

As a freshman and sophomore engineering student, it is nearly impossible to avoid discussing the general education requirements of Iowa State. I remember discussing these classes with some of my fellow classmates during those first years, and interestingly enough, someone would always ask, "If I'm an engineer, why do I have to take all of these classes that don't really have much to do with my degree?". I used to have some of these same questions myself, but now that I have completed all of my general education courses, I think I've found my answers.

My first general education class was Religion 210, which deals with the major beliefs and practices of most of the religions present in America. I decided to take this course since all that I knew about religion was a very narrow view from my childhood. As a Sophomore, I was looking to broaden my horizons beyond my small-town childhood, and this class was a good way to do it. Ultimately, while it didn't change my personal beliefs that much, I was able to gain a deeper appreciation for the differences (and similarities) between different religions.

The second general education class that I took was History 201, which was an introduction to western civilization. After my religion class, I began to wonder what could have caused the huge variety in belief systems. I ended up asking a friend majoring in history if he knew of any classes that would provide this background information. He recommended 201, so I signed up for it. This class provided me with the cultural and social developments from ancient Mediterranean up to the 1500's that were ultimately responsible for much of modern society.

After taking these two classes to try and figure out why humanity does the things it does, something dawned on me. I was essentially trying to analyze both of these classes from a sociological perspective. Once I figured this out, I decided to take Sociology 134 to find out if I could learn some new techniques to help my search. I ended up enjoying that sociology class so much that my last two general education classes related to it in some way.

The first of these classes was Criminal Justice 340, which was about the theory and research of social deviance and the policies in place to control it. This was a logical extension of both my newfound interest in sociology as well as my interest in figuring out why people do what they do. We were able to look at studies that were performed anywhere from twenty years ago to the year before and ultimately delivered a presentation on an issue and how to resolve it.

Finally, the last general education class that I took was Sociology 325, which deals with the ethics of agriculture. This one was out of my comfort zone even more than the previous ones. I have family that farm, but never really gave much thought into what ethical issues could arise from agriculture. However, having seen more and more news stories and documentaries about where our food comes from, I decided to take this class to get a deeper view into this issue. Ultimately, our class was able to define what agricultural ethics looks like and provide our own individual issues to solve.

Looking back on the beginning of my college career makes me wonder why these requirements were ever questioned. Without them, there would have been no reason to pursue subjects outside of engineering. As Neale Donald Walsch once said, "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone". Even though it can be difficult to pursue things outside of the college of engineering, the rewards that it provides are well worth the effort. After all, a good engineer is defined by knowledge, not expertise.