

General Education Reflection

Throughout my time at Iowa State, I've come to realize that engineering isn't just about knowing how to build things; It's also about understanding the world those things are built for. Some of my most important lessons came from courses unrelated to my major. In particular, my German courses (GER 301, 304, and 320) and Personal Finance (HDFS 283) have given me a broader understanding of communication, economics, and culture. These tools are just as essential as any programming language or circuit design.

One of the biggest things I learned was communication across cultural boundaries. In GER 301, I worked on reading and understanding historical texts in German, which helped me realize how deeply context and culture shape how people express ideas. GER 304, which focused on business German, pushed that further by showing how professional communication norms differ internationally. These courses taught me to think globally and recognize that good engineering does not happen in isolation. Instead, it must be communicated, justified, and adapted to different audiences. Understanding and respecting other cultures is critical as engineers increasingly work across borders.

Another lesson I took away was a deeper understanding of economic systems and financial technology, primarily through HDFS 283 (Personal Finance). With the rapid adoption of new digital financial tools, such as cryptocurrencies and fintech products, the everyday consumer is at risk due to a lack of understanding. As engineers, we must enable those outside our field to understand and utilize the advancements we develop.

Lastly, one of the most surprising things I learned was the value of ethical perspectives when making design decisions. While this generally wasn't the focus of these courses, in GER 320, we examined Germany's response to issues such as climate policy. This is not just a political question but also an engineering one. What technologies do we build to help with energy efficiency? How do we ensure that infrastructure is accessible and fair? Environmental and social challenges depend on engineers being able to think beyond the technical problem and address the social one as well. We have a responsibility to consider who benefits from our work and who might be left behind.

Looking ahead, I don't just want to be a technically competent engineer. I want to be someone who brings a broader, more human perspective to my work. The skills I developed in these general education courses will help me approach future engineering problems with greater care and context. Plenty of challenges do not have easy answers, but I feel better prepared to face them because of the education I received outside of my major.