

I remember when I first heard from my advisor that I would have to take a handful of general education classes in order to complete my degree. I did not understand the need for taking those. “What does a general education course have to do with writing software?” I thought. Honestly, that is the mindset I had for a long time. It took until I was a senior to realize the importance that those annoying gen-ed courses had on my work and career.

The first general education course I took was ECON 101 as a freshman. This was back when I did not comprehend the importance these kinds of courses had. The course was pretty simple: it covered the basics of microeconomics. This involved supply and demand, and some stuff about value. I do not think this specific course has helped me in my pursuit of being a software engineer, but it did help me to understand the reality of existing in our capitalistic society. I now understand why gas prices go up and now all the time. I also understand why we have variable tax rates due to there being less value in each additional dollar someone has. These concepts alone did not mean much to me, but as I began to take political science courses, these ideas crept in from time to time.

After I finished ECON 101, I knew I did not want to keep taking economics courses. I took a look at the general education offerings, and I saw that the political science courses had a set of classes I could take that would knock off the rest of the general education requirements I had. This was great at the time because I wanted a set of courses that would be easy to get through, and since they were about political science, I thought that I might be able to get some value from the material too. I was right about the concepts being valuable, but for the wrong reason.

The first political science course I took was POLS 215. This is an introduction to American government. I learned a lot about how the political system in the United States was set up according to the Constitution. Through that, I was able to get a better understanding of the political environment that I will continue to exist in.

A semester later, I took POLS 251. This is an international relations course. I thought this would be valuable because I would be able to learn about other government systems. I was really wrong about that. The course, at a high level, was about why the world was not in perpetual war. I ended up learning a lot about the political theory keeping the world at peace, and the way tension is handled. Some of those concepts boil down to a micro level too. There have been many times at work where we come together as a coalition of multiple interests that push the same goal to accomplish those same interests.

In Spring of 2019, I took my final two general education courses: POLS 333 and POLS 335. POLS 333 is all about diversity in the United States. This is a pretty big issue right now. There is a lot of tension around different minorities and our government’s current administration. This course helped me to understand the underlying causes of some of these issues, and how it is challenging to resolve them in an ideal manner. This kind of course correlates well to working on a team in industry. The people I work with oftentimes are different from me in one way or another. We each have unique ideas and ways of solving problems. At times this can cause tension. If someone decides to pursue a solution to a problem that I believe is insufficient or inefficient, there could be conflict. By looking at some historical examples of how some incredibly complex social issues were resolved, I have been able to resolve issues at work more smoothly too.

Lastly, there is POLS 335. Of every course I have ever taken, this is my favorite. The title of the course is “Science, Technology, and Public Policy”. With that title alone, it sounds like it could apply to my job. But

that is not what the course is about. This is really a course about political theory wrapped around the Space race between the United States and the USSR. Then how does this relate to my job? To begin with, my job is not just a job. I am proud of the work I do. When I see people visiting the websites I have written and saying good things about them, it makes me feel proud and accomplished. This class taught me the difference between just working at a job and creating something. It also taught me a lot about what it means to strive for greatness, to be a hero, to be a role model, to be remembered. We remember a lot of people from the space race. Why is that? We remember them for the actions they took, their ability to handle the most stressful jobs with a sense of elegance and finesse that we are not able to replicate and never will. When I look at the work I do, I now ask myself: "What will you be remembered for?" To be remembered requires one to have acted in a memorable way. To be memorable means to take risks. To be remembered means to have failed and then tried again.

As I begin my career, I often ask myself what I want to do. I know that I will be writing software, designing systems, and continuing to learn, but there is some gray area to those statements. As I progress through my career, I want to be able to take the right opportunities as they arise. I also want to be remembered as a great teammate. To be someone that others look up to is an honor like no other. To be that kind of person, I have to be someone that can work with others. And for the people around me to look up to me requires that there is some reason to look up to me. To them, I will have had to have acted and managed to land on my feet in the midst of a setup destined for failure. Looking back, I think I was a fool to believe that these general education courses were a waste of time. I had this goal, to be someone others look up to, when I began my college career. However, I was not able to see at the time how to acquire the knowledge required to lead. Luckily, the courses found me. I now know how to act, how to work with others, and how to understand the relationships around me.