General Education Reflection

Brady Kuhn

EE 4940: Senior Portfolio

Iowa State University

October 3, 2025

Introduction

By the time I graduate next May, I will have taken five general education courses across five different majors. Taking a wide range of classes benefits me as an engineer because it provides me with new perspectives for solving problems. I would like to highlight two general education classes I've taken during my time at Iowa State because of how they've helped me grow as a young engineer: COMST 214 Professional Communication and PSYCH 101 Introduction to Psychology.

COMST 214: Professional Communication

I knew I wanted to take a communications course to improve my soft skills as an engineer. It's easy to focus all your attention on your technical skills since that is what the majority of our classes are about. To stand out to employers, I wanted to make sure I had strong communication skills in addition to my technical skills. This class taught me about verbal and nonverbal communication in professional settings. It emphasized interpersonal skills, salary negotiation, presentation skills, and more.

These skills are very important when it comes to solving engineering problems because you must be able to communicate effectively with a team. A team that can't communicate well will be full of inefficiencies and sometimes unnecessary drama. Due to the rise of email, texting, and other forms of instant messaging over the last couple of decades, young engineers may not have the soft skills required to speak face-to-face with others. This makes developing those skills now *before* entering industry even more important.

PSYCH 101: Introduction to Psychology

Another general education class I chose to take to strengthen my soft skills is Psychology 101. I took this class in my first semester at Iowa State, and it was a great introduction to learning how people think and behave. It was a totally new topic to me, and it was nice to study something outside of STEM for once. I learned about the application of the scientific method to study behavior and mental processes. The scientific method of research is something that can be

applied to engineering because it trains you to think critically about your research methods and results.

In a world full of misinformation, especially with the explosion of AI content in the past few years, it is more important than ever to think critically about the facts presented to us. In engineering, problems can rarely be solved by simply implementing the first solution we find or using the first information we come across. This class taught me how to look at problems from different angles and derive solutions accordingly.

Conclusion

General education classes are often seen as a waste of time for students in STEM, but they offer invaluable exposure to topics and skills that all engineers can benefit from throughout their careers. Professional Communication taught me how to use nonverbal and verbal communication techniques to better communicate with my team. Introduction to Psychology gave me an insight into how people think and behave on a very general level. These classes taught me lessons that have made me a more well-rounded professional, which is so important as I prepare to graduate and begin my career.