

My Experience in ELI

The Emerging Leader Institute has helped me develop as a leader and changed my perspective on leadership. I have learned how to step out of my comfort zone to face many new challenges. I knew the Emerging Leader Program would be a great opportunity to learn more about leadership. Also, I knew that I would be introduced to new experiences and opportunities that could potentially help me in the future. Furthermore, I never expected to benefit as much as I did.

Each class session had a unique topic that was related or some how connected to real life experiences. In one class session, we did a ropes course which focused on team building. During the ropes course, we learned to depend on each other and communicate as a team. We learned that it is good to delegate in some situations, but it is even more important to listen. A good leader will take control of a situation and keep an open mind to what other people are saying. I think that this session was very important because of the message that was portrayed; teamwork is essential in any project. I can relate this session to my individual project because I had to learn to rely on teamwork so that everything could get done. I have not always been a team-oriented person and this course helped me realize that you can not always do things on your own. It does not hurt to rely on others for help because it is not showing weakness. It only makes you stronger.

The class sessions were just a portion of the class, the peer mentor groups were also interesting. The purpose of the mentor groups were to further elaborate on the discussions in class and give feed back about any questions you may have. These groups

allowed people that are not outspoken in class a chance to express themselves in a smaller group. I received a lot of inspiration during these small groups. One activity that we did in our small discussion group related to our greatest fear or obstacle. We wrote and shared comments on each person in our group about what we see in them as leaders. This activity really helped me because of all of the positive comments that everyone had to say about me. A lot of the times, I do not see what other people see in me. For example, my counselor nominated me to be in the Emerging Leader Program. It was my first time even being introduced to a leadership class, since I have been at U of K. I believe my counselor saw great potential in me, to even want me to apply to such a good program. So I took advantage of the opportunity. I will use the positive feedback I received as motivation. The little things that other people say make a big difference in how one feels. That is one reason why I feel the small groups were so beneficial. That one activity changed my whole perspective on why I should even try to make a change. By making a difference, one small thing could change the lives or hearts of a number of people.

Another great aspect of the mentor groups were that, the mentors would always challenge your mind. They would have you think about situations and apply them to a situation that you have experienced before. I learned from the small group that I was a type of person that likes to have a well thought-out answer before I actually answer a question. The small groups gave me a chance to take advantage of that and showed me that it there was not one right way. The mentor groups also contributed the one on one connection that helped me throughout the class.

The experience of ELI goes beyond what we talked about in each session. It also brings together a variety of people that comes from different backgrounds but have one common goal. That goal is to make a difference. I think that the class was very interesting because you have so many different personalities in one room discussing various topics. If anything, I learned to value and respect other people's opinions just by being in this class. Our minds were opened to new ideas, new opinions, and new backgrounds. I learned a lot from others experiences and how one person might look at one situation and another in a different way, it does not make their view wrong, just different.

Another activity that we done were the Leadership Styles that was designed based on our personality traits. In relation to the different backgrounds, no one had the same exact leadership tendencies. However, it was quite easy to distinct a dominate person from a person with a steady leadership style. I learned about myself as a leader and how I could improve a leader. Although, the test results may have other characteristics it says I possess, in my case it may not have been true. I also learned about what other leadership styles I work well with. Now that I know more about myself and the characteristics of others, I can apply that to any leadership opportunity I come in contact with, especially my individual project. I will be sure to use it in the future because it will benefit me as well as others.

Since the ELI program is very diverse and we all respect each other, it makes the atmosphere more comfortable. With a comfortable atmosphere, it makes the learning experience greater. Compared to other college classes, the average size of most classes are pretty large. You do not get to interact with each other or get a chance to express your

opinion and receive feedback. It also does not require a lot of work other than to think and be able to form an opinion with supporting evidence. This class not only helps you formulated opinions but it also encourages you to get involved in the community. My mother always told me I need to give back to the community and I never understood why until now. I have received so many blessings and there are many people out there who are struggling. I feel the need to give back to them so that they can experience what I have. A lot of times people take advantage of small things like that, but every little bit helps.

I think that if the opportunity is given, that every college student should take a leadership class just so they can hear about leadership. Some people don't have this opportunity but I believe if it was given to a million people, then someone out of that million would benefit from it. And that one person could make a difference that will contribute to millions of people and someone out of that million will benefit and continue one the legacy.

During this whole program, I learned to step out of my comfort zone. I've may have been uneasy at times, but by doing this I've overcome some fears and obstacles I've never imagined doing. It also allowed me to experience different things. For instance, our group project was challenging because it was not only out of my comfort zone, but the classes also. We learned as a group to open our minds up and experience something new. Something we would not do on a normal basis. When we picked the Refugee Ministry as our project, I was uneasy because it was something different. However, I learned that different is not bad; it is just another learning experience to get use to.

Now reflecting back to the beginning of the class, I can truly say that I am different. I no longer limit myself to things I feel comfortable with because I'm not learning in the process. I have learned to be more open and not completely rule out risk taking as an option. In order to learn you must be willing to try something new and not be narrow-minded. This class was a great experience and I feel that it will not just end here. I expect more out of myself and I'm a more confident person than I was at the very beginning of the semester.

As evidence for my self development, I can say that my project has brought me a long way. At the beginning I was nervous about my individual project only because it was something out my normal routine. I first received my inspiration from my mother and then it was sparked even more by the encouragement from my peers and mentors in my small group. As I learned more about collaborating, delegating, and influencing others, I found out a way to approach each situation in a way that was best for me. In doing this, I had no other choice but to do what was uncomfortable.

Thinking back on how each session impacted me, the most memorable was when we had a guest speaker that focused on risk taking. He had us participate in a meditating activity and nobody understood the purpose of that session that day. Well, now I do! The way I see it is the purpose of the mediating activity was to get us to focus on ourselves. If you concentrate hard enough to find whatever your passion is deep inside of you, you will find that there is nothing that can take over you and make you fearful. You are your own worse enemy and if you feel comfortable with yourself then there should not be a time where you feel afraid to take risks and step out of your comfort zone. If you build confidence in yourself that nothing can distract you or take you away from

your main goals then there is no comfort zone. You are what you make it and your goal should be to make a difference, so no one or nothing should stand in your way.