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If I have learned one thing this semester, it is that campus computers send viruses! I hope this one opens... I've also included everything in the body of the email just in case! ~Katie~

This has truly been a "Priceless" freshman year of college for me. So many events have shaped my life, that I can not begin to isolate them all. However, I am certain that one class played an instrumental role in shaping my new self. This class is not one in which you receive an actual grade from an instructor; rather, it is one in which you receive a grade from the individual who is hardest of all on you, that individual being yourself. I along with 25 other talented students had the opportunity to experience the Emerging Leaders course this semester. Together we tackled so many obstacles through our group community service project and together we tackled individual issues that arose. That is part of the beauty of this course. Though you may feel alone, you truly never are alone in tackling something that arises.

I entered the Emerging Leaders Institute (ELI) hesitantly. To be quite honest, I nearly almost didn't even get my application turned in. I had been nominated, received an application via the snail mail and began to write my essays. On the morning in which I found myself completing the application I received heartbreaking news. One of my lifelong friends had been killed in a car accident the night before, when returning to U of L. So, I finished the application in tears. Amazingly enough, I finished the application that day and turned it in, just in the nick of time. To this day I am truly astounded that I got into the program on the basis of that application, as I am certain it was not my best work by any means. However, I would like to think that there is a reason that I made it into the Institute. Perhaps, I am fulfilling something that my friend will never have the opportunity to do but certainly should have. If nothing else, the entire application process and surrounding events taught me that I must take things in stride, complete what I am required, and live each moment as if it would be my last. Therefore, I entered ELI with big dreams and a heart full of fear and uncertainty. My vow at the beginning of the semester was to truly make my ELI experience priceless. I felt as if it was my duty, to the Institute, to myself, and on level, to Emily. I will never forget the pretence surrounding my ELI experience.

Entering into ELI I was certain that there was a greater purpose for me, then there would have otherwise. I chose to dream big with my project and tackle something that would challenge me in a multitude of ways. At times I became so wrapped up in my project that I forgot to breathe. This is the point in which the oxygen tank scenario was explained to me. After reading my mid-term report, Barb emailed me this snippet of information. When on a plane, you are warned to use the oxygen on yourself first, in times of trouble, then on your counterparts. This simple feat allows you to best serve and save your counterparts. This is perhaps one of the most beneficial real world applications that could have ever been given to me, as it shows my wrongdoing profusely. I realized that I am always willing to help someone else above and beyond my physical capacities. There were many days in which I sacrificed a meal for my project, nights in which I only slept a couple of hours, and friendships which were neglected. After reading this email, which I saved on my computer mind you, I realized the error in my ways and took steps to correct my actions. Now I realize that your body requires food to survive, that sleep is a wonderful thing, and that friends are one of the most important parts of college.

You learn so much outside of the classroom setting, that neglecting friendships can actually be detrimental to your college career.

The next most beneficial moment of ELI, for me personally, was the mindfulness class. This could not have had better timing for me at all. I was stressed to my wits end when this session rolled around. I was so overwhelmed with everything that was going on in my life that forcing myself to sit and meditate was absolutely a divine occurrence. I realize that we laughed at some of the activities of the day; however, the point of the class was oh so clear. We must make time to center ourselves or we can not achieve anything.

Through my writing I have chosen to focus most on what I desperately needed to learn, in order to make me a healthier person and better leader. However, my discoveries did not end there. I learned just how dependent upon our small mentor groups I became. I desperately wanted objective input on my project and found that in the "Blue" group. The wide array of personalities, talents, backgrounds and skills in our mentor group are what shaped such a wonderful atmosphere. In fact, the small mentor groups better suit my personality as I learn from Myers-Briggs. I am much more comfortable and confident in a smaller group of people. Within these smaller groups, I allow my true self to shine through, release my fear and open up. I truly believe that the mentor groups are one of the most essential portions of this class.

Finally, I am certain that I will reminisce about my ELI days later in my college career and life. While I realize that saying that you are a part of the Emerging Leaders Institute at the University of Kentucky sounds powerful, honorable, and grand, these words can not even begin to encompass its meaning. ELI is a means of bringing out what already exists within individuals. This program challenges individuals in ways that no piece of paper could begin to tell of. In essence, only its members can fully understand its power.