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think

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At U. of Maryland, an Effort to Make Introductory Courses Extraordinary

By Dan Berrett

College Park, Md.

Required introductory courses are as important as they are unloved.

They are a key part of the general-education curriculum, which makes up as much as one-third of the typical baccalaureate student's education, and they are the subject of seemingly never-ending revitalization efforts.

Many senior faculty members avoid teaching such courses because they see them as being filled with callow students with little interest in the subject. Students often see them as the curricular equivalent of eating their vegetables, the unappetizing fare they must endure before they get to the interesting parts of their educations.

Critics argue that such distaste is well founded. These courses typically take the form of a slog through a discipline's "greatest hits," can prove to be deadly to students' curiosity, and often serve as gatekeepers that keep them from advancing.

The University of Maryland at College Park thinks it may have found a way to make these courses more engaging and rigorous. New and retooled introductory courses, called the "I-Series," have spread campuswide after a two-year pilot. This fall, all incoming freshmen must take at least two I-Series courses as part of a new set of core requirements.

The "I" refers to a litany of higher-education buzzwords beginning with that letter, including imagination, inspiration, and innovation.

Jargon aside, the courses are organized around provocative questions or propositions. They have titles like, "Is America Destined to Fall by 2076?," "Rise of the Machines: Artificial Intelligence Comes of Age," and "Economics and the College Affordability Crisis."

"They are not run-of-the-mill, staid introductory courses with a set body of knowledge the students memorize and regurgitate," says Donna B. Hamilton, the university's associate provost for academic

affairs and dean for undergraduate studies, and the driving force behind the I-Series.

The courses bring the meaty stuff of a discipline—its debates, approaches to problems, and ways of viewing the world—to freshmen and sophomores, rather than reserving such intellectual pleasures for upperclassmen and graduate students. And many of them are taught by senior faculty who have not led an introductory course in years.

But reality has a way of intruding on ambitions, as Ms. Hamilton is aware. While many colleges have created small freshman seminars as a way of revitalizing their general-education curricula, such an effort would be prohibitively expensive at College Park, with its 26,000 undergraduates.

Ms. Hamilton hopes the I-Series will offer the best of both worlds: large class sizes that are affordable at a big institution but taught in a way that offers more engagement than a typical lecture. She hopes her institution's strategy will ultimately prove realistic and long-lasting. Administrators and faculty committees set the expectations. Faculty members decide how best to retool their courses or to invent new ones, for which they earn $5,000. The budgets of departments, colleges, or programs also receive $110 for each student enrolled in a course.

"It took a force of will to say, 'We're going to make an impact on our undergraduates,'" Ms. Hamilton says, "and make clear that this really, really counts and this really matters."

Kindling Interest

Many administrators have made similar pronouncements only to see their efforts stymied by institutional inertia and complexity, says Carol Geary Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, a membership organization that advocates for high-quality liberal education.

Such frustrations do not seem to have discouraged the perpetual effort to improve general education. More than half of the 433 chief academic officers surveyed by the association in 2009 said general education had increased in priority at their institutions, and 89 percent were making some change in this part of the curriculum.

The general-education curriculum generates such intense interest, Ms. Schneider says, because it usually represents the largest academic endeavor on a campus, and it tends to serve as the vehicle for many academic expectations. General-education courses are supposed to be distinctive and reflect the college's values while also

providing students with core skills like quantitative reasoning, oral and written ability, and critical thinking. Maintaining focus on such disparate goals can be difficult, though, especially after the faculty committee and provost's office start rethinking other parts of the curriculum.

The factor that will ultimately determine whether College Park's efforts pay off, Ms. Schneider says, is how well faculty members are supported in changing how they teach. Ms. Hamilton's office approves I-Series syllabi and offers faculty members help in revising them. Workshops and teaching consultations are also available.

"There's no reason why in a class of 60 you can't have collaborative learning going on," Ms. Schneider says. But "it's harder, and it takes skill."

