

## **Sarah Whitaker**

### *The Emerging Leader Institute*

I thought being accepted into the Emerging Leader Institute would be my main accomplishment of the year. Boy was I wrong. Then I got going with the class and heard about our individual project and decided that my project would definitely be my most impressive accomplishment of the year. So with that settled upon, I delved into the course and tried to soak up all the advice I could from our various sessions in order to apply it to my Earth-shattering project. Although I hadn't decided what it would be, I felt certain that it would make the front page of the paper and secure my place in history for eternity. Slowly but surely, I realized that the project development would be quite a bit more difficult than any of us had planned.

For a while I truthfully put the planning on the back burner and concentrated fully on the weekly interest sessions because I was scared to get started on my project for fear I would fail. Though it may not have been the best way to go about it, the time I focused on class sessions gave me the time I needed to grow. I think the variety of the weekly sessions and our class interaction is what affected me most profoundly out of this whole course. The best part ended up being not the title of *Emerging Leader* or the pride that came from finally completing my very own leadership project, but the more subtle changes that I keep with me for life.

From the very first "getting to know you" session, I realized that this would be a huge learning experience. Sitting around talking about fun and silly or intellectually stimulating issues with this group of peers and mentors was amazing. After the first class I was ecstatic. With the help of Rhonda Strouse each of us in the class identified our own

personal leadership style. Coming to the conclusion that I was an 'inspirational' leader was a big step for me in the process. This defined me as creative and open to others' ideas but I have problems getting tasks done and trouble dealing with conflict productively. With this information I was a little troubled but I tried to keep it in mind as I worked through the year. I'm happy to say I think the Conflict Management session and my own experiences dealing with multiple tasks in this class have helped me take a massive step towards improvement. Another session that affected me profoundly was Don Frazier's Ethical Decision Making session. Through discussion of many controversial topics our class came to the realization that virtually every decision you make in your day-to-day life is an 'ethical decision'. Because we were blessed with a speaker who really lives what he teaches, I saw how vital it is to be aware of the ethical implications of every decision, especially when you are in a leadership position. These sessions and many others helped us deal with useful people and taught us presentation skills. This has really given me direction for the leadership steps I plan to take over my next 3 years here as well as the rest of my life.

The mentor group experience really helped gel what we learned in class. Meeting once a week outside of class in an informal setting was not only fun but more productive than most of my time spent by myself. Having the guidance of a mentor, a peer mentor and four other classmates gave me the guidance I needed to stay on task. If I ever thought a particular class session didn't interest me or didn't affect me, our mentor group discussion would always bring a new view out in the open. Receiving advice on my individual project from people in similar situations was very encouraging, too.

Everyone has heard before, and I'm sure you'll all hear it again, that "You are who you associate with" and being around such a dedicated group of peers had an amazing effect on me. I never realized it at the time but looking back I see our class as so mature because, no matter how tired we might have been, there was always someone there to perk the rest of us up when it came time for a group discussion or activity. The speakers would not have had the same effect on me without the completely open and honest atmosphere surrounding me constantly. The combination of the people, the activities and the high expectations we were compelled to work up to made ELI a valuable class for personal growth and good contacts on the University campus.