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ELI Final Paper

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The Emerging Leadership Institute was an amazing experience that will stick out in my mind throughout my time here at UK. I truly do not know what my semester would have been without having participated in this program. It was great to have something different to look forward to during the week instead of regular classes. It served as something new and exciting that relieved stress and made me feel more alive during a relentless week of studying. Through ELI I have gotten involved in other organizations and overall, just become more immersed in campus life. The program has motivated and inspired me to do things that I never thought possible. It has kept me on my toes and very busy, but in an exhilarating and positive way.

Getting to know my class mates was an important part of the whole experience. The orientation may have been long, but helped to get everyone relaxed and set the tone for the many classes to come. The ropes course that we did in the third class was a blast and another good opportunity to bond with the group. This day was full of games and challenges that may have made us look a bit obscure to other students passing by, but gave us the opportunity to laugh and feel connected. The ropes course gave us a sense of community and team work in a group that we were still somewhat unfamiliar with. The various presenters that came to speak in the following classes provided new perspectives that were often different than those we had already gotten from instructors and classmates. Several of the sessions gave me tools and insights that I know will be useful for me throughout the rest of my life.

Dr. Gordon Holbein, our second guest speaker, particularly sticks out in my mind not just for the unusual activity we did but for the significant lessons we learned. The activity required

that we form teams to compete against one another in order to see who could get the most signatures from people around campus. It was embarrassing at first, going around and asking strangers for their signature with absolutely no purpose, but once we started getting creative it was pretty comical. We learned some of the fundamental values of leadership through this odd exercise like credibility, teamwork, communication, and even ethics. I think the most meaningful thing that I learned from it was the saying “If you don’t ask them, they can’t say yes!” Dr. Holbein described this as what should replace the old saying that many people used to rely on which was “What’s the worst they could say?” This new saying is so much more effective and we found that out by doing. The people who gave it a shot and asked as many people as they possibly could for their signature ended up getting the most. By not asking someone you are not even giving them the opportunity to help you. This applies to just about every aspect of daily life. Dr. Holbein also explained to us the difference between a ‘good’ leader, one who is inspirational, and a ‘successful’ leader, one who gets the job done. Some of the groups in the experiment were ‘good’ leaders because they played by all the rules and maintained their integrity. Although, the group that seemed to be the most successful may not have been ‘good’ leaders because of their lack of ethics. From this we were able to see that in order to be an effective leader you must be a mix of both a ‘good’ leader and a ‘successful’ leader.

In a session on the credibility of a leader Ricardo Nazario-Colon came to speak to us and asked the class to evaluate various well known leaders in the world. This sparked some lively debate among the class as we began to question the integrity of different public leaders. Ricardo also gave us some ideas to ponder that helped to paint a clearer picture of what it really means to be credible. The first one by John Maxwell deals with the character of a leader and the

importance of integrity, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but courage is doing what is right when you are afraid”. This quote really hits close to home for me because I think a lot of people just see courage as not being afraid of anything. In reality it is more about what you are able to accomplish when you are afraid. This quote has come into my mind several times during my individual leadership project. There have been many instances when I had something I wanted to say and was scared to speak up, but I was able to find the courage to push myself to do what was right. The second idea that really stuck out to me was that ‘before you can lead others you have to learn to manage yourself’. Although this idea is not directly related to credibility, it is more about the character of a leader. It is so true and so meaningful, especially to us as college students because most people are really trying to discover themselves. This class has taught me a lot about myself through dealing with others, learning from the presenters, and trying new things with my individual project. I learned that everything I am experiencing teaches me more about my self and will in turn help me to be a better leader of others. Ricardo challenged us at the end of his session to question whether we were becoming the kind of people who others genuinely want to follow.

