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The best way I can describe the Emerging Leader Institute is to say it is an experience unique to any I have ever had, not only as an undergraduate, but also in my entire life. My background varies little from that of any student who has taken an interest in total personal development. In high school, I was involved in sports, student government, and leadership organizations. I came to the University in the Fall of 1999, fulfilling my lifelong dream to be a wildcat. While I have found outstanding opportunities for personal and leadership development through my fraternity and the Greek system, ELI ranks at or near the top of these opportunities.

Why was that you ask? ELI provided an environment of experiential learning in leadership and all topics related including diversity, conflict management, strategic planning, and personal leadership profiles, in a setting with other student leaders who are alike in their vision for a better University and world. So many times as people inspired to make change, we are surrounded by others who do nothing but spread doubt and discouragement. ELI is a place just the opposite.

As John F. Kennedy remarked once, "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped."

I personally believe this statement and it was totally invigorating to be amidst so many others that do as well. If I take nothing else from ELI, I will take that enthusiasm for change and the knowingness that I am not alone in the quest to make a difference. Our in-class sessions were almost always very, very interesting. My fantastic mentor, Mr. Lance Brunner, presented two sessions on mindfulness and meditation. It has helped me

to appreciate more the world in which I live. Many times it seems we get so caught up in our "To Do" lists and forget that life is going on at every moment. Another session that I particularly enjoyed was the session with Mrs. Rhonda Strouse on personal leadership profiles. We learned that every individual has a unique blend of four basic leadership types, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. It reminded me of a quote I have often heard, "Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are." This session early in the semester established that, despite the fact each of us were in ELI, we were all different and possessed a wide range of talents, abilities and leadership styles. Learning these things has helped me tremendously in my dealings with others. I can now appreciate the fact that all of us are coming from different places. Once I realized this, it was much easier to communicate with individuals I had sometimes struggled to communicate with in the past. Recognizing and valuing the differences in each person, something we also learned in our session on diversity, is an integral part of communication and leadership.

Another large portion of the ELI experience is the individual and class leadership projects. Each member of our class did an outstanding job choosing a topic for their individual leadership project, developing their idea through a plan of action, and adapting to the inevitable obstacles and disappointments that came along. I remember very vividly, in one of our mentor group meetings, Mr. Brunner remarking about how we were each attempting to "merge heaven and earth." We had to ask him exactly what he meant and he said that each of us had an idea for our project, a dream, a picture in our mind of what our finished product would look like and that that was heaven. He said that there would certainly be setbacks and logistics that would alter or change completely that idea or

picture and that that was earth, or reality. Finally he said that our task was to merge these two things and that would be our project. He could not have been more right and I know everyone else would agree with me. An immense amount of learning took place for each ELI student between "heaven and earth".

I will certainly never forget my experience in the Emerging Leader Institute, nor will I forget the friends I made. I have four semesters left at the University of Kentucky and undoubtedly a countless number of leadership and development opportunities to come. However, I know that the quality and value of the experiences to come have been increased ten-fold because of my time in ELI. Thank you classmates! Thank you mentors! And a special thanks to Elizabeth and Courtney, it could never have happened without your service and sacrifice!