

General Education Reflection

By: Max Medberry

In my pursuit of a bachelor's degree in computer engineering from Iowa State University I have taken numerous general education electives. Some of these electives have been very helpful in my growth as an engineer. Two of these helpful courses include Introduction to Western Civilization 1, a history class, and Science Fiction, an English class.

Western Civilization 1 covered western history up until 1500. In this class we mainly learned about historical events, and how they shaped the lives of everyday people throughout the course of history. The class really showed how modern culture and values did not occur overnight, or even in the last 100 years, but has come about from series of events going back thousands of years. I learned that regardless of if the changes are explosive and quick, or subtle and slow, society is always evolving. As engineers, we are one factor that influences the direction of culture along its ever-changing path.

In Science Fiction, I learned that society has always been looking towards the future to try and decipher its path. The science fiction genre concerns itself with the subject of speculative technology, and where it will take our culture in the next twenty, or hundred, or even thousand years. The product of these predictions has in the past led to outcomes varying from new areas of research to moral panic. The takeaway here is that we should always be thinking a few steps ahead of our scientific discoveries, and contemplate the effects, positive or negative, that they can have on society.

The general education electives I have taken at Iowa State University have taught me to hypothesize on both the influences on current society, and the outcome of adding new technologies to a society. To give an example of how this would work, look at social media. Historically, society has used technology to improve their methods of communication. We can trace the progression of person to person communication all the way from the earliest letters to more recent advancements like telephone calls and email. Social media is just society's newest, most sophisticated method to communicate, and it makes sense that people would want to use the best tool available to them. Despite the advantages, social media does not come without its drawbacks, and recent studies have linked its use to increased loneliness and even depression. Science fiction would teach us to extrapolate on this trend and estimate its outcomes on society.

General education electives are useful in more ways than just breaking up the "more difficult" engineering classes we take. I think that Western Civilization 1 and Science Fiction have taught me to be a more considerate engineer.