To help develop these skills, faculty members teaching the I-Series courses have been meeting throughout the semester to share strategies and exchange ideas. At a recent session, several faculty members described their plans to "flip," in whole or in part, their courses the next time they taught them. Students might watch lectures online outside class and spend time in class working together to apply what they learn.

Other faculty members have tried more incremental methods.

David B. Sicilia, an associate professor of history, said he wondered at first how he could make his course, "Moneyland: Business in American Culture," which bore all the hallmarks of a lecture, feel less like one.

He also wanted the 100 students in his course to feel history on a visceral level. He tried role-playing, casting some of his students as employees of Chemical and Chase Manhattan banks during their merger in the mid-1990s.

During his lecture, he called on several students. Using company documents as primary sources, he explained that "business units" had been reorganized and the students had either not been "selected" for a position or their job had been "eliminated."

Some were speechless, he recalls. Others asked how they could keep their jobs. Mr. Sicilia stuck to the antiseptic text laid out in the documents. To flesh out the context, he quoted the statements made by the bank's top executive at the time and cited reactions of fired employees.

"That became very experiential for the students," he told his

colleagues during the faculty meeting. "That starts to feel to me to be really different from what we do in regular lecture courses."

While he has tried similar exercises in other courses, Mr. Sicilia says he might not have attempted it in a large introductory course had he not been teaching in the I-Series. "There's just an overall cultural message that we get from administration to try to be more innovative and creative," he says. "It's made our general-education curriculum a lot more interesting and a lot more relevant."

Unexpected Results

Large class sizes can make innovation more difficult, say many faculty members in the history department at College Park. As course sections grow to more than 100 students, discussion sections become unwieldy, which places a burden on teaching assistants.

In such cases, the pedagogical shifts can be relatively modest, though still effective. Richard Bell, an associate professor of history, started incorporating field trips to sites of historical interest for his course, "Pursuits of Happiness: Ordinary Lives in the American Revolution," which teaches the social and cultural history of the time.

He also earns high praise from his students for a simple tactic: He stops his lectures every five or 10 minutes to ask them questions, and he listens to their answers.

During a recent lecture, he described the experience of Molly Brant, a Mohawk woman who was the consort of the head of Indian affairs for England. Mr. Bell recounted key moments from her life in vivid detail. Though she and her eight children were emotionally bereft after her mate's death, they drew upon material wealth—including two pairs of green velvet leggings, fine china, and a violin—to remake their lives.

Mr. Bell asked his students how we might know these things about her. What sources might survive?

A few hands go up.

"Justin?" Mr. Bell says.

"Journals," the student offers.

"Alex?"

"Trade receipts."

"What use would trade receipts be?" Mr. Bell asks.

They would show where she was traveling and maybe with whom, the young man explains.

Paintings, says another student. Diplomatic records, offers yet another.

Mr. Bell says the students' ideas are good, but he explains that accounts written by ordinary people from so long ago rarely survive, if they ever existed. Brant's story can be recovered because she appears in the writings of others, he says.

The discussion of historical methods is part of the course's design. While most introductory history surveys lean heavily on secondary sources, or works by other historians, Mr. Bell draws almost exclusively on primary ones.

"For better or worse, the only historian they hear from is me," he says in an interview. While his students may not have the chance to weigh competing claims made by historians, they do get to see how historians marshal primary sources to build an argument and try it themselves.

Most students appreciate being taught the tools of the discipline, but at least one of Mr. Bell's students says she prefers the survey, which provides an overview of significant dates, events, and people. Dominique D'Anthony, a junior majoring in neurobiology and physiology, praises Mr. Bell, but she thinks the course is better suited to history majors.

"I don't think it's valuable as a 100-level course," she says. "What I think they should be focusing on in my one history class is a broader view."

Some students like the angle offered by I-Series courses, and take the courses even though they do not have to.

Each semester a handful of engineering students take "Materials of Civilization," says Robert M. Briber, chair of the department of materials science and engineering. He suspects they enroll because they want to learn more about unusual uses of materials.

For instance, Mr. Briber assigns his students to take home a paper clip made of a nickel-titanium alloy. After bending the paper clip, they blast it with a hair dryer. The heat returns the clip to its previous shape. The students must then look up the alloy's applications in patent literature and write about how it is used.