Our ELI instructors, Angel and Jared, taught several of the classes during the semester and I think that I actually learned the most from them. The session on how to go about creating change was extremely helpful because I was struggling with where to start for my individual project. Jared outlined seven steps to use when trying to create change and these really became the guidelines for my project. I realized that I needed to do a lot of research concerning the organization I was dealing with and was also going to have to get connected with people who could help me make a difference. The most important step was ‘strengthening’ because it ensures that you make a strong enough change to last even after you have moved on. This step

was what was going to make my project so difficult and maybe even a little bit bigger than I was able to handle by myself. We learned that a transformational leader is one who not only can carry out these seven steps, but is able to elevate their followers into future leaders. The second part of being a transformational leader is almost as hard as the first. It really makes you think about the kind of impact you could be having on other people. Viewing a leader as someone who elevates the people around them really changed my mindset of what leadership is all about. It is easy to get caught up in working to elevate yourself that you often do not think about those around you who could really benefit from what you have to offer.

Right before our midterm reports were due, Jared and Angel instructed another session this time entitled “Envision the Future”. This class provoked an epiphany for me concerning my individual project. Jared brought up the discussion of why someone would join an organization with leaders who do not have a vision. My initial reaction was that you would not join because why would you ever want to be a part of something that does not have a vision? I realized then that the whole reason why I was doing my individual project was because I felt that the Student Government did not have a vision. I did not like the way that things had previously been run and I did not think that they had the best vision for students. I then asked myself whether I would have gotten involved with the student government if things were running the way they should be and the answer is no. I would not have been inspired to create change in this organization had there been nothing wrong with it, but because the leadership is bad I felt the need to take action. So the answer to Jared’s question is that you join an organization that does not have a vision in order to create one. It is these kinds of thought provoking questions that allow you to come to conclusions that further evolve the self during this program.

Many times I was surprised to find how much could be learned from a seemingly simple rule or suggestion. When Dr. Lori Garkovich came to speak about ethics in regards to leadership she presented us with an easy way to keep morals in check. College is definitely a time when ethics are put into question, but by asking yourself what you would do if you knew that your actions would be on the front page of the morning newspaper you can keep from getting yourself too far from the values that mean the most. Obviously people will do things in their lifetime that they are not always proud of, but this is a good way to stay grounded. She also cited an excellent quote from Martin Luther King Jr., “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in a moment of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of controversy and challenge.” This quote really embodies several characteristics of a leader because you have to know what your values are and be able to stay true to them even when it is difficult. Courage is an underlying theme in many of the discussions, such as this one. It takes a lot of courage to uphold your morals especially when everyone around may readily throw them away.

Joseph Fink led a discussion with us on how to foster collaboration. This was very helpful for our individual projects seeing as collaborating with others is one of the seven steps to creating change. We learned that collaboration is all about building trust and valuing others. One thing he said that I think people need to keep in mind is to ask, “Who else would benefit from knowing this?” Although it is not suitable in every situation, in today’s society everyone is self-centered and worried about competing that they forget about the power of collaboration. This is very similar to the idea of elevating the people around you, but offers an even greater opportunity for you to benefit as well. I learned from this session how valuable it is not only to just build relationships and make contacts, but to do it before you need them because you never know who might be able to help you out in the future.

I think that the most beneficial thing I have gotten from this program is what I have learned about myself. Not only were the various leadership style analysis tests and professional presentations helpful, but learning from my peers and mentors was valuable as well. Being surrounded by successful and talented young leaders creates an atmosphere that can do nothing less than elevate all those involved. Some people may have felt inferior coming into the class, but what we all came to realize was that everyone had something unique to offer to the group. Everyone respected one another and truly wanted to hear each, individual opinion or insight that was available. Seeing how much other people valued my project and perspectives increased the respect that I had for myself. This gave me the added confidence that I needed to provide even more of what I had to offer to the group and to everything else that was going on outside of the class. This experience has opened my eyes to the great amount of respect and confidence that lies within a great community of college students. This atmosphere has given me the courage to speak out and to reach for even bigger tasks to conquer. The program has made me stronger in my leadership abilities and has given me the strength of character to achieve even more than I could have hoped.