

Alyssum Pohl

Alyssum's Experience of ELI and her Independent Project

Choosing the Emerging Leaders Institute

I had no idea what to expect. "Leadership" stuck out like a sore thumb and I was intrigued by something that attempted to deal with an aspect of my personality that people had always told me I possessed. Lance Brunner, a close friend of the family, and one of the mentors and speakers of the class, suggested that I apply, and I'm very glad I did. I'm afraid that giving an adequate explanation of what the class offers is virtually impossible because I believe that every one of the 26 students in my class took something different away from it.

My Expectations

I really was, and am, tired of the typical "leader" characterization: executives, dictators, presidents of this-that-and-the-other, bosses, etc. I wanted to see if this class thought outside of the box in that way. I also wanted to calm my tendencies to "take over" things. My goals were to learn to communicate more democratically, to concentrate on being an effective leader without alienating anyone, to seem more like a friend than a dictator, and also to relax my edginess when I am faced with lots of responsibility.

The Class

I am still a bit ambivalent on how to feel about the class. Basically, every week we concentrated on a specific area of leadership and had a speaker come in to lecture. Each speaker brought his or her own style and it was quite interesting to see the more human, fun, enthusiastic sides of these professors...aspects to which students in other classes may not be accustomed. However, I can't help but feel like the informational

sessions were prescribed to us. Indeed they were. Heck, EVERY class at the University is, that's why there are lesson plans and syllabi. It's really hard to put a finger on exactly what I mean by this, but perhaps I would have liked it more if we had more chances to discuss and reflect on each session. Let it be known, however, that this is a minor qualm with ELI. I learned a very important lesson because of ELI that no other class could every really teach (that lesson to be announced shortly).

My Independent Project

I tossed around several ideas: parking spaces for WRFL DJs, instituting a dance/health benefit scholarship for UK students, etc. I finally settled on something that grabbed my heart and attention immediately. I read somewhere about a Primate Rescue Center (PRC) in Jessamine County. Immediately I phoned them and began my volunteering times there (once a week for 3 hours each time). I was introduced to 11 chimpanzees (Cory, Ike, Pasma, Tina, Jenny, Rodney, Donald, Hazel, Victoria, and Zulu) and close to 40 monkeys including macaques, colobus, siamang gibbons, a baboon, and others. Becky Wagner and Rachel Weiss, the caretakers and workers there, told me that the Good Foods Co-op used to donate produce last year, but then somehow there was a breakdown in communication, and that had since ceased. Therefore, my main project for ELI and PRC was to reinstate the relationship between GFC and PRC and get a regular list of volunteers to make deliveries to and from each place. I promulgated my idea via posters, fliers, my radio show on WRFL, and word of mouth. I have received interest from a few good people committed to the goodwill of these wonderful creatures, and I thank them profusely for making my efforts a success!

My Lesson

The biggest lesson I learned from ELI was not learned in class, but I don't think I would have learned it if I had not been in the class, because I doubt I would have put forth the concerted effort that I have towards working at PRC. I was working there, and my next job, as outlined by Rachel, was to learn to drive the "Green Machine," the old John Deere golf cart/dump truck combo. She gave me a quick description of how to turn on the machine, which buttons and switches did what, and then she stated simply, "Okay, drive around back to the pile of used chimp straw, load the back of the Green Machine, take it to the compost pile, and then drop these boxes off by the burn pile." Whoa! What an eye opener! I was struck by the way that Rachel so easily gave me full reign of my task. She completely delegated all responsibility on me. My inclination, had I been in her shoes, would have been to hold the volunteer's hand through the whole chore, sitting next to him or her in the Green Machine and coaxing with "Yes, and now...", especially since there is only one Green Machine (it doesn't want to be broken), because PRC isn't any farm (the monkeys are potentially dangerous critters), and because I was an amateur at all of the above. I learned that it is okay to not take responsibility for everything, to let go, and entrust others with what needs to be done. It even gives the others more confidence, too. It's weird how something so simple is so profound.

Continuing

Working at PRC has really helped me confirm what I've suspected all my life: that I want to work with and/or for animals, especially wild animals. I believe that my work at PRC has given me a wonderful introduction to what I may experience next year studying abroad in Africa, and to what I hope to continue for the rest of my life in one

way or another. When I return from Africa I plan on volunteering again at PRC and doing more: giving presentations to school children, doing fund raisers, etc.

What You Can Do

To find out more, read *Animal Underworld: Inside America's Black Market for Rare and Exotic Species* Check out the Primate Rescue Center's web page at www.primaterescue.org Donations of all types (toys, money, time, food) are always welcome and appreciated. Contact April Truitt at kyprimate@aol.com or call (859) 858-4866.