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The Emerging Leader Institute provided many opportunities for me to strengthen my personal leadership through various different exercises and guest presentations. The individual and group projects gave me and my classmates a chance to give back to the community many of the great things that ELI has taught us so far through the progression of this course.

ELI kicked off to a great start with the orientation that took place on a Saturday. To start things off, I am pretty confident in saying that no one was particularly enthralled with giving up a whole day of the weekend to dedicate to a class that they hardly knew about. Little did we know, this day would become a mold for future events, and also be a positive jump-start to an exciting semester.

After the opening convocation and one-line introductions, we really began to start to meet the strangers we would call friends by the end of the semester. In the “Circle to Circle” icebreaker session, a question was posed to one person who would have to give an answer to one of their peers in thirty seconds. In the first circle everyone was hesitant to start things off and actually use their full time; however, things quickly changed. Simple questions then led into detailed discussions and stories that flowed beyond the allotted time. After the signal was given for the end of each circle, chatter was still occurring because the students had trouble pulling themselves away from their new friends.

Another great portion of the orientation was the “Show and Tell”. All event participants, including mentors and program directors, were asked to bring a bag with three items that they thought best described themselves. Each student then arranged their items on a table at the back of the room. Students in groups of three were given a sheet onto which they would place a guess as to what items they believed matched with each person. Some of the choices were clear-cut from the beginning. Some students brought an item that represented their fraternity or sorority, and most of these students were wearing those same Greek letters on their shirts. Others such as Natalie Brown had introduced themselves to others as a Wildcat Danzer, and one of their items matched their membership in that organization. On the other hand, several of the groups of items gave no clue as to who the person could possibly be.

This exercise really made me think about not “judging a book by its cover” because of the outcomes of some of my guesses. The connection that is most prevalent in my mind is made clear through a great example. A brand new, red Nike Shox running shoe sat on a table amongst various other gadgets. I immediately chose a guy in the room who I thought looked the most athletic. When everyone started to reveal which items they brought, I was shocked. The Nike Shox tennis shoe belonged to a middle-aged mentor, Lee Edgerton. If I was taking a guess, that would have been my last one. Lee then shared with us a story of how he likes to go running with his young grandchildren. Through this I learned that just because some attribute seems most fitting to one person or organization does not mean that it cannot be applied or even adopted into another person or organizations personality/goals.

Other topics included in the orientation included the program overview, individual project planning and group project discussion, but the “Circle to Circle” and

“Show and Tell” gave me an idea of what to expect from ELI experience in the upcoming semester.

My favorite part of the first class session involved the completion of a DiSC Personal Profile System. This tool really helped me to discover what my personality influences were. It also recommended ways to become more effective after you had discovered which areas of your leadership needed the most improvement.

In the first session, we inputted our responses to a set of question on two graphs. The first graph was later titled as the “behavior expected by others” and the second as “under pressure, the real you”. Not surprisingly, my graphs were almost a mirror image of each other. This showed me that I do not try to change my personality for others, but it did show me that under pressure, I could improve my leadership under one of the major headings. In order to be more effective under pressure, my influence characteristic would be more prevalent if I better learned how to be more realistic when appraising others.

This made me realize that I cannot always uphold everyone to the high standards I set for myself. I have learned through the progression of ELI that many times as a leader you have to compromise. Sometimes this means settling for less from an individual in a project than I would normally contribute, but other times it means letting go of the situation all together. Often it is necessary in the midst of a great group of individuals to sit back and let the great ideas of others take control.

Using the DiSC evaluation as a reference helped me to realize it is necessary to sometimes become the leader who is not recognized. The person who is behind the scenes is often a very committed individual who works more for the progression of the group as a whole rather than personal gain. That leadership attribute is something that I am trying to focus upon with my full attention in order to make it a great part of my role as a leader.

I took away a great principle from the session with Dr. Garkovich that I have already applied to several organizations which I am involved in. She took a very different approach to gathering volunteers, resources, and information to make a struggling organization better and improve great organizations beyond their current potential. This simply worded, but very complex model is asset-based development. In its most simplistic form, the capacities and resources of local people, organizations, and institutions are pooled together and used to assist in achieving your goals.

She first described that in order for an organization or community to become greater, someone must take an active role from inside the group. Someone inside the group is more likely to be motivated and to have the true values of the organization as a driving factor.

One excellent idea discussed in the presentation was the capacity inventory. Several sheets were passed out as examples of how this type of inventory can apply to different organizations. Basically, these take the best form as a checklist of activities a person would be interested in performing or abilities that individuals in an organization currently possess. When the abilities of an individual and their willingness to share with and teach those to others are used, an organization will grow from the inside out.

Another great topic concerned the use of resources that were already in place that could be used by your group. Examples included the use of meeting halls, food services, educational programming, and other organization’s volunteers as ways to facilitate growth of your own organization. By using resources already available, organization do

not spend time working effortlessly in recreating ideas/objectives already common to another organization. Asset-based development uses current capacities to further that organization and yours at the same time.

I recently adopted these principles in an application to my fraternity. I used a capacity inventory checklist to determine which individuals would be the most beneficial to serve upon a newly formed Judicial Board. Candidates were chosen upon their leadership skills, past involvement, and willingness to serve as a leader in a position that requires an unbiased opinion. The techniques I learned from Dr. Garkovich's session helped me to determine the best candidates to fill those positions.

A recurring theme for me in ELI has been the progression of my skills as a leader while at the same time being concerned more for the needs of others. Ron Hustedde's session regarding conflict mediation helped to address these issues even further. The most satisfying part of this week came through the negotiating that took place during the different cases presented in class.

In both disputes, two organizations were concerned with gaining something personally, but both had one thing that stood in their way—each other. We learned to see beyond a simple black/white picture to find alternative answers to mediate conflict resolutions. The most eye-opening experience came when we finally realized that the core interest of the competing organizations dealt with separate issues. Ron first posed the object of the mediation as “Get what you need.” We realized after some stiff investigating that each person could gain what they needed while allowing the other person to share the common resource.

I could share many more experiences that I have had through ELI, but these are some of the most ubiquitous topics in my mind. Personal profiling, asset-based development, and conflict mediation are all topics that greatly improved my leadership ability. A more clear definition and development in my role as leader, the long-lasting friendships I have built, and networking with campus and community leaders are all great attributes that have been the core of my ELI experience.