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## **Emerging Leadership Institute Final Paper**

*Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. ~ Dwight Eisenhower*

Emerging Leader Institute has taught me how to achieve Dwight Eisenhower's definition of leadership. Not only has ELI taught me what true leadership is, but it has also molded me into an effective leader. Over the course of the semester I have changed from a person who wants to make a difference to a leader who knows what it takes to make a difference. Since January not only have I learned a great deal of information but I've also applied this information to my life and been able to accomplish things I never would have thought possible.

Prior to enrolling in the Emerging Leader Institute I had been very active in leadership positions throughout all of high school. I was involved in all major activities through the school, National Honor Society and my local church. Being involved and taking on leadership roles was easy in a school where I only had 200 kids in my graduation class, as opposed to something like 5,000. After coming to the University of Kentucky I kept telling myself I would get involved in activities, but knowing where to go to get plugged in stopped me from doing anything. When I heard of E.L.I. my first thought was that it would be great to put on a resume, but I also viewed it as an opportunity to finally become involved on campus. I never thought I would learn so many valuable lessons, get to meet the people I've met and participate in the activities that I've been a part of.

What made the Emerging Leader Institute such a valuable experience was that I was able to hear good speakers that provided us with useful information, but then ELI also gave me an outlet to use this information that I learned. To me the most useful lecture we had was the lecture where groups of us had to recruit volunteers. What separated this lecture from the others was that we were able to use what we had learned in that class period. He taught us the importance of enthusiasm in order to get the job done, and how this will translate into getting willing volunteers. I was able to use this lesson and it prepared me for my individual service project.

These two lessons that I learned from this class were the two most important things for my individual project. The most difficult part of putting together my project was deciding on what to do and how to do it. Before the class I thought that my project would have to be some humongous undertaking that would influence a large number of people. However, after being in the class for sometime I realized that every project you assume as a leader doesn't have to be something big. Even a small project can grow overtime and become something bigger and better. Also, it is much better to have a small project that you can successfully manage as opposed to something that you're not prepared to do.

After switching my proposed project idea three or four times, I finally settled on something that I was passionate about and that was realistic. One of our speakers started a conversation in class to get us talking about what made us mad about the way campus was run. He said as emerging leaders, rather

than sit around and gripe about what is going on around us we should stand up and start a change. This made me realize that my individual project should follow this same guideline. Passion for a project can help translate into a successful project. Since I started working with inner city children in middle school I've fallen in love with them and really enjoy working with them. However, I also realize that a big problem with inner city children is the lack of emphasis on school work, and I decided this would be the area I would try to bring a positive change to.

With the encouragement and advice from my peer mentor group I was able to achieve my goal of reaching out to inner-city children by starting a program that would place emphasis on reading and education. I realized the importance of first designing a mission statement of a goal that I would like to achieve, and then determining what the necessary steps would be to meet this mission statement. Prior to discussing my project with my mentor group I had tried to make up a program design for different projects without a goal. Once I had a goal to strive for my project was much easier to plan.

Working in a group also taught me a great deal about interaction among leaders. Initially, it seemed that there was a lot of clashing of personalities and everyone assumed somebody else would do the work. I am used to assuming a visible role in groups, but I had to realize that among a group of twenty leaders there were other people that were better equipped for this position. Instead, I had to do some of the "dirty" work that I had been accustomed to delegating over the years. This was a very valuable lesson for me. I now know how people that

aren't in the head leadership role feel and I know how important is it to recognize their work. I carried this lesson over to my individual project by writing thank you letters to everyone who has helped me thus far with the summer reading program.

Our group project also taught the entire class the importance of being able to adapt to new situations. Quite a few things didn't go as planned, but because of our ability to make changes the project was still a success. Making changes required us to first realize that our first ideas weren't going to work, and then quickly coming together to come up with a new plan. Through changing the plans I feel that many people in our class, myself included, were able to overcome their egos that were a problem in the beginning of class. This is another important aspect of leadership that I feel was one of my weaknesses before I entered the class.

Throughout my leadership experiences in high school rather than address my weaknesses I ignored them and continually had to try to overcome them. With constructive criticism from my mentor group I was able to address my weaknesses and feel that as a result I am a much better leader. My biggest flaw is my poor planning skills. This is the reason the first projects I planned failed, but I think that those setbacks were a positive thing because of the lessons I learned from them.

One of the points that we discussed on a regular basis, getting your volunteers to sign on to achieve a common goal, rang true for my project. Until I had a clear cut plan for my project getting volunteers was very difficult. However,

once I established a goal and a way to meet my goal getting volunteers was much easier. This is a lesson that I will carry on and use for my leadership positions in the future.

The Emerging Leader Institute was a very valuable course for me and I feel it has taught me many applications I will use for the rest of my life. I don't know where I will end up or what leadership roles I will take on, but I feel that I am equipped to handle whatever I am given.