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Karen West · in 4 minutes

At the end of every MOOC I've taken I've written a thank you note, since these courses are offered for free online, offering those who want to learn a place to do so without having to leave their home or office and to learn for free. I'm currently unemployed and already have all the degrees I plan to get in life, but for the unemployed, they offer you free learning while job searching, and for the poor, as long as they have an internet connection, they can learn for free when they otherwise may not have had the chance.

This course might be a considered a humanity for me, since my BS and MS are in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, and all of my 18 years work experience in these areas as an engineer. It never occurred to me to take a law humanity or go for a law degree when I was young enough to do so, and many of my technical friends and family did do that, but I think most people in my office at the time were furthering their technical education, so that is what I decided to do too. But currently, I found myself unemployed, now have young kids as I job search, and found I needed to both practice old skills and learn new technical skills in order to find employment.

So why take a law humanity? I took my first last year, Justice, at this time and thought the debates that went on were fantastic and brought debate and conversation to my life at home practicing technical skills home alone while trying to find a job. At the end of that course was around the time Edward Snowden exposed the eavesdropping, and I thought to myself after having taken that course, what are the issues here, both technically and in terms of keeping our country safe while not violating human rights? Then I thought, do I know what my human rights are specifically? I mostly know technical things. So since then, while practicing technical skills and job searching, I've added one law humanity at a time, and took International Criminal Law, US Constitution and International Human Rights.

At this time, I have no other plans to take more law courses and honestly hope to be employed in the technical world again, but by taking US Constitution this semester with Prof. Amar, I've learned better about how my home country works in terms of the written and unwritten Constitution. It generated conversations with my husband who is British, but has lived in the US 21 years now, about the differences between how his country operates and how mine does. Although I used to think we were very much alike, I found that there are some major differences in how the laws are made to control the economy for some things like health care, education, and even little things like people age 65 and over being able to ride public transportation for free. And I then wondered, this is a budgeting issue with economies, and I know nothing about those either, and have mostly programmed embedded systems and done EE/CS things, so I took microeconomics and macroeconomics to try to learn a bit about countries and how they think about budgets in these respects, and I learned a lot there too, but what a complex issue--I learned a lot but have no idea after having taken them.

So I'm sure everyone's motivations and goals and reasons for taking a free online MOOC are different, but what I learned after writing the first essay in this particular class was that I was quite proud of my country and the principles upon which we were formed in the late 1700's, at a time when my husband's country (whom I do admire very much in many ways) was actually a bit of a bully (no taxation without representation) and we stood up to the bully at the time and won when no one thought we could. They also structured our Constitution to be fair to all, whether from a poor or rich background, and although it did not become fair for a minority such as black people and women having rights too, it did change, and that is another great thing, that the Constitution continues to evolve over time. I also have learned in the process, that our country is an infant compared to other places in the world, and perhaps there are things we can learn from our elder countries that may have dealt with things we have not yet had to deal with, being an infant in comparison in having to deal with a country's long term issues.

So I'm thankful for having taken this course, in that although I originally took it to supplement my technical learning while trying to find employment, it helped expose me to other issues to think about and better learn about how my country works and be able to compare it to other countries.

Many times at companies at which I've worked, you may have chats with office mates during lunch hours, or perhaps at home with a friend or family, but given I've been unemployed for 4 years and 9 months in Boston, the discussion forums sometimes help replace conversations about relevant things in the world that you may have had during your lunch hour when working, all while at home alone from your computer, and that has made life while job searching a bit less lonely too.

I also bought Prof. Amar's books electronically, and someday may perhaps read them more thoroughly than I was able to this semester. I find I have more time to read outside my technical world when I'm working actually, than in a period of job searching.

So thank you and best of luck to everyone, those who may take what they learn from a course such as this and be able to help change and form the world we all live in in the future, and those like me, who is more aware of these things as I work in a different world.

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