

ELI Fall 2004  
Lisa Pawlik  
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When I applied for the Emerging Leader Institute I expected to learn about becoming a better leader through becoming more involved in the campus community. However looking back on my ELI experience my own leadership skills have been tested and by doing so have been greatly improved. The Emerging Leader Institute gave me the opportunity to not only learn about leadership, different ways to apply good leadership techniques, and the chance to go out practice leadership skills and then reflect back on where improvements can be made. Because the Emerging Leader Institute had a classroom (which involved numerous small leadership activities), group project and individual project components, I can not simply say that one project alone helped me grow as a leader, but the entire process of ELI did. However two projects: the class group project and my individual project made the most impact on me. As we learned in class "leadership is a process". The Emerging Leader Institute has changed me as not only as a person, but as a leader, because leadership is truly part of our lives in every aspect, and by applying leadership lessons to projects it may allow you to see a problem in a new light finding a better solution.

For our class project we had several possible projects to carry out, and we limited the choices to two projects we really wanted to do, and the class was essentially tied. The two projects were packing Thanksgiving day meal boxes at God's Pantry so people who are less fortunate could have a good Thanksgiving meal and putting on a senior prom at the Liberty Ridge assisted living home here in Lexington. The process of choosing a project was a learning experience in itself. We all wanted to make an impact on the community, and there were pro's and con's to both projects. Everyone went around the room stating which projects they thought were best and why we should do that project. By getting a chance to articulate what we expected

to get out of the group project, we learned as a class that we could work together to pick a project everyone would be happy with. The process of choosing a project was also very important because we were reminded the project does not have to be a traditional project, we were free to think outside of the box and allowed to deviate from what classes have done in the past. I think one of the reasons why ELI is a class that you learn so much from, and carry with you for life is that we were allowed and encouraged to think outside of the box. If boxing food all day would not allow our class to make a large enough impact in the community, then maybe if we combined it with a senior prom at night it would. So, in a way we learned our general indecisiveness to choose one project actually made our two projects better, because everyone was happy, which made group morale high, so the projects were completed with enthusiasm. Coming into ELI I never expected to learn the little things about leadership, such as indecisiveness and how to combat it, but I think these “little lessons” in the grand scheme of the class provided the greatest learning experiences.

The group projects gave us a great opportunity to put our leadership into action and learn from actually going out into the community and focus on how to get things done. We solicited donations from area businesses and we were extremely successful in doing so. I never thought that we could have all the food donated and have a large amount of our decorations supplied, but we did. We also had to plan our projects, especially the senior prom. Through this class I have truly seen how important planning is in becoming a good leader. Planning was the real work of our senior prom. I will never push planning aside after completing this project. Our prom would simply not be the success it was had we not had a great plan and several back up ideas. Our prom was so successful because we not only planned but worked together.

The most important idea I learned from our group project is that you have to adjust your old ways of thinking of what a leader is. A leader does not always have an official title. In fact

someone else could be designated “chairperson” or “manager” of a certain event/group but there could be more than one leader. Our group project did not have any official titles but we all worked together contributing what we are best at whether it be decorating, planning or food. Some of us may have taken a greater leadership role in one aspect but a lesser role in another. By doing so I learned that leaders do not always have to be in control, because it is more often than not impossible to be in complete control of such a large project. Leadership I feel after completing this class is inspiring others to achieve not by confidence in the leader but by confidence in themselves. A good leader is not a dictator, they realize that several minds are better than one, and many suggestions can make an idea better. In ELI we learned leadership will not always be glamorous and easy; people may take credit for your work, other times credit may be incorrectly given to you, and working to get a group of conflicting personalities may not always be the success you thought it would, but instead it involves a real commitment, you have to work on it occasionally. By assessing your work on a specific task you can see where your strengths and weaknesses are, and how to improve. I am grateful that the Emerging Leader Institute gave me the opportunity to be involved in such a great project: our service day at God’s Pantry and Liberty Ridge assisted living home.

On self-assessment and growth as a leader, I truly feel that my individual leadership project allowed me to truly experience ELI as it was designed; as a class where we learn about leadership and get the opportunity to learn hands on in an environment specifically designed to help us become better leaders. By choosing my project I was already learning something: that not every project has to have a definitive ending/solution point. I chose to try and get more crosswalks on campus. I chose my project because I think student safety is a large problem affecting this campus. In addition I think having more crosswalks on campus would not only make the excuse that there are not enough on campus obsolete, but also it would make crossing

the streets safer for everyone, because UK is a walking campus. In the past I never would have picked a project like this because I always picked projects where I knew the final destination of the project such as going to God's Pantry, packing boxes and giving people a holiday meal. I learned that not all projects have to have a set end point to be beneficial, that I could make an impact without necessarily getting another crosswalk on campus. I also learned choosing projects with "lofty" goals are not necessarily projects to avoid. These projects simply require that I look at the project in a new way and find the best way that I can make an impact as a single person, relatively small group on campus, etc. The Emerging Leader Institute also encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone. I probably could have picked a project with one of the groups I am involved with on campus and maybe made a more concrete impact on the community, but I think by leaving my comfort zone and choosing a project that at first I was not very educated with allowed me to grow as a leader, because leaders are not always in their comfort zones.

With this project, I never actually did get a crosswalk on campus, but I would like to think I made some progress towards making this campus safe. I researched the project, talked with students, administrators and through this process I learned not only about safety issues but where my own leadership skills need improvement. As John F. Kennedy said "leadership and learning are indispensable to each other", and I certainly learned this in my project. I learned that I could not go into meeting unprepared because people would not take you or your message seriously. I can not put into words how much I learned about campus safety, so I learned by getting involved and making the initiative to get out and make a change you are already setting the path to becoming a better leader. Again, planning played a large role and I watched my project develop from I want to do something with pedestrian safety to get more crosswalks on campus. I really saw my leadership project as a process. Pedestrian safety is not something I will completely forget about after I leave this class, or even this campus. It will be a project I will

continue to be involved with on campus in anyway possible, because I learned even small changes can lead to that great big change you so desire. My individual leadership project will continue through out my time at UK and I feel that because of ELI I was able to work on a project that would allow me to grow as a leader and also learn at the same time.

Even though my experience with the Emerging Leader Institute has just come to an end, I can already see changes in not only my leadership style, but also as a student, member of the UK/Lexington community and even as a good group member. This class gave me feedback on my own leadership style and my strengths and weaknesses through not only evaluation, but by allowing me to complete a project and see for myself where I can improve. I will continue to work on my individual project and use some of the skills we discussed in class. This class has made me even more confused about leadership than when I came in because learning about different leaders, case studies and schools of thought on leadership has made me realize that leadership is a process. You can not complete one class like ELI and know everything you possibly can. I see myself taking various lessons and topics discussed in class and developing them further. Whether answering my questions is through more leadership reading or talking about my experience in this class with others, I will carry my ELI experience with me for a very long time. The topics we discussed in this class such as practices of exemplary leadership, enlisting others and celebrating values and victories will stick with me when I am in a situation where I need to step up and be a leader. Unlike some of my other classes, I will actually follow up on questions and projects from this class, making the Emerging Leader Institute not only a class, but more like leadership itself, a process.