

General Education Reflection

As a student in engineering, I have found that it is easy to emphasize technical classes and thinking; however, the general education classes I have taken have shown me how important general education is. General education classes allowed me to see the world from different perspectives and integrate a wide breadth of knowledge to expand both my personal character and my professional ability. Among the many non-technical classes I have taken, the most important to me have been Introduction to Philosophy, Introduction to Metaphysics and Psychology of Sexual Orientation.

The philosophy classes I have taken, especially Introduction to Metaphysics, have helped me to improve both my critical thinking and my approach to problem solving. Engineering requires making a lot of “best guess” decisions, and philosophy requires looking logically at problems and choices to make a well reasoned decision. Fundamentally, these are the same things. Additionally, a large portion of philosophy is analyzing something to try to find flaws in it. Applying this methodology to design engineering is very important in producing robust, well-built products.

Another major influence the philosophy courses had on my engineering decision making is in the realm of ethics. Because a huge part of the study of philosophy is related to ethics, we spent a lot of time asking questions and looking at problems from numerous perspectives. In engineering, decisions with ethical implications are frequently made—decisions about the safety level of an automated car feature, or the biological impact of a new technology. With this background in philosophy, I feel much better prepared to tackle these problems.

On another side of the coin, my psychology of sexual orientation class was extremely helpful for understanding and recognizing the problems and triumphs faced by the LGBTQ community. I grew up in a very conservative town in southern Missouri, and had very little exposure to people and communities different from my own. We are in a time of greater self expression and social acceptance, and this class helped me to be more aware, compassionate, and empathic towards the wonderfully diverse culture we are currently in—especially as those people continue to fight for freedom of expression.

While being an engineer can be technically challenging, there is a whole other challenge that comes with being a well rounded individual. I’m very grateful for the people involved in my general education courses, as they have taught me how to be a better critical thinker, more ethically minded, and increasingly empathic and compassionate.