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Inquiry to Innovation

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Class Reflection

Coming into this class, I didn’t know a whole lot about what I was getting myself into. If I’m being honest, I signed up for the course under the swift recommendation by my counselor and the appeal of completing an honors experience in my first semester of college. I didn’t take too much away from the course description other than the fact that it was an interdisciplinary seminar (as a blissfully ignorant freshman, something I didn’t truly appreciate the value of until after completion of the course). Essentially, my expectations coming into the course were to work with other students on problems; nothing too demanding.

… And boy was I wrong. The first day of class, we were assigned to buy a book and read x amount of chapters per night. This may not seem like it’s too demanding--and in the grand scheme of things, it’s not. But let me provide some perspective: First year, first semester freshman. Science major taking chemistry, biology, and statistics on top of other classes. For this already overwhelmed student, extra reading seemed like the cherry on top of my already impeding suffocation by homework. Long story short, I got over it. I sucked it up, strapped down, and made a weekly schedule of homework so that I could balance my homework time.

This leads me to the first of many things that taking this seminar has taught me: time management. In high school it was easy to manage my time because the work was easy and the extracurriculars were fun. On top of that, schedules were the same from day to day. But once I came to college, my world was turned upside down. I had to learn to pencil in times to complete homework, go to lunch, even to sleep. Unfortunately, I’m one of those people who doesn’t learn a lesson until I’ve been through its negative consequences. Lucky for me, though, I learned the lesson of time management early on in my college career, and (I think) it is entirely accredited to this class.

The main take-away from this class was the interdisciplinary part. I started to see the inherent benefits of this aspect during the first weeks of class. Discussions were fairly open and allowed students to voice their opinions on the art of creativity. Each student clearly exemplified their majors in their words; the engineers posing the logical, step-by-step approaches to problem solving, the science majors starting at the root of a problem and working their way up through observation. After several weeks of this, we all had a feel for how the others worked. So when we were divided into groups to work on the final project, we had to use the little knowledge we had about the others in order to work fluidly. This is a *lot* harder than it sounds. I can’t speak for all of the groups, but I can speak for mine. First, we all worked on different time schedules. I always made timelines of due dates and progress, while others did work the night before (this is not bashing them! I am guilty of doing that same thing quite often). I liked to jump to conclusions once we had a lead, while others liked to consider all aspects of a problem and solution. At first, this was hard to get used to. But once we dealt with it for a week or so, it became a benefit. We learned how to assign parts of a project for the person who would get it done to its best ability. We learned how to communicate with our team members and voice opinions without stepping on other people. While I was working, I didn’t really notice the importance of this cooperation. But looking back now, I know that it is perhaps one of the most important life skills that I have learned and that I will carry with me throughout and beyond my college years.

In my opinion, it was lessons like the ones detailed above that are the core of this course, not the content. Where else would a science major like myself get to work on a project with engineers, communications majors, and others? If it were not for this class, I am not sure where, how, or when I would have gained the skills of time management and interdisciplinary cooperation. I’m sure that I’ll look back on this class in a few years and find that it was one of the most beneficial to my development both as a student and as a person.