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ELI

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“Develop the Leader within you.” In a nut shell that is what this class does for its participants. But it does so much more than that too. When applying for the ELI program I was mainly thinking about how it would look on a resume, or how nice it is to get three credit hours for just taking a leadership class. Being around leadership workshops all my life I thought I knew a great deal about leadership; the first day of class I realized that wasn't true when I was asked to provide my own personal definition of a leader. If you think you know a lot, then you define leadership; it is not as easy as it sounds!

For all those prospective students of the ELI program you are probably wondering what you do in this class. Well you listen. The first part of becoming a leader is to understand that you don't know it all, and being able to listen, analyze, question, and learn is essential for any leader. The beginning of the year I thought this class was just going to be a joke because all we did was play group games that allowed us to get to know our other classmates. But soon that changed and we were able to hear from speakers all over campus, people who had lead and made the difference that we all wanted to make. Instructors, mentors, speakers, and classmates help you see the styles in which you lead others; also you see the many other various styles in which people lead. This helped me a great deal because it allowed me to see the weakness in my own

leadership characteristics, which now enables me to see those weaknesses and try to strengthen them.

Not only did we learn about ourselves through just observation but also through personality test. We took many during the course of the semester. Often we came away frightened by the results, as if someone had taken our personalities and written it out in a box to the “T”, never knowing that our uniqueness could be outlined so well. These were always fun because they not only showed you your strengths but your weaknesses as well. You also begin to notice people who are like you and not like you... after your third test almost everyone has found that person who has scored the same as me almost every time. These are fun because they help you find friends whom you may or may not have originally sought out. Like in my class there was a kid named Alex, and we never became really good friends or talked a lot, but because of the class we knew that we were close to the same kind of person and for that I feel that we both could go to each other incase of a problem. It almost feels like you would be helping out yourself; and without this class I would have never felt that similar to another person that I have not known for a long amount of time.

In a particular class, we had an outstanding speaker who gave us a little project to perform. We were divided up into groups, and the task was to see which group could get the most people to sign a piece of paper, they weren't signing for any purpose other then for us to collect signatures. This was one of my favorite classes because it presented the opportunity to see other people in action. Of course some people are shy and others are more outgoing, but yet we all still had a common task. You would notice that the outgoing people went face to face and grabbed people, talking to them and persuading

them to sign their sheet. Shyer people would hang around where the papers were and steal other people's signatures by giving the stranger the wrong paper, who of course would inevitably sign it and go on there way not knowing any better.

So what does learning about leadership have to do with your life? When you think about it everything revolves around personal interactions. Leaders in our everyday lives are the people who are able to step back from a situation, analyze, and then act in an appropriate manor. It doesn't matter if you are running for office in a fraternity/sorority, or a manager in the work force, or even dealing with your own personal relationships. All these activities require the same set of skills to execute or maintain effectively, such as communication, listening, flexibility, ethics, motivation, change, critical and creative thinking, goal setting, cultural diversity, etc... The list goes on and on, no matter what you are doing you need these skills consistently through out your whole life and with every task you do; the goal of a leader is not only to execute well but to grow every time and to improve with each experience.

One of the biggest things that ELI has taught me is that anything is possible. Being a freshman in such a large school your really only feel like a number; or at least that is how I have felt. But ELI showed me that if you really want to be heard and you want to make a difference all you need is a shared vision, time and energy, and a little persistence. Not only has this program taught me that I can do it, but they have also introduced me to the head people within the college who can help me. It isn't always what you know but who you know, and in such a political structure like a big college (i.e. UK) your connections can take you far.

When asking yourself if you want to apply to the ELI program, do not do it if you don't like to interact with people, otherwise you will not enjoy the class. My favorite memories from the class were just when all of us were hanging out, or the funny things that the diversity of your class unavoidably brings out. We laughed together, we even sometimes complained as a class but we got to learn from each other, and those are the things I will never forget. So I know I still haven't answered the question of what we do in class, but to truly understand you will have to take the class.

My future dreams have already started to unfold, I hope to one day start up my own Steak Sauce Company that will one day rival A1 and Texas Pete in popularity. This class has not made it possible for that to happen, but it has given me more courage for myself. Because of this class and the things I have learned I truly believe that by the time I graduate I will be wise enough and smart enough to start and finish this quest. Not because of the specific things I learned but because this class has inspired me to grow as a person. By being around people my age who are so enthusiastic about leadership, change, the future, and giving a hundred percent all the time really makes you want to push yourself in your own life, and within the activities and challenges that you are apart of.

Now I want to talk about what I will take away from this class and apply to my life as a friend, boyfriend, employee, student, and any other chance I get. A big lesson I learned from ELI was to challenge the process. Don't always do what everyone else has done in the past just because it works. Maybe there is a better way to do something, and because of this class I have learned to be in search of that better method. Learn to model the way! This was one of the main things I knew before coming to ELI well almost the

only thing I thought a leader. But then I found out that it is just a leadership style.

Sometime modeling the way isn't always the approach that works; maybe you need to inspire others. The multiple approaches that you learn the more armed you will be when it comes to life's experiences, and the battles that come with them.

Finally I would like to end with saying thank you to Jared and Angel; you both were a terrific inspiration, and just made the class very enjoyable. I know they may not read this but I would also like to thank my mentor and peer mentor (Dr. David Durant, Amber Noel) for feeding us so much free food, and giving your advice. Amber I had a great time opening up my life with you and sharing all the interesting details. And last but not least I would like to say thanks to my class mates, I hope I helped you with finding yourselves as much as you all helped me. And I can't wait to see you all in the future, don't be shy, and say hi!!! :)

"Anytime you see someone more successful than you are, they are doing something you aren't."
-Malcolm X-

Just for you Angel!!!