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"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." –Confucius

This semester I feel as though I have found myself among the other 27 emerging leaders through speakers, activities, challenges, and friendships. I began with a static idea of what leadership is. Through classes on mindfulness, conflict resolution, diversity, communication and the DISC profile, I was able to turn something static into a definition that was dynamic and perfect for me and my leadership style.

The first step in my journey this semester began with deciding on an Individual Leadership Project. That was not difficult since I already had a few projects going on outside of ELI as a senator in the Student Government Association, as well as the Philanthropy Coordinator of Alpha Gamma Delta sorority. The project I decided to pursue, with the idea of ELI in mind, was a coalition endeavor.

In my first semester at UK, SGA's new "Take Back Our Campus" Coalition Grants came to my attention. As one of my sorority sisters and I talked about the grants, as well as a situation of separation between historically white sororities and historically African American sororities, an idea struck us/we should apply for a grant to do a philanthropic event with one of these sororities. The idea grew from there and soon after a coalition was formed between my sorority, Alpha Gamma Delta, and Alpha Kappa Alpha. Through connections the Fellowship of Christian Athletes got involved and from there our coalition really took shape. Our objective was to put together and host a carnival this semester to be a celebration of a month of fundraising for the UK Children's Hospital and the Lexington Shriner's Hospital.

I ran into many problems along my path, as issues I failed to foresee erupted left and right. It was in this stage that I really began to apply the experiences of my class time to my outside project. During those times when nothing went right and the world is against you I could hear Lance Brunner's calm voice asking me to listen and focus on the present rather than be upset. I had many choices in this effort. I could surrender an issue I care about to embrace the comforts of irresponsibility or I could use the friendships and lessons made and learned in ELI to fulfill my potential as a leader.

"The leader who exercises power with honor will work from the inside out, starting with himself." -Blaine Lee

In the end after much "storming", the coalition was more important than any carnival or event. I realized this almost a moment too late that my identified task-orientated nature was taking over and ruining the opportunity for friendship. The coalition made a collective decision to hold off on the carnival until the fall in order to rethink every aspect of it and our partnership. I learned that not all groups work on the same style of leadership. I also saw that I had to establish credibility here at UK. I had always been a credible person in the past, but this was a new place and I was a new face. The difficulty in this is to see past the goal your individual organization has or even that you yourself have to notice that everyone has goals and a way of doing things. It isn't about the task, but did you work together? Did you enlighten others as to where you came from, and did you listen to what others had to tell you?

"Leaders keep their eyes on the horizon, not just on the bottom line." (Warren G. Bennis)

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.

The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."

-Max De Pree, "Leadership Is an Art"

Where do I go from here?

Good question. I am already engrossing myself in my leadership opportunities here at UK, partially because of my desire to apply what I have learned and partially because of wanting to be around the wonderful people I have met in this class. Our coalition is continuing on with plans for a fall event. More importantly, friendships between the groups are strengthening and that in itself is sometime the best leadership experience.

I am much more mindful of others after my experience in ELI. I also find that I am not as loud or dominant as I used to be (I am, but in my mind noticeably less) in the sense that when I am not the most knowledgeable I know to step back and lead in another way. My much calmer mentor, Randy, as well as other inspirations have led me to enjoy silence and active listening. I still have a long way to go in my journey to be a good leader, but the contacts and friendships I have formed here will only help in expanding my understanding and solidifying my commitment to community.