

Mary McCain

My Emerging Leader Institute Experience

Last fall when I completed the Emerging Leader Institute application, I had no clue of how I would grow as an individual because of my involvement. The leadership concepts I will take away from the various ELI sessions will not only impact my personal development, but the groups that I will be associated with. I have learned the importance of incorporating open-mindedness, motivation, consistency, and determination into all that I do.

There is not a specific definition of leadership; it comes in all different shapes and sizes. Leadership occurs when one takes an ordinary idea and deals with it in an extraordinary manner. ELI has taught me that regardless if your efforts impact one small child or an entire university campus, you have made a difference when striving to improve your vision.

My ELI experience has opened doors of opportunity. I have gained a sense of mindfulness and diversity, team-work and resourcefulness. Through this I have learned that leadership is not only evident in the process of a group reaching a similar goal, but throughout one's daily interactions.

Prior to my ELI experience I had a restricted vision of life because of my small community where I grew up. I had never been involved with such a diverse group of individuals before this semester; this diversity gave me exposure to different perspectives of society. In a sense, I brought diversity to the class as well. I haven't traveled much, nor do I possess any amazing or unusual talents like some of my classmates. However, I am from a rural community in Central Kentucky which has instilled characteristics that differ

from many. I have played an intricate role in the success of our family farm and, as a result, have an inborn love for agriculture.

It is the diversity of my individual project that guided me to my individual project for ELI. When I first came to UK, I was appalled with the degree of agricultural illiteracy of many people here on campus. Since my major is Agricultural Education, I wanted to create a stepping stone for myself by educating urban children of agriculture's impact. I wanted to take advantage of such a lack of knowledge and focus my individual leadership project accordingly.

My actual intentions changed directions over the course of the semester. Originally I planned to go to elementary schools around Lexington and give presentations to advocate the importance of agriculture. I wanted to explain to them that everything in their lives reverts back to agriculture in one form or another. I wanted urban students to realize the intricate role that farmers play in society, hoping to rid the negative stereotypes that are so common to the uninformed. Today's society, because of the fast pace and rearrangement of priorities, has allowed agriculture to dwindle away from the curriculum of many teachers. Because of my background, I felt that I could make an impact on a few groups of the younger generation. Like I mentioned before, leadership comes in many forms. With making children aware of the proven facts of the food and fiber industry, I knew that my efforts would help the trend diminish among those I taught.

One attribute that ELI taught me was that a leader must be flexible. I contacted the Kentucky Department of Agriculture in hopes of locating resources for my presentations. Luckily, they offered more than material. Because of their assistance, I met Mr. Doug Germann. Mr. Germann is a teacher for gifted children, grades three through

five at Stonewall Elementary School. He is nationally known for advocating agricultural literacy and incorporating it into his curriculum. Recently, Mr. Germann received the *Farm Journal*, a nationally recognized farming magazine, teacher of the year award. To work with Mr. Germann was a "once in a lifetime" opportunity; therefore, I changed the spectrum of my project accordingly.

In cooperation with Mr. Germann, I coordinated a round-table discussion group that consisted of the Fayette County Extension Agent, Mr. Maner Ferguson; a professor of Agricultural Education, Dr. Charles Byers; two professors of Agronomy, Dr. Mark Coyne and Dr. James Thompson; and a professor of Rural Sociology, Dr. Lorraine Garkovich. The topic of our discussion was how urban sprawl is destroying more than wetlands, farmland, and natural habitats--it is also destroying agricultural literacy. The round table went well because of the quality of insight on the issue. We discussed their concerns and possible solutions.

Mr. Germann and I will take these findings and devise a curriculum of the collaborated ideas. With the ideas established he is going to create a video with the involvement of his students. He hopes to enter his completed video in a Farm Bureau competition and submit it to KET and Channel 13.

Mr. Germann is very enthused about solving the problems of agriculture literacy. Because of his motivation and encouragement, he has left an impact on me concerning a subject I hold dear to my heart. Now that the semester has ended I will continue working with Mr. Germann in hopes of enhancing agriculture literacy among the urban children. In conclusion, my involvement in the Emerging Leader Institute has helped me establish a network with the UK faculty and particular individuals; knowing them can only be an

asset to my career ambitions. ELI has provided me with a larger scope of leadership.

Incorporating such techniques will get me far in life, both as an individual and working as a group. Over the course of the semester I learned a lot about myself and I know that I will reflect upon my experience with ELI far beyond the scope of my college career.

With me I am taking ideas, friends, networks, and motivation that will affect the rest of my life.