

My name is Rohit Vepa, and I recently graduated from session 18 of the FBI National Academy Youth Leadership Program, or YLP, from June 23-July 1st. Before I talk about my experience and the YLP, I would like to thank the Maryland-Delaware Chapter of the FBI National Academy Associates for providing me this unique opportunity to take part in the YLP program.

The week I spent at the FBI Academy in Quantico participating in the YLP was truly unforgettable. I made lifelong friends, met inspiring people, and learned necessary leadership skills.. I have to admit that I was both intimidated and excited after first seeing the huge campus, but after meeting my fellow classmates I felt reassured because they were just as intimidated as I was. Even though we all came from different places, some as far as Poland or Australia, it was amazing how fast my classmates and I bonded. We all instantly became friends and by the end of the week we had become a family. The early mornings were a struggle at first, waking up at the hotel at 5am and getting ready for a day at the FBI headquarters. During the day we would have tours, classes, and presentations. We were fortunate enough to visit the Hostage Rescue Team's facilities. We learned about the intense selection process and grueling training the members of this team went through. The YLP also had its fair share of surprises, like when a helicopter swooped in and the new recruits practiced fast roping during our tour of the facilities. Our daily classes were both interactive and informative. We not only discussed what it takes to be a good leader, but also what characteristics distinguish good from bad leaders. My favorite class was probably the one on forensics, because it combined my interest in

science with my newfound interest in law enforcement. I say newfound because before the YLP I wasn't much aware of the diverse activities the law enforcement engages in, and had not focused on law enforcement as a career option. I had seen a career in science or math as the main option for me, but the people I met at the YLP and the classes that we had helped me realize that law enforcement is a career path that I could pursue. The stories and experiences the instructors shared demonstrated just how exciting, fulfilling, and essential jobs in law enforcement are. One of the counselors shared a story about how she rescued a young girl who was kidnapped by her own father. Our counselor's astonishing actions saved the girl, who was put in such a terrible situation. After we were told the story everyone's eyes in the room were watering. We experienced another surprise when Director Comey visited us for a short Q and A. We were all excited to take a picture with him, and the photographer actually had to use a ladder to ensure that everyone behind Director Comey was in the picture. In the evenings we had PT. At first I thought the PT would just be vigorous workouts that pushed us to our physical limits, but we also played fun sports and team building activities. All the physical exercises we did helped prepare us for the yellow brick road, which we ran the day before graduation. Our class was so tight-knit that people who finished first went back and ran with the others to the finish line. Ringing the bell at the end of the course was extremely gratifying, and sharing that moment with my new friends made it even better. I enjoyed all aspects of the YLP: the informative classes, the delicious food, the intense PT times, and our class trip to Washington DC. I will cherish the new friends I made and lifetime lessons I learned during this program. The graduation day was a day of mixed emotions.

We were all happy to be graduating, but sad that we would not be able to spend any more time with each other. When the week started we were just nervous kids surrounded by strangers from various corners of the earth, but as the week went by we turned into a family. This program taught me many new skills that are essential to be a leader in modern day society.

Finally, this great opportunity would not have been possible without the kind help and guidance of many. First, I would like to thank the Chapter for sponsoring me and I thank Captain Campanella for his support and guidance. He helped me with the application process and once the selection was made he provided invaluable assistance in preparing me to attend the YLP. I would also like to thank Major Luther Johnson of the Howard County Police Department, for agreeing to sponsor me during the application process and his kindness. Lastly, I would like to thank my mom for making me aware of this opportunity and always pushing me to be the best I can be. Without her strong encouragement, this would not have been possible. To sum it all up, the YLP was without doubt the most worthwhile and enjoyable experience of my life.