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ELI

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Final Summary

The Emerging Leadership Institute was a very interesting experience for me. I not only learned a lot about myself, but also about different styles of leadership and how there isn't a right or wrong way. I developed certain expectations about the class after orientation; some were met, some exceeded, and some not. There were many instances where I learned something that I would have not expected before hand. Overall, it was an excellent learning and growth experience, the first that I have yet to experience at the University of Kentucky.

The first thing that I noticed when I entered our first orientation, and the one thing that has left the greatest impact on me, is the people. The class had a wonderful diversity of students, some aggressive, some passive. There was a diversity of different leaders from different organizations, which was a great way for me to get familiar with different organizations, such as Student Government, and to also learn from other people who have adopted different leadership styles. There were so many different personalities that it completely contradicted my previous conception that leaders had certain characteristics and certain personalities, and that by the same belief, that followers had the opposite personality characteristics. I've found that this stereotype is false. Natalie, our group leader, appeared to be a very sweet, quiet and passive, but I found that she was an amazing leader and I learned a lot from her leading style. So from this, I have learned to not make presumptions about a person's leadership abilities based on their personalities.

The next thing that made a large impact on me was my mentor group. When, at times, it seemed like the world only wanted to hear what they wanted and nothing else, the doors were open at my mentor meetings to say whatever was on my mind, and actually have intellectual people respond. Being from a group of all dominators, I found that it would have been difficult to do a project together because, who would be the leader? There were amazing leaders in that group that exemplified the same characteristics and leading styles, which taught me something that I did not learn in the class. If, perhaps, I was in a situation (like my mentor group) where there were a bunch of dominant leaders and no followers, I believe the best overall solution would be to evenly assign and divide tasks to complete and guide each other. I know it goes against all that I've been taught, but I believe that sometimes it doesn't hurt to be a leaderless committee of hard workers who are on the same page.

I learned so much from the individuals in my group. From Mimi, I learned that some adults really do care about your opinions and understand how you feel. She was an awesome support for us throughout the process and really understood where we, as students, were coming from. Ben was a lesson in itself. He was so smart and thoughtful, and I admired his confidence (close to arrogance, I know) but his willingness to jump into a situation and objectively give a good conclusion or solution. Several times he was actually the mediator between arguments in our mentor group. Kourtney was also a very different dominant. She was very devoted to community service, and many of us couldn't understand her devotion. As the class progressed, we began to see why she was so passionate about volunteering and whereas before, we thought that she wasn't a dominant, I definitely saw that in her, but in a different form and focused towards a

different cause. That is also something that I learned is that everyone is passionate about different things, and although you may not choose to do them yourself, that doesn't make it any less important and it doesn't make that person any less of a leader. Kyle was funny. I had a very difficult time with him at first because sometimes what he would say or do would come off offensive to some people, but as I got to know him, I saw that he is a really tender-hearted person inside but he expresses himself quite differently than most people do. Katie is someone that I've known for a while and she is a very aggressive and determined person, as everyone else in my group is. She knows what she wants, and she stops at nothing to get it. She didn't downsize her project because that is what she wanted to do and I'm proud of her for that. Altogether, I loved my group. I couldn't have expected such an experience any other way or with any different people.

From this class, I have also learned more about myself. Given the opportunity to create and complete my own service project was awesome. I was thrilled to actually have an opportunity to let my thought processes take over and use my imagination. I wish that I had been taught how to actually coordinate an event, or at least that is what I expected, but I tried to take the most I could from my project and what I learned. I have also been sparked to become more involved and stretch my leadership skills out that way. For years I have been working on writing a book about young girls and adolescence, but not once had I thought of becoming a Big Sister and making a difference in at least one person's life. Now I am willing to take that chance. If anything, this class has taught me to step outside of my comfort zone and do some of the things that I've always wanted to do but have been afraid of. I would love to be involved in Student Government or Student Activities Board, but until now have I felt the confidence to strive for that. I have made one step in that direction, and have applied to be a College of Communications Ambassador. I am thrilled about this opportunity to make a difference in people's college careers and be a positive role model. Hopefully, everything will work out and I will achieve my goal, but you can't win unless you try!! At the same token, I've also learned to step back and re-focus. Many times I get overwhelmed with tasks and I fail to enjoy me. I forget that I need to experience life to some degree besides devoting myself to other people. Every once in a while, I need to devote myself to *me*. Sometimes I try to be an over-achiever, and this semester, I've learned to pull back a little and focus on long term. This brings me to the topic of mindfulness. Sometimes we are in such a rush that indeed, we are on autopilot. We forget to cherish and enjoy the small things that we sometimes take for granted. Since that lecture, I have come away with a more relaxed attitude about life. I may not want to be a professional gardener, but everyone needs to stop and smell the flowers sometimes.

In the end, being around such inspirational people has encouraged me to go beyond and achieve the unachievable. After leaving high school, I left with a lot of "I should have" or "I could have"'s and I told myself that I wasn't going to do that in college, but I've done just that. I've jumped into the opportunities that were comfortable to me, but I've failed to pursue the things that I think I would enjoy because I've let my fear overcome me. I've decided that no longer will I do this. I will make the remaining two years memorable and try to step outside of my comfort zone as much as possible to become the best person that I can be.