

*Student Reflection*  
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Good evening. I, like my colleagues, am delighted to welcome the newest class to the Jepson School. I have been asked to reflect tonight, as a senior, on my time at Jepson. I will be sharing many pearls of wisdom, so I encourage those of you who want to get an A to write this down. Being a student of leadership means absolutely nothing, rather it is what you do with that knowledge that defines you. At Jepson you will be challenged. Like most other disciplines on campus you will wade through numerous readings, some of which can be mind-numbingly boring. You will take quizzes and tests that will leave you wishing you had studied a little harder. You will write papers, and when you get them back with a grade and comments like “I don’t understand what you mean, explain,” the only thing you can say is, no, no, wait, *I don’t understand what you mean*.

But really what I have described is nothing out of the ordinary in the life of a college student. At Jepson we do some of that normal “academic” stuff, but we are also given the opportunity to explore and learn like no other students in a field of academia that I have encountered. That first step is being taken here tonight. You are being welcomed into a special community, a community of cool kids. There are plenty of good decent people at UR, but I swear to be admitted to the Jepson School you must have a certain level of coolness about you. Coolness in this sense means many different things, but I for one not only have taken the time to get to know everyone in my Jepson class, but I feel as if we share a deeper connection than, say, the kids I take my history classes with. You will spend the next five semesters working, learning, and growing with the people who sit with you tonight.

The other part of our special community are faculty who are truly amazing and gifted. Not only do they know their stuff and are passionate about making you interested in your studies, but they are without a doubt the most hip department on campus. How many faculty members do you know who can discuss the finer points of turntablism and hip-hop music, or who give you money back from the royalties they make when you buy their textbook, or invite you over to their house for a sober tailgate before a football game. Take every opportunity that is given to you here at Jepson. I have and not once been disappointed.

All this is jim dandy, but here comes the real bomb that has to be dropped. What were you thinking when applied for admission? A degree in leadership studies is worth as much a Tickle Me Elmo doll during Christmas of '96, which is to say a lot. Yet I still have to regularly explain to my parents why they pay so much money for me to study leadership. I blame the lack of a Tickle Me Elmo doll as part of the reason. But the real answer that I have come up with to this question of why study leadership is simple. Because it's about me. My classes in leadership have impacted me personally in a way that no other classes I have taken at college have. My history degree allows me to spit out mundane dates and facts about stuff that has already happened. My political science classes – while thought provoking – have really left no impression on me. Other departments scoff at Jepson, but that is because they are jealous that they have to teach whatever boring stuff it is they know. At Jepson we get to explore the boundaries of different fields of study while striving to make sense of what leadership is and its importance in the world today.

It sounds worthy and it is, because in order to succeed here you have to be willing to change. You have to change the way you think and act, and how you view the world and your place in it. The core curriculum here is meant to immerse you in fields of study that will immediately challenge the way you view everyday life. That shift may be the way you view injustice in society, the dynamics of power that take place in every group you belong to, or the ethics that form the foundation for our very human existence. This all might seem a little crazy and farfetched, but I guarantee that every Jepson graduate is a much different person today because of their experiences here.

At this point I hope none of you are hanging on to the hope that you will learn how to be actual leaders at Jepson, because that is probably not going to happen. What Jepson does give you is a sense of awareness about yourself and the world around you. That type of real world intelligence is in short supply these days, yet many of us will never go on to be leaders in the traditional sense of the word. But Jepson has prepared us to be members of society who are smart and savvy with an understanding of people and processes of life and who carry with them a sense of justice and ethics. Whether you lead a company, a classroom, or a household, or maybe just follow others, Jepson will leave its mark on you, and you can't help but feeling like you are a better person because of what you have learned here.