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When I applied to Emerging Leader Institute (ELI), I knew that it would be an extremely well rounded learning experience. I was sure the course would provide information unavailable in any other class. My ELI learning experience would be one to last a life time and useful in all career fields. This institute would undoubtedly teach me valuable leadership skills, in such an effective way as to broaden my horizons and better my ability to be a leader.

Throughout the semester we heard many different lectures given by guest speakers. The lecture topics ranged from communication to diversity to life management. Each one stressed important values and was effective in their own way. Every discussion related its subject to leadership. Some of my favorite forums were the ones concerning life management, diversity, mindfulness/creativity, and conflict mediation.

As we listened to a life management expert, we learned ways to put our lives in order. Stress was an issue discussed in detail, which made us realize it may not always be bad. Most likely, every leader knows the word well and struggles to conquer that ever present thorn in our sides. However, in small, harmless dosages stress may push us outside of our comfort zone (A comfort zone exists when everything goes smoothly, but challenges do not take place to help us learn.) and help us challenge/better ourselves.

Our discussion on diversity reminded us how easy stereotyping others is and how often we commit the dreaded act (most of the time not even realizing it). Being careful not to make assumptions and not to judge others are important duties of leader. This may seem like common sense, but could be something not often considered when leadership comes to mind.

The idea of standing at the outskirts of our comfort zone also surfaced when we spoke of creativity and mindfulness. Creativity may exist as another aspect of leadership not often considered. But how boring would our lives be without creative leaders? We must be mindful of what we are not experts on in order to broaden our own horizons (as well as others) and expand our knowledge.

Perhaps one of the most important techniques involved in leadership lies in conflict mediation. After all, how could there be leaders and followers if they did not coexist (at least some of the time)? If the two were never in accordance, there would not even be followers of the leader. This information session may have been one of the most educational because the class was informed of many different conflict management types. When solving problems, "yes or no" questions do not help; we must ask more detailed questions concerning all parts of the argument. Personally, this method had never even crossed my mind.

Through these discussions and all of the others we had, I learned about others, myself, and interaction between the two. Two communications specialists told us that communication is a "shared meaning." The statement is one that I will remember and try to apply each day. By doing so, I can monitor my mistakenly made assumptions and stereotypes. Also, while creating this shared meaning conflict mediation will be made easier. I must remember not to impose "yes or no" interrogation, but consider all sides of problems. Along with the other parties, I will now be able to reach solutions not through compromising or autocratic decision-making, but by analyzing the problem and creating answers that solve each detail of it.

Another aspect of solving problems sometimes involves those you are trying to help. We were told how important it is to do for others what they need, not what you want to do. This is something I need to concentrate on; perhaps it will save time for everyone, not to mention maximize the amount of assistance given. Lastly, in the future I must not worry so much about stress. It can, along with creativity and mindfulness, push others and me beyond what I think is possible.

If I had not participated in this course, I would not have learned so many important aspects of leadership. These skills, techniques, and ideas can help anyone in any field of study. I am sure they will assist me throughout the rest of my life. Emerging Leader Institute has been, and will remain, one of the greatest learning experiences of my life.