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Emerging Leader Institute

Summary Paper

I was sitting in my UK 101 class, waiting for dismissal, when our student instructor mentioned something called the Emerging Leader Institute. Without thinking about what our instructor was saying, I quickly wrote down the information she told us and left with the rest of the class. It was not until later that evening, when I actually thought about what our peer instructor said. In the back of my mind I was thinking, I should apply for the class. Our peer instructor said it would be a great opportunity to get more involved and learn leadership skills. On the other hand, I thought that I have already been involved in so many leadership activities in the past and it was time for a break. Over the next few weeks I contemplated whether or not to apply. Then one day, I finally reached my decision: I would apply now and decide later! I thought that it was not likely that I would get into the class, but if I did, I would simply decide if I wanted to enroll when that time came.

About a couple months later, I had forgotten about my application to ELI. I guess in the back of my mind I thought that I did not get in. Right about the time that I had come to the conclusion that ELI was not going to be an option for my spring semester classes, the news came. I was woken up on a rainy day by a phone call from Rachel, the class coordinator. She said that I had been selected for the Emerging Leader Institute, and that registration information would be emailed to me shortly. All of a sudden, I was in the class with no time to decide whether or not I wanted to take it. My original plan was falling to pieces. At this point, I decided that there was no way I could call Rachel back and say “Thanks, but no thanks” and thus I found myself on the path to one of the most beneficial classes I have taken at UK.

The first day of ELI was orientation on a Saturday morning in January. I was a bit skeptical about waking up early on a weekend, but I gave it a go. Our first activity was a version of the popular children’s game Bingo. For every person in the class there was a square that represented some leadership activity that they had completed prior to ELI. This was a great opportunity to learn something about each person in the class before getting to know them. Another activity we completed as a class that first day was one where each person had to bring three items to class which represented themselves. These items were arranged on tables without names and we were challenged to pick out whose belongings they were without knowing who anyone was yet in the class. These activities were helpful icebreakers in getting to know my peers, but were only a preview for the semester as a whole.

The ELI semester was broken into two parts: one for leadership seminars and another for individual presentations. The first part of the semester allowed me to participate in various activities which furthered my growth as a leader. For instance, at the first official class, each student was required to answer several questions about their leadership style and personality. At the following class, we were given the results. They were astounding! My personality and leadership style was explained exactly by the results from a simple survey. These results helped me to realize that my leadership style is one of DI or dominance/influence. By understanding my leadership style, I am more aware of why I act the way I do in certain situations as well as preventative steps I can take to avoid conflict.

Another presentation, by Lance Brunner on “Mindfulness and Creativity”, was one of my favorites. In this seminar we were taught to be aware of our surroundings and how to step outside of our comfort zone. This is typically hard for me to do, so I found this presentation challenging and helpful. We participated in two activities that reinforced the message of Mr. Brunner’s seminar. One of the activities was where we had to pick a partner to lead us around campus. The catch was that our eyes had to be closed the entire time except for when our partner told us it was okay to open them. Upon our partner’s command we were to open our eyes to get a new view of our familiar campus. This activity taught us to trust another person as well as look at something with a different perspective.

Lance Brunner also taught us to step outside of our comfort zones. He said that the most learning takes place when we are being pushed to think and act differently than we are used to.

The activity we participated in to support this idea was one where we had to dance to classical music around the classroom. Although this activity was one I did not particularly care for, it pushed me beyond my comfort zone. Because I was uncomfortable, I was able to learn, which made this activity effective.

The seminars although informative, were only the beginning of my growth as a leader through ELI. The creation of my individual leadership project is something I also learned a lot from. It was so much work it was almost like a class in itself. For my project, I chose to address the needs of high school students desiring to attend prom, but who may not have been given the opportunity to go because of financial reasons. Thus, I decided to develop a drive where students could donate their used prom apparel (such as dresses, shoes, suits, ties, and accessories) at discount prices. However, like many of my peers, my original plan was much harder to achieve than originally anticipated. I encountered many bumps in the road and disappointments, but ultimately I was able to accomplish something. From this project, I learned how to develop an idea entirely on my own and that it's important to maintain communication.

Besides learning from my own project, it was interesting and exciting to hear what my classmates had accomplished with their own projects. Hearing the similarities and differences between their projects and my own was a real eye opener. Many of the problems we encountered were the same, yet each and every person had their own unique ideas. By hearing their presentations, I was able to learn new ways to go about implementing an idea that I can use for the future. I also had the opportunity to learn about each person's personal interests and goals, which was not only inspiring, but excellent information that I can use for networking in the future.

As a complement to ELI, each student was required to meet weekly with their assigned mentor group. This group helped me form a closer bond with students in the class as well as providing a good source of information for my individual leadership project. Unique to my group, we stated our highs and lows of the week (or our best and worst moments). This taught me to look at time with a broader perspective and to realize that for every bad there is a good. I was also able to recognize my peers' accomplishments via their sharing.

The last learning experience of ELI was our group project at Big Brothers and Big Sisters. For this day, our class designed a carnival including various indoor and outdoor activities. Like the individual projects, the group one also had its setbacks. Fortunately everything worked out, and we were able to have a successful carnival. From this project, I learned how to be lead, instead of taking a role up front like I usually do outside of class. I also learned that it's important that each person carry their own weight and complete what they say they are going to. Finally, by working with the children of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, I learned that not everyone in life has the same opportunities that I have been given like a supportive family.

My experience in the Emerging Leader Institute has been a once in a lifetime opportunity that I have benefited from greatly so far and will continue to grow from in the future. It has opened the door to numerous activities that I never knew were available on campus or in the community of Lexington. Additionally, through ELI, I have met over 30 people who will be able to serve as contacts in the future.

After thinking back to that day in UK 101, I am so happy that I applied for the Emerging Leader Institute. When I decided to turn in that application, I never knew that I would grow and learn so much from one class. Furthermore, my experience from ELI has only just begun. I will continue to use the information I learned and to contact the people I met through the class for information and friendship throughout the future. The possibilities of what I will be able to accomplish through the Emerging Leader Institute are unlimited.