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So, in thinking about summarizing all that I have learned this semester in ELI in a mere five pages, I was presented with quite a dilemma. One reason for this dilemma was that I am a writer and absolutely love to put my ideas on paper. But, the bigger reason for this dilemma was that I have learned way too much throughout my semester, not to mention within my ELI class. And as much as I love to put my ideas on paper, some of the things I have experienced or learned would be cheated if words were put with them. But, with all that said, I am going to attempt to give the best overview of my experiences and personal growth that I possibly can. I suppose the best way to relay everything ELI has been to me this semester is by dividing my experiences into categories, and so, I will talk about the emotional, social, and mental effects that ELI has had on me.

First I will talk about how ELI affected me emotionally. The effects reach far and wide. When I refer to emotions, I guess I am more talking about the moral and spiritual effects ELI had on me. As I hopefully made evident throughout our class sessions and other time that we spent together as a class, my faith is immensely important to me. This has not always been the case, as through the last two years of high school, I let many other things get in the way of me living out my beliefs. However, my faith became sort-of like a goal to aspire to, a standard to live up to and out to others. I say all this simply because ELI became another place for me to share the thing that is most important in my life. I was overjoyed on the first day of class, actually during the orientation, to learn that many of my future classmates lived lives directed by and dedicated to their personal

faiths. As class sessions went by I grew more and more in my personal faith through different activities and class discussions we engaged in. In particular, I think I gained an even better understanding of my faith through our group service project at Sunbridge. When we were there, I truly felt as if I saw Christ's love through my classmates. I saw people my age demonstrating unconditional love to those who were in a great deal of need. After that day, I rededicated myself to putting the needs and desires of others before my own.

Another way in which my personal morality was affected through ELI was through my increased sense of integrity. I have always strived to be an honest person, but in some cases I may have only told the partial truth or just stayed quiet in order to protect my own self-interests. Many times, I would only tell the truth or be completely honest if it was convenient for me. Don't get me wrong, I definitely tried to be honest, but if being truthful was going to be too difficult, I would try to find another way out. However, through our discussion about ethics and through my individual project, I gained a better understanding of the importance of being truthful. And, in keeping with the theme, I am going to be extremely honest right now. At times, thoughts would run through my head about not even doing a project. In a lot of cases, I thought that just giving up would be a lot less frustrating than trying to organize and carry out a project only to risk the possibility of failure. However, with the fear of failing ELI, and more importantly with the fear of being void of a sense of accomplishment or personal pride, I took the risk and am in the works with my project. Also, by making honesty a priority above most other things, I have truly gotten to know the other people in my class. I can proudly say that they know who I am, my priorities and dislikes, and I know those things about a lot of

them. Also, through the conflict mediation session and diversity sessions, I realized that it is better to be honest with my opinions because only then can your ignorance and misguided views be corrected.

Socially, I have been affected in many different ways as well. I alluded somewhat to the social aspects of ELI in the previous paragraphs, but I believe there is much more I can say. As I said, I feel as if I have gotten to know my ELI classmates quite well this semester, and that is a reward that I don't think I could have gained any other way. But, I think the biggest social lesson I have gained through ELI is how to relate and interact with people that I didn't think I had any common ties or bonds with. In particular, I am thinking of the faculty members that I interacted with in every class period. I began to see each and every staff and faculty member for who they were personally rather than as just their title or position. Simply by talking with my peer mentor, Lance, as well as with Rhonda, Rachel, and the other faculty and staff that had a part in ELI this semester, I acquired a lot of insight about life and how to handle things that may cross my path. Secondly, I now have confidants I feel I can come to with problems or difficult situations if I need advice or support. The faculty members and professors that came in to speak influenced my thinking and behaviors both in professional and personal life. I feel extremely fortunate to have been blessed with such experts in important leadership issues. I also feel extremely privileged to have gotten to know such fine staff members on a personal level. I have truly seen the cream of the crop, so to speak, of the University of Kentucky.

My interaction with unexpected persons was not limited to the faculty and staff however. The people in ELI were an eclectic mix, and I appreciated every one of them.

Through all the different personalities, I have a more open view of world culture and my college experience will be more fulfilling. The people in my class come from all different backgrounds and lifestyles and I have a lot more respect for viewpoints and choices that vary from my own. Specifically, I came to the realization that I am quite naïve when it comes to the customs and beliefs of ethnicities different from my own. Through ELI, I gained personal experience with the African American and Hispanic cultures, and am more appreciative of both now. A few of my classmates' projects focused on culture and racial unity, and through them, I became more aware of this important issue. Also, another project made me more aware of the versatility that physically disabled people have in the professional world. I never even knew such varied equipment existed, but I am amazed at all the inventions and accommodations that are available. All of the projects that my classmates have involved themselves in are inspirational because through them, I can see the personal passions of each person in ELI. Not only that, but some of the projects sparked passions in me that I was completely unaware of.

Lastly, ELI affected me mentally. The way I think will truly never be quite the same. For instance, the session we had on mindfulness and creativity showed me the importance of silence. I am definitely a talker and my moments of complete silence come few and far between. But, Lance allowed us to revel in silence; to enjoy the quietness that enables us to really think down to our core. I am greatly appreciative of that because it has enabled me to get to know myself a little better. I am also more open to my own personal creativity, whereas before I most likely would have shoved my off the wall ideas aside for lack of courage. Also, I have new tools for problem and conflict

solving. This without a doubt adds to my intelligence. I was, for the most part, unaware that there were actual thought out ways and different strategies for approaching a difficult situation. When I think about it, it makes perfect sense. Different types of people deal with problems and rough situations in varying ways, and it would be fitting that there are different strategies for problem-solving depending on the personalities involved. My increased knowledge about problem-solving coincides with another session that impacted my intelligence as well. When we took the leadership style test, I acquired a lot of insight about myself and the way I relate to others. Firstly, I realized that I love people. I was somewhat aware of this because I find myself having an extremely difficult time being alone. But, it was exciting to actually be diagnosed as a people person. I also was reminded that I hate conflict, and this couldn't be truer. However, I realized that my strengths and weaknesses can compliment other personality types and work well with them to produce successful results in whatever task I chose. Also, by seeing the strengths of other personality types, I now know in what areas I can improve.

Needless to say, the benefits that ELI gave to me are immeasurable. I am a better person in every aspect of my life. I am more beneficial to myself as well as others. With all that I have mentioned, however; I didn't really talk about my individual project. And, actually, my paper would not be complete without mentioning it. Throughout my other papers this semester I have made it clear that I am extremely passionate about the Hispanic population, and throughout this past year I have gained a great love for children as well. My project is far from complete, but I am going to be able to work with both of these groups of people. And although my project is in it's beginning stages, I have had many eye opening experiences already. The people I have been working with for my

project have much less than I have been blessed with, and yet they have more joy than the majority of people I know. The people at La Roca church are teaching me more and more about life every time that I interact with them. My project is still in the beginning stages of planning but I can't wait to help the people at La Roca. I know that being a part of something that will bring those people happiness will be the biggest reward ELI has ever given me.

So, in this paper, I hope I have made it clear what a spectacular experience ELI has been for me. There is not one aspect of my life that hasn't been touched or shaped in some way by my experiences this past semester. I only hope to take what I have learned and apply those lessons throughout the rest of my college years and beyond.