**The leader in me;**

Unlike other leaders on campus, I am not a confident person when it comes to public speaking. Personally, I also dislike competitions and aggressiveness, as well as power. In any organization I have been in, I enjoy doing jobs in the background to contribute and never want attention for doing what I do. I used to be class leader throughout from primary to secondary schools back in Vietnam, but that changed as I entered high school in Singapore. I cannot remember what made me change my mind, but as far as I remember, my priorities shifted and I was simply happy not having the power and responsibilities. Years ago, it was my definition of a leader: power and responsibilities.

When I was contacted by Andre to apply for the position of a Retreat Coordinator, I had mixed feelings: excitement and anxiety. Various factors contributed to how I was feeling, and none of them was convincing enough to make me say yes or no to the offer. It took me a few days to finally apply for the position, and I am glad that I did.

Many years back in high school when I started school in Singapore, the time when my perspectives on leadership was going through a transition, I was a completely different person compared to when I was in Vietnam. The competitiveness that I felt constantly in Singapore made me doubt my abilities in leadership. The aggressiveness of everyone when they were campaigning for a leadership role was so overwhelming that I felt sickened by the insincerity, since every one was becoming a leader for a golden college application. I was in the Student Government of my small high school, the community of which I loved so dearly, yet I still could not feel right being a leader. At times I would feel like my opinions were not appreciated and everything was about the school politics and popularity. I then questioned myself often: am I the right person for this leadership position?

When I arrived at UC, I gave another try at leadership by applying to the First Year Leadership program and Student Orientation Leader. The two opportunities ignited something in me: the urge to serve the community, which is the University of Cincinnati. However, the question then was whether to serve publicly or behind the scene. I tried multiple positions in the executive board of a few organizations, and then just regular members in some others. I found out that, in both scenarios, I was equally satisfied with the amount of effort I put in my performance, and it does not matter whether I am in “power” or not. In fact, leadership, as I have learned from my experience at UC, does not mean power, like what it did to me in Singapore. It is no longer about who would have most control over an organization, or who would look best in resume with long list of leadership roles in various activities. Leadership is about how people with true passion for the same cause work together, take initiatives to achieve a goal, and bring positive outcomes to the community. True leaders know how to work with people, not control them. True leaders do not have to fit a stereotype like I thought they would, and thus we often find diversities in leadership roles. There is not a single definition for a leader.

Back to the position of a Retreat Coordinator, I applied, giving my best to the application and the interview, believing that I, with my own unique perspectives and experience, could bring something new to the program. I did have doubts multiple times, since I was inexperienced with the program myself, having been neither a participant nor leader. However, I realized the support I was receiving from everyone, from my fellow coordinators, the Honors staff, and the Retreat Leaders. All the feedback was positive and constructive, and the teamwork was impressive. There was no negativity in the environment, since everyone was working hard to make the Retreat a success. Somehow, I did not see myself any different than the Retreat Leaders, even though as Coordinators, we were supposed to guide them what to do. To me, it was more of a cooperative, productive relationship among fellow Honors students sharing the same goal. There was not any clear power hierarchy. There was not any dictatorship. There was not a moment in which our prides got the best of us. I was truly impressed by how things turned out throughout the preparation and actual event of the retreat.

I still remember the day of the retreat, when I was standing in front of about 20-30 students in a small room, carrying out the activity I designed for my session. I thought to myself: this is it; this is when my leadership skill gets tested. However, in fact, my leadership skill has been tested throughout the procedure of the event. From the moment I decided to give the application a try, to when I talked to my fellow Coordinators about my design of the session, to when I was bonding with my small group Retreat Leaders. This opportunity of being a Retreat Coordinator has taught me that leadership is not about a glorious moment when you can outshine everyone else. As a matter of fact, the Retreat Coordinators at the Honors Retreat mostly did planning work in the background while it was the Retreat Leaders that actively led the camp and interacted with the students. With that, this experience showed me a different aspect of being a leader. Whether you are visible or not to the public, what matters is the final outcome of the project and how it impacts the community. Personally, I am still not an aggressive, fierce leader with strong personality that could make it to politics and such. I am a different type of leader. The leader in me is one that enjoys working with people to bring out a solution altogether. The leader in me is one that makes sure everyone is comfortable working in a team. The leader in me does not mind being in the background. I might not be a leader with the best public speaking ability or the most impressive campus involvements out there, but I know my strengths and weaknesses, and am able to turn them into uniqueness in my style of leadership.