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Emerging Leader Institute
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The Coolest Course on Campus

The Emerging Leader Institute (ELI), or should we call it Tri-C for the **Coolest Course on Campus**, has been a sensational experience for me. ELI is more than a class, it has personally helped me emerge as a leader, broaden my horizons for future employment, and increased my opportunities for future community involvement. This has truly been an opportunity to use my personal talents, interests, and work effort to help a vast number of people, while opening the doors for my personal benefit.

I first entered ELI thinking that this was going to be a class that was based on participating in certain community service projects to fulfill a grade requirement. However, ELI has been totally opposite of this. The class allowed me to totally earn my grade by setting my own personal goals and pursuing them. I knew that this was going to be the perfect opportunity for me to make a change on campus and in the community, meet new friends and acquaintances, and prove to myself that I can succeed. ELI has done just that.

Choosing a project was probably the most difficult challenges of this semester. I wanted to do something that would leave an ongoing impact, not just a one-time event. After brainstorming the first couple weeks as to what I wanted to pursue, I still had not come up with anything. That is when the small mentor groups of ELI came to the rescue. With the help of Lance Brunner, our group leader, Ryan Schoonover, our peer mentor, Natalie, Beth, Katie, and Laura, I was encouraged to find something that appealed to my interests and emotions. I was so overwhelmed by the openness of my small group and the support that showed no matter what idea I proposed. One day after the second week of class, I was taking a Sunday drive in Lexington in which I went down many roads that I had never been down before. While I was driving through the outskirts of Lexington, I started to notice the true beauty of the land, horse parks, and wildlife that surrounds the urban city. As I got closer to the center of Lexington, I noticed kids out playing baseball in the yard, while parents were grilling out or working in the yard. After driving through the residential part of Lexington, I was stunned at the many different businesses that exist that I never knew were here. I then entered campus, where everything was familiar and the same as I had left it. This is when it struck me. I had been exposed to an area just right outside of campus, an area that was so close but so far away. I realized that Lexington is filled with so many opportunities and is a great place to live, and many UK students never have this exposure. The solution: increase the interaction between UK students and Lexington.

I told my group of my idea that week and I was instantly provided with a few downtown references by our group leader, Lance. I was first faced with the challenge of branching out and facing people outside of campus. I set up three interviews the next week with the references that Lance provided. The interviews went great. The people loved my ideas, were supportive, and provided me with a list of other references. One person, the President of the Lexington Conventions and Visitors Bureau, invited me to a luncheon with around 15 presidents and C.E.O.'s of large corporations in Lexington. From this luncheon, my project exploded. I was provided with feedback, set up times for personal interviews, and gained the support of many downtown leaders. The networking relations increased rapidly as every person provided me with

another reference. To this date, there are over thirty people that I have somehow been associated with through ELI.

Personally, this project has helped me in so many ways. I have to say the network of people I am now associated with has been the biggest outcome of this project. I now am acquainted with several leaders of Lexington that are more than willing to help me with future endeavors and goals. Through the people I have met, I have obtained an internship over spring break, future references for employment, and the possibility of opening a business with an entrepreneur. From this project I have learned that there are so many opportunities are right in front of everyone. It is only a matter of reaching out and taking advantage of these opportunities. Also, I have learned that leaders of corporations and organizations in the community share many of the same goals, concerns, and ideas of the average person. These people are very supportive and it only takes a phone call to set up a time to interview.

Another big outcome of this project is that I have learned consistency is a major part of being a successful leader. I tried to make it a point to take at least ten minutes everyday to think about how my project is going and the next step I needed to take. Also, I found that to keep the energy flowing with a project, it is always good to update everyone involved often so that they do not lose track of what is happening. As busy as most people are these days, a project can easily be put off if it is not blown back up in their face very often.

The leadership skills I have obtained, the network of references in the community, and the closeness of friends I have made with other classmates is what ELI is all about. I feel that this course could not have been set up in any better way and the instructors, group leaders, and peer mentors were 110% helpful and supportive. It seemed as though this were four different classes this semester: individual leadership on campus and in the community, large group leadership, small group leadership, and personal and ethical leadership training. Just as the name of the course suggests "Emerging Leaders", I have truly emerged as a leader this semester.