The Emerging Leaders Program is a multi-faceted program designed to engage new students with the campus and local community while examining, developing and practicing leadership skills. First-semester freshmen and transfer students work collaboratively with faculty and staff program advisors and undergraduate peer mentors to learn about and practice leadership skills.

A HANDS-ON APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

During Orientation, 200+ students apply for fewer than 80 spots in the Emerging Leaders Program (ELP) which kicks off on move-in day and wraps up just prior to finals week.

ELP students are placed into one of six knowledge communities (KCs): arts and humanities; business and entrepreneurship; environment and ecology; global awareness and citizenship; public service; and sports, recreation and wellness.

During the semester, student mentees attend workshops that cover topics including group dynamics, professional etiquette, public speaking, goal setting and ethics. They also participate in a networking program with campus and community leaders.

An active role on campus and in the community

Students accepted to the program:

- explore and apply personal strengths and insights about leadership,
- examine, develop and utilize leadership skills including oral communication, networking, problem-solving, program planning, interpersonal and group dynamics and time management,
- impact the local community through development and implementation of a service learning project.

Program highlights include:

- 363 students have completed the ELP certificate since its inception in 2010.
- Nearly 1,600 services hours were completed by students in fall 2015 as part of the program’s service learning projects.

“The students are experiencing a process where they learn to be proactive in their own learning and leadership skills. This is challenging. They have been told what to do their whole lives — by counselors, teachers, parents — and are now thrown into an ambiguous situation. Some students struggle. Some don’t. But, they all come out on top having learned a great deal about partnership, leadership and self-awareness.”

-Sarah Thompson
Lecturer for health and wellness studies; faculty program advisor for sports, recreation and wellness knowledge community

“When I first learned about the ELP, the idea of being a good team player really appealed to me. From early on, I was exposed to people in a number of different majors. Working alongside students in Watson and Decker was a new experience that really showed me what this campus has to offer in terms of intellectual and cultural diversity. I knew right away this program would be a good way to start making an impact from the beginning of my college career.”

-Mohammad Bishawi ’15
Triple major in accounting; politics, philosophy and law (PPL); and history
LEARNING THAT LastS A LIFETIME

Seed money for a greater impact in the community

A major component of the ELP is completion of a service-learning project in the community. Students must take initiative to find a community organization, plan how to get everyone in their group involved, raise funds and budget. All without a cent to begin with. Seed money for the six knowledge communities could provide:

- support for the initial costs of creating a service learning project,
- fund projects at local agencies/organizations that have been left out of due to high start-up costs,
- provide transportation for students to and from community service sites.

Advanced training for our student mentors

Undergraduate students from across campus serve as ELP mentors receiving two academic credits as they directly, and positively impact the lives of our new students. In this role, the mentors practice communication, facilitation and problem-solving; obtain increased knowledge of campus and how to maximize use of resources; and build self-awareness and an understanding of personal strengths, leadership skills and more.

Our budget for training is limited, restricting us to two brief on-campus meetings and a weekly in-service throughout the fall semester.

Additional funding would allow for a more intensive training approach for our student mentors. This could include a one-day retreat utilizing the Challenge Ropes Course on campus, and other activities to build the mentors’ knowledge of leadership skills such as team building, group dynamics, communication skills, problem-solving and conflict resolution.

A second semester experience

Currently, the ELP is only offered during the fall semester. Carrying the program into a second semester would create increased opportunities for student community-building, skill development, leadership reflection and application. It would also enable students to have a greater, more sustained impact on the local community.

An advanced leadership certificate would build on the first semester experience for both student mentees and mentors though additional leadership development and service-learning projects in the community. ELP mentees from various sub-groups would get the opportunity to collaborate on projects, fostering increased impact.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

Students are placed into one of six small interest-based teams called Knowledge Communities (KCs) that meet weekly throughout the course of the fall semester. Each KC has a specific theme from which to view and practice leadership. Previous KC community projects have included:

- **Public service** raised money for a domestic violence center to purchase cleaning and household supplies for victims of domestic abuse and participated in a clean-up project at the center.
- **Environment and ecology** built a raised-bed garden for a local church to provide food for the neighboring food bank.
- **Business and entrepreneurship** helped a group of girl scouts learn about entrepreneurship and earn three troop badges by raising $400 through the creation and sale of bracelets on campus.
- **Sports, recreation and wellness** offered an art workshop and nail painting to residents at a nursing home Alzheimer’s unit while raising funds and awareness for the Alzheimer’s Association.
- **Global awareness** held a food sustainability event on campus with proceeds given to the Hunger Project.
- **Arts and humanities** held a student music and arts showcase to raise funds for special needs children and their families, and volunteered at the center.

A cadre of faculty, staff and peers support the groups. Each KC has a volunteer faculty advisor, a volunteer staff advisor and two student mentors.

The advisors lay the framework, act as content experts and provide community connections, while the student mentors facilitate and guide the process.