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Emerging Leadership Institute  
Final Report  
Fall 2004  
November 30, 2004

It really is hard to put into words the effect the Emerging Leadership Institute has had on my life and will continue to have throughout my collegiate and professional career. How in the world I got accepted into a leadership class; where I quickly realized, that I really had no idea what leadership was, is astonishing. (And after reading back through the application questions, boy, did I make myself out to be a sap.) But I am very thankful to Jared and Angel for taking a leap of faith on a guy who didn't know the difference between a leader and a manager and accepting the challenge of equipping him not only with the tools to become a campus leader but with the tools to lead in any situation.

My brain really doesn't begin firing until 10 A.M. (even later on Saturdays), so please excuse me if I leave out a few things from the Orientation. (Dr. Holbein, please keep this in mind when you are grading my tests for my 8 A.M. class next semester ☺.) The first thing I remember about orientation, was that it was well early. The muffins and juice were nice but my body, unaccustomed to early Saturday mornings, did not know how to react to the food. I am also not the most charismatic person early on Saturday mornings, but several classmates went out of there way to introduce themselves and discuss our similar interests; the first step towards several rewarding new friendships I have due to ELI. I really didn't know what to expect from my fellow classmates prior to ELI, but what I found were several students with similar concerns and dedication to helping others.

(And some with greater concern and dedication, that are truly modeling the way.)  
By mid-morning, I was fully awake and remember how proud I was of our “house” drawings, outlines of the most important facets of our lives and the excitement of meeting my mentor group the first time.

The classes were unlike any class I have ever had. Rather than bombarding you with countless, unusable facts, the instructors did a wonderful job of instilling core ideas that one can take with them wherever they go. Instead of focusing on memorization, the instructors geared their efforts towards equipping every ELI student with the tools necessary to be great leaders. Every speaker won't be the most appealing to you, but I was able to gather at least one thing from every speaker, no matter how little the speaker's area of expertise applied to my life. Jared and Angel did a wonderful job of bringing in some of the best minds on leadership this university has to offer and setting up a semi-order of the presentations to give the class a more cohesive feel that is hard to achieve in a class relying so heavily on guest presenters.

My mentor group was an awesome experience, which not only helped me to better understand the topics covered in class, but also kept me focused on fulfilling my individual leadership project. Dr. Holbein and Lara always went out of their ways to make the mentor meetings exciting. Sure some of the games we played were a little goofy and I have a few friends back home that I wouldn't send a copy of Larry the Lime's biography to, but all of our games and activities helped to strengthen and develop our leadership abilities (and although I will later deny this to anyone who asks me, pretty fun.) Dr. Holbein, Lara, Andrew, and

Katherine all contributed valuable ideas to my project and kept me focused. I really enjoyed my time spent with my mentor group.

My individual leadership project really called into play several of the leadership lessons I had gathered in ELI. My first idea was too ideological and vague and my second idea (which I am currently still working on) was put on the backburner after talking to Steve Feese, who convinced me that Lexington had a far greater need for someone to design a brochure that could be handed out to students and property managers alike, since there is such a high turnover of occupants and management every year in the UK area. I feel that the brochure was a success and am hopeful that it will get lots of use in the upcoming years but I still feel that I have failed by not bringing recycling to the five or six apartment complexes immediately surrounding my own, but I am still working on the logistics of the recycling bins and getting the residents informed about recycling.

I feel that our group projects were a roaring success. I have never been around a group of college students who were so eager to wake up early (and I thought Orientation was early...) on a cold Saturday morning and stuff Thanksgiving boxes for God's Pantry. I also could not believe how well our Senior Prom for Liberty Ridge went. Despite the large strain of classes, work, and other campus activities, everyone in the class worked hard on their respective committees and pulled off an exceptional evening that I am sure both the students and the residents of Liberty Ridge will remember for a long time. The decorations were stunning, activities went off without a hitch, and somehow

Lisa was able to manage a group of guys on the food committee that knew a whole lot more about eating food than buying or cooking it. (I know, because I am one of those guys.)

If you would have asked me to name off great leaders before I became involved in ELI, I would have rattled off names like Alexander the Great, Sun Tzu, and General Patton. I would have applauded the actions of Malcolm Glazer (owner of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and probable-soon-to-be owner of Manchester United), who when purchasing the Buccaneers promised Tampa authorities that he would go halves on a new stadium. Once Glazer assumed control of the team he renounced his verbal agreement and gave Tampa two years to build a stadium, or he would move the team to city that would; Tampa caved in and now the residents are paying a half-cent sales tax to cover the construction. I viewed leadership as the conquering of your opposition, the acquisition of a rival's territory, or the pillaging of those opposed to your growth.

While many of the before mentioned accomplished great things, my leadership studies pre-ELI were focused on an extremely small area of leadership. I now realize that there is much more to leadership than building an empire or wiping out our enemy. I now realize that leadership is the relationship between those that lead and those that choose to follow. A leader should inspire those around him/her to accomplish universally great things that would have been impossible without the leader's inspiration. If Alexander the Great would have focused more on his relationship on with his followers and less on acquiring

more followers, perhaps the results of his struggles would have lasted longer than a few years after his death.

I realize that no definition of leadership can be applied to all circumstances. What works well in one situation for one leader, might not work in a similar situation for a different leader. Would Donald Trump be a world-renowned leader if his last name was something like Cardoza, a name that doesn't just flow off of the tongue? If one was to put Mother Theresa as CEO of Company A and Napoleon as CEO of Company B, I would assume that both would achieve magnificent results albeit the fact that they would use different methods. ELI also opened my eyes to the fact that most leaders don't have titles, it is just the 'leader' hat they put on.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in ELI and felt that I have grown so much as a leader since the beginning of the semester. Where before I would look at something and say "Someone needs to do something about that," I now look at the same problem and say "what can I do about that?" Learning should never stop, but I feel that if I am able to implement only half of what I have learned in ELI, I can help to make a powerful difference in my community. Everything about the program was first-rate and I cannot wait to continue to implement the tools I first learned in ELI.