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My Emerging Leader Institute Experience

My Emerging Leader Institute Experience was truly incredible! When our class met for orientation in January, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. At the beginning of the orientation, my fellow classmates and I were given several exercises to help us get to know each other. These exercises really helped to ease our apprehension about the class and provided a great icebreaker. Once we were comfortable around each other, Ms. Elizabeth Bates, the ELI Director, started outlining the syllabus and explained what was expected of us for the semester. I was shell-shocked. I thought to myself, "How in the world am I going to accomplish all of these tasks?" Now looking back, I realize how silly my fears were and how far I have come from having participated in ELI.

I felt that the most instrumental aspect of the entire class was that it is left entirely up to the participants how much you choose to learn from the class and how much you wish to accomplish. It was the first time in my educational experience that I was not told exactly what goals I had to accomplish or how I was supposed to accomplish them. Many people would probably wonder, "Well, what motivates you to succeed in a class like that?" Being in a class of fellow leaders and having the guidance of excellent mentors empowers you with the understanding of what goals are and it inspires you to accomplish them.

One goal that is set for you at the start of the class is the design and implementation of a personal project. This project is something that you work on for nearly the entire semester. For my personal project I decided that I wanted to do something that would be incorporated into my everyday life. Since I am the Scholarship

Chairman of my fraternity, I decided to try to raise the overall GPA of my fraternity. I felt that if I was successful then maybe my idea could be adopted by other fraternities to bring their GPAs up as well.

I was able to accomplish many positive things within my fraternity. However, midway through the project I realized that bringing the grades up in a fraternity does not end at the end of one semester. I had set a goal for myself that is ongoing and to be truly successful with my project I must persevere. Many of my fellow classmates had the same discovery about their projects as well. One battle usually does not win the war; it often takes many small victories to win the war. This proved to be just one small example of the many aspects of leadership that you will learn if you participate in the class.

The Emerging Leader Institute teaches about leadership not from books, materials, or from speeches, but from the actual process of being a leader. By that I mean that just about everything that is learned in the class is the result of reflecting on something that you have done while in the class. No restraints are placed on this learning and what you take from this experience is entirely left up to you. As for myself, I not only learned many new strategies that will help me be a great leader, I learned to have confidence in myself. ELI provided me with the support that I yearned for to try new things and to try to make a difference in the world around me. It is a much better feeling to know that you tried to make a difference, even if you don't succeed, than to be left wishing that you had tried.

I have mentioned several great aspects of the Emerging Leader Institute, and now I would like to share another. Rarely does a person receive a chance to work positively with so many people from so many different backgrounds and beliefs. ELI taught me to

be open and considerate of others ideas and beliefs when they did not match my own. In class we were encouraged to voice our opinions especially if we disagreed with what someone had said. This was probably the single hardest thing for us to accomplish all semester. Near the end we had learned to be able to disagree with one another without offending anyone. Being able to open our minds and respect those different from us will prove to be an invaluable tool for all of us in ELI.

As a participant in ELI, I made many new friends, gained a remarkable insight into my strengths and weaknesses, and was exposed to many different styles of leadership. I will forever cherish the memories and lessons that I learned from my experiences with the Emerging Leader Institute. I have been involved in many leadership forums and nothing has come close to my experience with ELI. I would encourage everyone interested to go for it with a 110% effort!