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"Life is like a box of chocolates" and "there is no time like the present" are just two of the many quotes that try to explain how important life experiences are. The Emerging Leader Institute is the "experience" of a lifetime. Day in and day out our experiences guide us in making life-changing choices, and ELI gives us a plethora of valuable lessons and experiences to make our choices better.

The Emerging Leaders Institute gives us the experience and the building blocks to serve others. In the Wizard of Oz, Glinda, the good witch says to Dorothy "it was always in you". She was talking about courage and dreams. The passion and the will to serve were always in me, however I never had the courage to try. My experiences at the Emerging leaders Institute gave me the courage to try. This part of ELI was the most meaningful to me because as I realized I could make my project happen, I realized I could make many others things happen as well. And so, through ELI a new path appeared in the journey to discover my potential and myself.

As I racked my brain to figure out who I could serve, and how I could serve them, it was only natural to me to serve women, and I would serve them with nutrition. In particular, battered women. I would serve these women because if I could teach them to love their bodies through fitness and nutrition, I believed I could teach them to love their bodies enough to not let their bodies be battered and bruised. My heart needed to help women who feared to help themselves, by giving them the knowledge, and all the tools they need to love their bodies.

However, as I mentioned earlier it was my ELI experiences that gave me the push I needed to serve. The push started in the classroom. Here I was an aspiring leader in a

room full of the most talented, motivated, and successful campus leaders. Instead, of being intimidated, I was inspired. I valued my classmates' opinion of me, and I was motivated to get involved and prove myself a leader. The knowledge I gained from listening to the perspective and the experiences of my peers was undoubtedly the most powerful and important information I have learned in my college career.

On top of the incredible information I received from my peers, came very valuable lessons from the University of Kentucky's most respected staff members and instructors. These lessons were about being aware of yourself and your own personality. We also learned to work with the personality types of others. Other lessons included time management skills, ethics, appreciating diversity, and meditation. In no other classroom do we take the time to learn these basic skills. Also, in no other class do we take the time to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses. In ELI we take the time to do these things and more.

Another light bulb moment of my ELI experience came, as I realized that to be a leader meant more than just leading others, it also meant letting others lead you. I learned that many others can help you make your dream a reality. This is what the mentor group from ELI did for me. Some how from day one, at orientation I knew that I needed to be in Lee Edgerton's group. I needed to listen to him, I needed his unconditional support, and I needed this kind man to be my friend and my mentor as I questioned who I was, and who I was becoming. Thank you Lee!! Being part of this mentor group also gave me the chance to help my classmates attain their dreams. Every time we met, we left being inspired by each other's hard work, encouraged when we each faced stumbling blocks, and receiving insights from our peer mentors, who gave us something new to think about.

So where do I go from here? "The sky is the limit!" For the rest of my life I will reach for the stars because I want to bring light to those who have none. I want to continue to work with battered women. I would like to see nutrition and fitness programs become a part of every battered women's facility. It is my goal to end this epidemic; I want women to love who they are. In the future I also know that I will smile more and give more than I ever thought possible because I now know, I can make a difference. I also know, I am not working alone. I know a classroom full of people who want to make differences too! The Emerging Leaders Institute has given me the resources to make all my dreams come true. I now know some of the smartest, most innovative, incredible people in this world, and they are my classmates and my friends. I have experiences that most people don't acquire until they are much older than I am. The Emerging Leader Institute was an experience of a lifetime, and I will forever be grateful.