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Emerging Leader Institute is like no other class you will find in your studies at the University of Kentucky. For me this class was about finding passions in your own life, finding out more about these passions, and then pursuing them. At the same time the class focused on learning more about who you are and how you accept and take on leadership in your everyday life. The main theme of this class was based around making a difference in the world around you. Whether your world is the state of Kentucky or a group on campus, somewhere, something around you needs your initiative and leadership abilities.

I came to this University knowing what type of career I wanted to pursue. However, like most of you can assume, it changed along the way. I was very aware of my passion for design and the outlets that I use to make me feel that my life is worth something. This class took all I had ever thought I knew about myself and added to that tremendously. Emerging Leaders Institute puts into perspective of how I can recognize opportunity and use the opportunities around me to make a difference. All that I have learned in ELI, I can apply to everyday life. Not just my future leadership capabilities, but what I plan to do right now, in the world around me.

The topics that we focused on didn't necessarily have a right or wrong viewpoint. I find this to be the most intriguing type of learning because you learn all sides to issues while forming your own opinions. The atmosphere of this class is a great place to form opinions. You get to know the other students and they also get to know the real you. During the "Issues in Diversity" seminar we got to talk about issues that come up everyday, but they were issues that we don't always address effectively as we should in a

diverse society such as we live in. I was forced to realize things that I had never thought about before when dealing with diversity of different groups, whether it was ethnic, gender, or racial groups. The individual project that I explored focused on achieving a more diverse campus and the seminars helped me to see what others my age were feeling about the issues that I encountered. This assisted me in the real world when I went out to accomplish my goals for my project.

Because of this experience I have learned to take advantage of opportunities that are available around me. A quote I found during my experience in ELI explains this well; "Most people don't recognize opportunity because it is disguised as hard work." Before ELI, I would have told anyone that making a difference and getting everything out of life that you want is the hardest thing you will ever do. After ELI, I learned that if you are passionate and you really want to do something then the hard work is not hard work at all. You begin to see it as opportunities that lead to more opportunities and ways to make a difference and to learn about the world around you. It is what you do with these opportunities that make them worth your while. Because I have taken advantage of these opportunities I have found that this campus is not such a large place after all. I have met some amazing people and found leaders all around me. It is through all of this that I have learned to lose myself in opportunities only to recognize the real me even more.

So how am I different because of this class? After learning about my personality type in the first few days of class I have been looking at things differently. I realize what motivates me and what pushes me to lead. I have taken quite a few leadership positions in my life, most of which have been rather small roles. These were instances where I lead but I didn't have to change or prove anything. Now I realize that it is not the size of the

project or position you take but what you do with it to help others and how you change things for the better of everyone involved. Now I will take the opportunities I face with more responsibility and desire to actually set goals and work towards those goals.

My individual leadership project was focused on learning more about the international students on campus and encouraging them to share their culture with the students on campus who don't know any more than "the American way." With all the tragic events that took place in our nation recently, I felt this was something that was important to work towards; not only to break our preconceived notions of other cultures but to help the international students feel welcome in a foreign place. Before my project I had used the University simply as a place to learn and go to class. Now I have realized that there are organizations on campus that are working passionately to lead in big and small ways, but effectively. These organizations offer opportunities to lead and make a difference. Without this class to push me to meet people and get involved I would have missed out on experiences that I may never get again once I leave U of K to pursue a career. I now look at things other than my field of study as ways to learn and for places to lead.

If for whatever reason you have stumbled across the application to apply for ELI and you are debating on whether or not to write the essay and go for it, then do not hesitate another minute. If you take this class I will personally guarantee that you will never be the same after it. You will learn more about yourself, more about others, and how you can make a difference in the world around you. We all know this isn't a perfect world but if each of us takes a stride to change even the smallest thing then together we can make a big difference.

**Not everything that can be counted counts and not
everything that counts can be counted. -Albert Einstein**