

Ashley Stevens—ELI Final Paper

In my application for ELI, I wrote about some of the reason why I wanted to participate in ELI, making new friends being one of them. Participating in ELI was in a nutshell just a lot of fun and I think the relationships I developed with my classmates are a big reason why I enjoyed ELI so much.

Besides the reasons I gave in my application, walking away from the experience of ELI I can see a lot of other opportunities that I didn't know would be provided to me when I came to orientation. A big part of ELI for me was not only getting to learn about leadership through the book, guest speakers, Jared and Angel, and my mentor group, but also having the opportunity to practice what I learned by participating in some of my classmates' leadership projects and my own leadership project.

The day before Kristen was to have her leadership project I got a Facebook message from her asking me to fill in for a girl who had dropped out at the last minute. I really did not want to do the whole swimsuit and gown thing, but at the same time I knew that Kristen had been working really hard on her project and I felt like if I were in her situation I would really appreciate it if someone filled in for me where I needed them to. The big lesson I took from participating in Kristen's project is to be there for people even if it means stepping out of your comfort zone. Not only was I able to be there when Kristen needed someone, I also made new friends and can now recite all 43 presidents by heart.

Now that I am in college, I've thought back on numerous occasions about my friends from high school that I don't really get to see that often anymore. Looking back, I realize what a HUGE influence my friends were on me; fortunately I had really good friends who influenced me in a positive way. Even though we've only been together for four months, I've seen the impact my fellow classmates have had on me. When I first started college last spring I hung around some UK students who weren't involved in university activities or organizations, they basically just went to class and I think because these people were my friends I didn't really think about or feel confident enough to get involved on campus. I don't hang around those same people anymore, and having made other friends and been involved with ELI, I've seen how much fun and how beneficial it is to get involved with UK's many organizations.

Usually before class a bunch of my classmates and I sit out in front of SC 357 and just talk. Many other ELIers eat together down in the cafeteria before class. One of the strengths that I think our class has is the ability to communicate well with one another; we were friends before we were classmates, despite the fact that we are all very different personality-wise and we all come from different backgrounds. The fact that we were all able to get along and respect one another showed me what a great group of leaders I had the opportunity to be in ELI with.

On the cover of the notebooks we got from Angel at orientation is a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead

where there is no path and leave a trail." I think a lot of times I let other people's expectations and the activities and organizations I'm involved with define who I am. When I was finishing up my sophomore year of high school I decided I didn't want to be on the Varsity Dance Team anymore. It was really hard to transition into not being a dance team member because it had been such a big part of my life up until that point. Through ELI I've grown up and realized that I shouldn't let activities and organizations define who I am, but to decide for myself what values and beliefs I want to have.

In addition, I've learned how important it is to do as Dorothy Edwards told us: Find something that we're passionate about, otherwise we'll be miserable. Sometimes I feel pressured to get involved with certain organizations because it will make my parents happy or look nice on a resume, but I don't really focus on that anymore. Instead I devote my time to activities that I'm really interested in; for example this summer I am going to start working toward my private pilot's license because I love airports and airplanes and it's always something that I've wanted to do.

ELI really opened up a lot of opportunities for my classmates and I through really simple things like listserv e-mails notifying us of upcoming leadership opportunities. Through one of the many e-mails that I got from Angel I found out about The CAUSE, which I applied for. I was super nervous going into the interview because I really wanted one of those 22 spots. The first thing Meg Quarles brought up in the interview was my involvement in ELI. I told her

and the two other people who were interviewing me about my individual leadership project and our group leadership project. Later on in the interview, Meg asked me what my personal leadership philosophy was, which was so easy for me to answer because I've been studying and thinking about that exact thing for four months now.

I told Meg that my personal leadership philosophy was to be a leader in such a way that you are a positive influence on people that in turn allows them to become leaders. We've all been around people who just bring out the best in others and make them feel good about themselves, and that's what kind of leader and character I want to have. I want to have the attributes that Gordon Holbein would associate with good leaders: Good leaders are people who uplift others, can act as role models for them, and are positive. I know that I'm still developing as a leader because we're all still developing as leaders, and as I develop I want to become a leader that focuses on people first, not programs.

I have a lot of favorite class sessions from ELI, but one that sticks out in my mind is when we were finished with guest speakers and Jared went over with us principles and material that we had been going over and learning all semester through our book and speakers. I don't know if it was Jared's intent to go off and start talking about the issue of apathy on campus but we all started discussing it and it was really interesting to listen to my classmates' perspectives on the issue. Reasons for apathy on campus can be blamed on a number of

things, one reason I think it occurs is when people focus on programs first instead of the people that make up an organization.

Right now I'm involved with an organization in which many of its leaders focus on programs first, not people. I know that what these leaders are concerned with is not necessarily helping people, but making their numbers go up, which in turn makes them look good. I've really lost interest in attending activities put on by this organization and I think a lot of other people have as well just because they're boring since the focus isn't on people; it's on making a certain person look good in the eyes of others. In order to be an effective leader, you have to genuinely care about other people.

All the opportunities and experiences I've had with ELI this semester has more so unveiled for me what my leadership style is than actually given me a definition of what leadership is. I think I've always been a leader who is people-oriented; being in ELI has helped me to realize that through the DiSC test we did with Rhonda Strouse, the leadership projects I had the opportunity to be involved with, as well as other class sessions.

Near the beginning of the semester Jared told us that this is the class that we actually remember stuff from. I know I can't recite specific things that I learned in class or from the book, but I have learned a lot from the examples of my classmates and instructors, which is what I will carry with me throughout my college career. ELI has helped me to define who I am as a leader, but more

than anything I think it's been character building, and for that I am grateful to have been a part of the Spring 2006 ELI class.