of everything, that was always present at every school event and had the 4.0.? Remember the valedictorian who was so decorated at graduation and who gave so much of their time to their high school? That kid was me. I was a Kentucky Governor's scholar, a Jeff Green scholar, a UK academic scholar, an RECC scholar, a Kiwanis scholar, valedictorian, president of the Student Technology Leadership Program and Beta Club, Vice President of the National Honor Society chapter in my school, leader of the Georgetown Mentorship Developing Leader's program, the only student in my school chosen to go to PEPP, on the advisory board for the

Jackson County Empowerment Zone, and a student representative for the Jackson County Kiwanis Club, blah, blah, blah. My parents were also leaders in the community, so I also had social obligations to fulfill in my spare time (ha ha ha). I wouldn't trade my high school experience for anything, but I was tired. I was burned out. I didn't want to be class president, I didn't want to be leader of any clubs, I didn't want to be "that kid" that everybody always turned to in order to get things done at school. I just wanted to be a regular person. Someone who blended in, someone that nobody looked twice at, an average college student. This was the so called "plan" for me as I entered college life. I had no motivation whatsoever. ELI changed all that. Through the seminars which taught good leadership skills, to simply observing the other leaders in the class, I began to feel myself transforming into "that kid" again. I began to attend campus functions, I even got involved in a huge volunteer project with the Children's Miracle Network, something I'm not sure that I would even have attempted in high school. I realized that I didn't really want to be just average anymore, and deep down, that being average would never truly satisfy me. Now, after the completion of the class, I feel just like my old self again, rejuvenated and ready to go. I think that several people in the class shared that sentiment. That has been the true effect of the class on me. Of course, I certainly picked up a lot from the lectures and such, but at the end of the day, ELI has given me back my motivation. ELI made me want to be "that kid" once again.

Specifically, an event that stood out to me in ELI was, as I'm sure many have said, Sunbridge. Visiting the nursing home was a wonderful experience for me. It was not necessarily out of my comfort zone, as I had been there before, but it was, nonetheless, a challenge and a heart warming experience. Out of all of the community service projects that we had to choose from, I wanted to work with the homeless because I had never had that opportunity before, however, the class chose the nursing home. Throughout the Halloween party that we had at Sunbridge I became increasingly glad that this place had been chosen. The residents genuinely appreciated the attention and care that they received from us. Anytime that you can really feel like you made somebody's day better, you have a much better day yourself. I definitely felt great on this day, about myself, and everyone in the class. I was so proud of everyone. I'm also pretty sure that some of the residents still keep in touch on a daily basis with certain students, which is wonderful.

So, now what? From this experience, what will I take with me? First, I am a member of the University of Kentucky community. When I walk across campus, I always see people that I know and admire and give them a wave, or stop and talk. When I read the Kernel, I read about people that I know, and I truly feel that I am a part of a community of leaders, and more importantly, a community of some of the most wonderful people that I have ever met, class members, mentors and staff, all included. Secondly, the Children's Miracle Network. When we all gave our presentations about our individual service projects in class, I showed

some of the children that the fundraiser that I'm involved in will benefit. Every second that I spend in preparation for the fundraiser will be well worth the time and effort if I can raise enough money to pay for the treatment of one child with cancer, or one child with HIV, or any child who needs medical care and cannot financially obtain it. The work that will go into this project, and the effort that will be required to keep it's momentum going from year to year requires a lot of motivation. The motivation comes from the kids, and they have made this project very important to me. As a result of ELI, I have the opportunity to really make a difference in the lives of these ill children. So, now what? I will organize this fundraiser to the best of my ability, and really make a difference. Thirdly, ELI has provided me with wonderful adult contacts at the University of Kentucky. In a class of 30,000, it is extraordinarily difficult to stand out in the eyes of professors, and in the eyes of even your advisor, because they have to deal with so many people on a daily basis. In ELI, the class is so small, that the instructors really get to know you personally. You are not simply a name or heaven forbid, a number, on a sheet of paper or on an attendance sheet. You are a person, with a real personality, characteristics and qualities. I will always have a recommendation or just a friend to talk to when I need assistance from someone who knows me for who I am, and who doesn't barely recognize my face in a sea of other college students vying for the same opportunities that I am. I feel that being in ELI really set me apart from other students who didn't have the ELI experience.

Finally, thank you to everyone who made ELI a possibility. I hope that you can see the impact that it has had on me. I would encourage anyone to take ELI. The transition to college life was an easy one for me, just because of this institute. Thank you very much for the ELI opportunity and for providing me with a network of friends and contacts that I will have throughout my time at the University of Kentucky and for the rest of my life.