

## **Zach Webb**

Before I began the Emerging Leader Institute, I expected the class to focus on individual leadership. Because we were to complete individual leadership projects, I assumed that the majority of class time would be spent working on our projects and training individually. However, after the first day of orientation, I quickly realized that the focus of ELI was not so much on accomplishment as it was on personal growth. Working with others in ELI has given me more insight and knowledge at how to be an effective leader than any other class I have taken.

Over the months we participated in a variety of group activities, yet none stood out more to me than the ropes course at the end of the semester. For this activity, we were divided into three groups. The first event required our group to stand on three boards at the same time. Ropes were attached to the three boards and, working together, we had to lift each board and take a step. The ultimate goal was to go forward about ten yards in fifteen minutes. We succeeded, but had tremendous difficulties.

The second event was also very challenging. For this part of the course, we had to get each group member through a spider web of nine holes, without going through any one hole twice. Since some holes were high above the ground, we had to lift some members of the group and pass them through without touching the web. This was challenging because we had to decide who would go through which hole, and when they would go through it.

These activities impacted me by clearly illustrating the true meaning of leadership. Leadership is not about taking charge or accomplishing great things. Leadership is effectively working with others in a system to complete an objective. In

each scenario there were rules to a system, and in each scenario there was an objective. Only by working together could we reach our objective in the system.

In this class and in my previous work with the Student Government Association, I have had my difficulties balancing personal beliefs with the beliefs of others. As I think about ELI, I remember a time when I did not fully understand the purpose and importance of quality leadership. ELI, however, has supported and reemphasized the fact that true power, influence, and respect comes by working with others, not by chastising or ignoring them. On the ropes course, I took the time to learn from my mistakes. We left our egos at the door, and concentrated on efficient and achievable solutions. We were eager to succeed, and I think this influenced our behavior. I did not want my dominating leadership tendencies to bring failure to the group, and I learned that a balance of leading and following is critical to overall success.

Though individual leadership was important at times, the course was great at clearly portraying the reason why everyone is part of leadership. Dominating, individual leadership would not have generated success, nor would it have caused complete and total apathy. There were times when I took charge, and there were times when others took charge. There were times when I stepped back, and there were times when others stepped back. Overall, the course made me appreciate and value teamwork in a way I had before. Leadership is so much more effective and rewarding when it is a group effort, not an individual effort.

I always thought I appreciated diversity and outside involvement. However, it was never clear to me how important it is in leadership. Being able to work as a group with totally random people made me realize how much of that was lacking in my past political

and leadership experiences. I am different because I now know it can be more rewarding to accomplish things with others than all by myself. I have also realized that even though a group is harder to guide than your individual self, a group will also provide support when you fall and help you up when you are down. In the future I will strive to open the leadership process, and strive for the reward of a goal completed by a group.

The Emerging Leader Institute has brought me insight, but it has also brought me something more real: friends. I have read about leadership in books, and I have studied the lives of other leaders. Yet my true learning comes from experience. The Emerging Leader Institute has given me this leadership experience in a unique and valuable way. Throughout the course I have been able to reflect on what works and what does not. There is no question that I will be a more effective leader because of ELI.