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General Education Reflection

During my time at Iowa State I took a lot of engineering classes that have prepared me very well technically for my job after graduation. Outside of engineering classes, I had the opportunity to take classes as general education electives that were in areas that interested me outside of my immediate major. The experience I gained through these classes not only helped me broaden my perspective on the world as a whole, but they contributed to a greater understanding of my engineering education as well.

One of my favorite general education electives that I took over my college career was Introduction to Intermediate Macroeconomics. The class focused mostly on the mathematical basis behind a lot of the abstracted concepts learned in earlier economics classes, such as how multiple factors affect supply and demand curves and how much they move them in the aggregate. Even though this has no direct connection to engineering, it will help me greatly in the future because it taught me how to think critically about how the economy operates and affects markets. My career goal is to design systems to solve problems within my organization and knowing how markets are affected by factors will help me consider the right problems while doing this in order to launch a successful product. Additionally, the always-on threat of recession is much better understood through an economic lense which will give me an advantage when I am inevitably part of a company facing recession. Being able to see past the short-term effects will help me to contribute to the company’s recovery and advance my career simultaneously.

Another interesting general education elective I took was Technology, Globalization, and Culture. This class was primarily guest speakers from industry who gave lectures on how their jobs relate to globalization and some of the things they have to consider because of it. My main takeaway was that often the right thing to do to help people in the long run will almost always cost more money, but the long-term benefits can far outweigh this short-term cost. It was really important to me thinking about the world we live in today with the threat of climate change. There’s a good chance I’ll be in the position of having to make a decision that is better for the environment but potentially much more expensive and this class gave me the perspective to make the good decision for society as opposed to the company. This class also made me realize just how much engineering decisions affect the world, a Google product for example is used by hundreds of thousands of people and simple things like favoring a certain type of setting can cause massive amounts of people to do their work around that assumption. This power is something that should be considered every time a new engineering decision is made.

A third class I took was Introduction to International Studies. The most impactful part of that class was a presentation I gave on South Africa and the then-President Zuma. The corruption that was rampant in the country was astounding and something I had never been aware of before. Just realizing how different things are in other parts of the world is crucial to making decisions in engineering that can do the most good. A product can be amazing but too expensive or divisive to be able to be used by the people that could be most helped by it.

I really enjoyed my time at Iowa State, and the general education courses I took were a big part of it. Not only did it help me gain more perspective, but it also exposed me to students from other disciplines that I wouldn’t have interacted with in an academic setting otherwise. I can confidently say these have been a big part of my education and will continue to have influence throughout my engineering career.