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General Education Reflection

Iowa State's Electrical and Computer Engineering department requires all students to fulfill General Education credits, which consist of courses outside of engineering, science, and mathematics. In such a technical field of study, it can be easy to focus solely on STEM subjects, but the General Education requirements helped me explore social sciences and humanities and broaden my worldview. I completed my General Education credits through a combination of Honors seminars, Chinese classes, and transfer Advanced Placement credits from high school. Although I did not take the traditional General Education route, each of the courses I took was a valuable learning experience.

During my first year at Iowa State, I took two Honors seminars that fulfilled my U.S. Diversity credits. The first seminar was called "Human Trafficking 101," and it explored the history and concepts surrounding human trafficking around the world. This seminar was incredibly eye-opening, as it shed light on a serious crime that happens everywhere, including our very own cities. While I went into the class already knowing the basics of the subject, I was surprised about how diverse the focus was. We learned about the intersectionality of human trafficking, and it was very insightful to see how different factors, like race and gender, add nuance to each narrative and type of trafficking. This seminar really allowed me to develop my perspective on the issue, and it was a call to awareness and action that I still follow today.

The second seminar I took was called "The Social Psychology of Activism." In this class, we analyzed the motivational, interpersonal, cultural, and generational factors that contribute to social and political engagement. For our final project, each student chose a different historical movement to research, write, and present about. My favorite part of the class was how interactive it was. During each session, we spent over an hour in group discussion, where everyone shared their questions and insights on the different topics we learned about. This seminar truly pushed my critical thinking skills and increased my confidence in sharing my own thoughts. It gave me a deeper understanding of how psychology applies to social movements, a subject that will always remain relevant in society.

The remainder of my International Perspectives and General Education requirements were completed through my Chinese minor and AP credits from high school. Since I had studied

Chinese in high school, I was able to test into CHIN 301 and 302, Advanced Mandarin Chinese, during my freshman year at Iowa State. In these courses, I continued to develop my speaking, writing, and reading skills in Mandarin through various exercises, presentations, and essays. I was surprised that some of my classmates were native Chinese speakers who either grew up in Chinese-speaking households or were international students. By having such a diverse class, I was able to learn about different facets of Chinese culture from firsthand accounts. Taking these Chinese courses improved my communication skills and cultural awareness, which will help me foster better global connections and collaboration in my future career.

In addition to studying Chinese, I took several Advanced Placement courses in high school. By putting in the work and performing well on the AP exams, I earned transferable credits in History, Economics, Mathematics, Psychology, and Physics before even starting at Iowa State. The transfer credits fulfilled the last of my General Education courses, and it opened up room in my college semesters to add minors in Mathematics and Cybersecurity. While taking multiple college-level courses in high school was nowhere near an easy feat, each class was interesting and provided me with a deeper understanding of its subject matter. The difficult course load also developed my work ethic, which has definitely helped me succeed throughout my time at Iowa State.

Overall, each of the courses I took for my General Education credits has helped me grow as a student and individual. They challenged my critical and creative thinking skills in unique ways that my STEM courses have not, and I know they have made me a better problem solver and engineer. I will continue to value these learning experiences as I move forward in my career.