

General Education Reflection

Iowa State University offers many diverse general education courses spanning fields such as history, science, music, and languages. The courses I took, AF AM 201 (Introduction to African American Studies) and RUS 3750 (Russia Today), provided me with a strong foundation in both the historical past and the political present.

I took AF AM 201 in my first year at Iowa State University. In this class, I learned about the history of African Americans in the United States. I learned about the atrocities that slaves such as Fredrick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs had to endure and the sacrifices they had to make to become free. I learned about how immoral acts such as whipping and rape were normalized during that time. Reflecting on this class, I can connect it to the present through the current normalization of ICE's actions. Situations such as detention centers and the normality of ICE agents to basically anything, including murder, and have legal protection, are mirrored, albeit to a lesser, but still meaningful extent, about what slave owners were able to do with the slaves they owned.

I took RUS 3750 during my third year at Iowa State University. In this class, I learned about the history of Russia, starting from the 1900s to the present day. One thing I found interesting and didn't know before was how the government set up legal censorship and how citizens fought back against the strict censorship. The government created ambiguous laws that allowed them to basically prosecute anyone they wanted. The citizens, despite the consequences, many tried to protest silently using methods such as intentional meaninglessness to show how absurd these laws are. In the present, lawmakers are actively trying to change the interpretation of words thousands of years old, such as those in the Constitution, to justify their actions legally and push their own political agenda. One example of this is birthright citizenship.

Another thing I learned while taking RUS 3750 is just how dangerous engineering can be. The Chernobyl disaster is one such example I knew about. If engineers take shortcuts and don't prioritize safety above all else, tens of thousands of people can be harmed. This disaster taught me to prioritize safety and not take shortcuts, even if others pressure me to do so.

These two courses helped me better understand the past of different countries and peoples. They helped me better understand myself and who I want to be as an engineer. I was able to reflect on the current state of the world, both in terms of the differences and, sadly, the similarities. In the end, I'm glad I took these courses, as they provided me with viewpoints and knowledge I wouldn't have gained by taking only engineering courses.