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The Emerging Leader Institute has definitely been a valuable experience. First off, I will start with exactly what ELI is. The Institute was a valuable experience to me and to my development as a leader. Jared and Angel, as well as my classmates, taught me so much about leadership and myself. Class consisted of discussion and leadership evaluation tools, such as the DISC test, that allowed us to explore what leadership is, who is a leader, and the different ways to lead. We discussed how different cultures view leadership and how to realize and adapt to people who view leadership differently. Every week we met in our small mentor groups to go over what we were doing in class, and how we were doing overall, with school and socially. We also were required to do an individual leadership project as well as a group service project.

My small group (mentor group) was great. My mentor and peer mentor both were so helpful. My idea for my individual project came after discussion with my group about things that mattered to me. We also talked about what we were discussing in class, and how it could be applied by us. When things were stressful, we could vent – and we did. The group was just a great way to personalize everything we did in class. We were also able to bond with each other and develop a friendship.

For my individual leadership project I decided to work with something that had had an impact on my life. When I was younger, my mother, grandmother, and I lived off of three hundred dollars a month, so poverty was something that

had hit home with me. Thankfully, today I am very fortunate to no longer live in poverty, but the issue is still of great importance to me. There is a school in the county that I am from that has a high rate of children in poverty – eight-five percent of the children at the school are at, or below, the poverty line. To help these children out I decided to raise money to provide them with school supplies they otherwise might not be able to afford.

I contacted the school and found out that the school puts on an Extravaganza every July for the underprivileged students. Still wanting to help, I decided that I would contact local businesses in hopes that they would donate money to provide the children with the supplies they need to succeed in class. I networked with my father and was able to raise five hundred dollars for the school to buy supplies for the Extravaganza.

This project taught me so much. I am very bad for procrastinating and because of the project and was forced to make a plan early on, and work step by step to finish the project. I also learned the importance of networking and the impact it can have on my success. The book, by Kouzes and Pousner, talks about modeling the way and inspiring a shared vision. I experienced both of these through the working of my project. I modeled the way by stepping out and making a difference myself, rather than waiting on someone else to do it. I inspired a shared vision by conveying what I hoped to accomplish with my project to the businesses I asked to make a donation.

By far, the most memorable moment of the whole class was our group service project. We decided, rather unanimously, to work with autistic children.

After discussing with a few parents about what we should expect when working with kids with autism, we set to work planning the day. I worked on the “atmosphere committee” and we were in charge of the feel of the event. We put together gift bags for each child that was at the event. The bags included things such as crayons and puzzle books, slinkies, kaleidoscopes, colorful erasers, and the like. We also put together different stations for the kids – arts & crafts, cookie decorating, gymnastics, dance. When we got there that did not work quite like we had planned, but that was fine. The kids ran around and played – mostly in the foam pit and on the trampolines.

The event was one of the most rewarding times of my life. We took the children to the Lexington Gymnastic Center for a day of fun, while the parents got a few hours to themselves to relax, get a few errands done, or whatever else they may have needed to do. Things started off kind of hectic, as we found out that the whole gym was not reserved for us as we had been told. But we managed to survive. I spent most of my day with the cutest – and by far the most hyper – two year old I have ever seen. Mason was absolutely adorable. He loved being bounced on the trampoline and running through the inflatable course, backwards. I believe that the whole time I played with him, I did not stop running. But it was so much fun. Not to mention the fact that Tom broke the trampoline – but that is another story.

The whole event taught me that I had to be flexible. Things did not go just as we thought they would, but we all made last minute adjustments and went on the best we could. I also learned to step outside of my comfort zone. Autism is

not something that I have a lot of experience with, and I was slightly uncomfortable with being responsible for the children if I did not know how to properly care for them. But it turns out that most of them just loved to play – like any other kid. I also learned a lot about autism through the whole experience. There are many different degrees of autism, from mild to severe, and children with autism all act differently from each other – there is not set standard for autism behavior.

Between the two required projects and the discussions in class, I learned so much about what is required from a leader, what is expected from a leader, and how to get myself to a point where I am the best leader that I can be, but still working on being better. The Institute was inspiring and motivating to me. Because of ELI I have made more of an attempt to get involved with things that matter to me.

I am a member of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. My involvement prior to ELI was non-existent, but now I will be holding an office next year. Although many times in class we have established that holding a position does not make you a leader, I feel that the fact that I am getting involved and making a difference makes me a leader, not the position itself. I will be Vice President of Planning for College Success, which focuses on members on NSCS going to local schools to tutor children, as well as build relationships with the children. I am very excited about getting this program up and running and stretching myself in my new position.

I will be going to a leadership conference in Denver, Colorado in July through NSCS. The conference will serve to continue my learning of leadership as well as network me with major US companies. The conference is a four-day event that involves workshops on leadership and planning for success for local chapters of NSCS. I believe great opportunities await me at this conference.

I also applied for a marketing internship with a local coffee shop. Before ELI I do not think I would have believed in myself enough to try for the internship. But I did. And I got it. Not only am I using the internship as a great learning experience, I am taking the initiative to have it counted as an independent project in both marketing and honors. I feel confident in myself that I will be able to succeed in this challenging position. ELI has given me the ability to see that when put in trying and challenging positions I am able to succeed, despite my fears and concerns.

The most beneficial thing that ELI has done for me is establishing a confidence that was not there before. I feel that I have an edge over my peers. ELI has taught me a lot about leadership and even more about myself. I believe that because of ELI I am more likely now to take chances on opportunities that before I felt like I was unqualified for.

If you are reading this paper in an effort to determine whether or not you should apply for ELI, I encourage you to do it. You won't regret it. The class is such a great thing. It teaches you so much but also challenges you to put to use what you learn – by going out and *being* a leader. The class is interactive, intriguing, and inspiring.