

Kari Beth Spencer

Breaking New Ground

Capable, responsible, committed, strong, and organized. These are a few adjectives I would use to describe myself and all of the above have greatly developed or been enhanced as a result of the Emerging Leader Institute. I am amazed when I think back to how far I have come not only as a leader, but as a person as well.

First, the atmosphere is superb. You are partaking in a highly selective course. Therefore, the presenters are tops in their fields. Your classmates are serious and committed to personal growth and to helping you grow as well. The presenters, faculty mentor, peer mentor, and classmates contribute to your development as a well-rounded individual. Everyone who is part of ELI is interested in helping you and is there for you every step of the way. Also, the mentor group allows you to establish close relationships with some other class members, a faculty member, and an older peer mentor.

At the very beginning of the semester, we conducted personality profiles. These personality profiles helped us understand ourselves and the characteristics we display in group situations. Honestly, when we conducted these profiles, I tended to agree with the positive qualities and disagree with the negative qualities my personality profile revealed. However, after leaving the ELI and walking home, I realized if I was committed in becoming a strong leader I needed to face up to those negative qualities and challenge myself to improve upon them. This helped me establish personal goals to reach at the end of the semester.

Also, I feel I am able to communicate more effectively with many different types of people. Before beginning this class, I felt comfortable working with people. However,

I tended to feel intimidated by people of authority. As a part of ELI, I was (in a sense) forced to communicate with people of authority. Now, I feel much more comfortable doing so. We studied group dynamics and this helped to understand how I could communicate more effectively in student organizations that I am involved in.

I was able to put to work all of the components of leadership studied while working on the individual project. From the beginning, I knew that I wanted to do some type of project involving healthcare. Specifically, I wanted to promote health and health care career opportunities to youth of Eastern Kentucky. I chose to focus on the youth of Eastern Kentucky because there is a healthcare worker shortage there and the youth of that area would be the most likely to become educated and go back to their communities to decrease the health care worker shortage.

Shortly after beginning the project, I found an organization on campus that was doing just what I wanted. It was the Outreach Center for Science and Health Career Opportunities. I contacted the Outreach Center and began working closely with the director, Dr. Donald Frazier. I traveled to Eastern Kentucky with him and observed him conduct presentations on anatomy, physiology, and health care career opportunities at a middle school and a high school. Dr. Frazier is involved with ELI and through working with him I was able to observe a leader in the field of Outreach Education. He certainly served as an outstanding role model for me.

I then realized that I needed to conduct the project closer to home because it would be difficult to reach youth of Eastern Kentucky while living in Lexington. After conducting some research, I discovered an organization called Metro Group Homes. I was able to spend an afternoon with the teenagers there and do a presentation on anatomy

and physiology. It was very interactive and they had the opportunity to handle a real brain, heart, and spinal cord.

I truly enjoyed working with youth and promoting anatomy, physiology, and health care career opportunities. Currently, I am contacting a lady about conducting a presentation for a group of young girls. Also, I plan to continue volunteering at the Outreach Center. I have so many ideas of things I want to accomplish and I would not have known how to go about it if I had not participated in ELI. For example, I would like to continue working with the youth of Metro Group Homes by having them conduct their own research projects which they would present to one another.

At the end of the semester, each ELI student conducts a presentation on his/her personal project. I do not think I truly had a sense of how far I had come until I began working on my presentation. When you are actively involved in a project, it is sometimes difficult to step back and view the entire picture. I was amazed at all I had accomplished and at my plans for the future. Thinking back to the beginning, I was unsure at how to interact with others. I didn't quite know how to plan and organize a group and I didn't know how to handle conflict within a group of diverse individuals. Now, I feel comfortable and confident that I could handle all of the above.

ELI prompted me to consider and think about issues in the community and my own life. Above all, Participating in ELI has been a privilege. It has truly made an incredible impact on my life and it could yours too!