"They learn a bunch of science and physics," Mr. Briber says of his class, "but it's not dry Physics 101."

For other faculty members, I-Series courses have led them to rethink how they teach students in their major. In "Design in Practice," Madlen G. Simon, an associate professor of architecture,

teaches the iterative process, called "design thinking," that architects and designers use to solve problems. Her students design a chair and a dormitory, coming up with seven different concepts for each.

"They did it in a rigorous way," she says. The students studied existing models and learned how architects draw. "They failed all over the place."

The process of trying and failing, and coming up with new designs, is what working architects do. But architecture majors don't get there as fast as the freshmen and sophomores in Ms. Simon's I-Series course. They must first plow through gateway courses, including a broad introductory survey, two history courses, physics, and calculus.

By the time architecture majors have the opportunity to design, they are juniors, and much of their ardor for the discipline has ebbed. Ms. Simon thinks that approach is one cause of attrition from the program.

"I've realized from teaching this course," she says, "that bringing the students right inside and letting them experience what it's all about works much better."

Real Relationships

Initial evidence suggests that the I-Series courses have been well received.

Of the 700 students who took these courses last spring, 83 percent said the courses helped them to think about relevant, complex problems and to understand the political, social, economic, and ethical aspects of them.

"Students who've taken pilot versions of I-Series courses have loved them," says Margaret Austin Smith, a doctoral student in sociology who is doing ethnographic research on the courses. "I've heard nothing but rave reviews."

The chief complaint seems to be that the courses are difficult, she says. Students she has interviewed have also said they want to be able to have a dialogue with their professors but are unsure how to ask questions that can make these conversations happen. "They want mentors," she says. "They want real teaching-and-learning relationships."

It is unclear how well such relationships can truly develop in lecture halls with more than 100 students. Still, contact and engagement with faculty seem to be what interests students most

about the I-Series courses, according to several students in fall courses who were interviewed by *The Chronicle*.

A bad teacher can ruin a good subject, while a good one can make even a boring topic interesting, says Jonathan M. Helinek, a senior majoring in information systems and marketing, who took an I-Series course because the title intrigued him.

"It's definitely different from any other class I've taken," he says of "Why Good Managers Make Bad Decisions," a business course.

In teaching the course, Mark Wellman, a teaching fellow, drew upon strategies he had tried separately in other courses: conducting real-world simulations, shifting every few minutes from lecture to discussion to brief video clips, and assigning a short paper that students submit at the end of each class. In his I-Series course, Mr. Wellman was able to use all of these tools together for the first time.

Such experimentation is a significant part of the I-Series, says Ms. Hamilton, the associate provost.

But the most valuable part of the effort may be something even simpler. Faculty members from different disciplines are explicitly encouraged to try new teaching methods. They can come together and talk about teaching in ways that have never been validated before, she says.

There's a benefit to such conversations taking place within departments, too, John Buchner, an instructor of general microbiology, said during a meeting of faculty. His introductory course had been revised by a team of professors who had taught it before he did.

"The big thing was faculty didn't work alone," he said. "Start a group with your colleagues and come up with ideas together."

Correction (12/17/2012, 12:28 p.m.): Because of a transcription error, a student's comment in Richard Bell's class was rendered incorrectly. When asked about what records might survive from a woman of the American Revolutionary era, the student said "trade receipts," not "train receipts." The article has been updated to reflect this correction.

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Real-time updating is **paused**. (Resume)

blowback 2 days ago

There seems little here that is new. This reads like the empty reforms higher education pretends to put before students and the public while doing nothing to address the decline of academic standards and skills. How do these reforms in general education at this university begin to address the shortcomings put forward by such works as "Academically Adrift." How much reading and writing are students required to do? What content must they master? All this seems more PR than the hard questions that higher education never poses for itself. The fact that professors are paid $5,000 to re-tool their courses(I assume this is only for tenured professors not for adjuncts who often teach most of the general education courses) and the fact the college will pay the department $110 per student seems to put an taint to the entire undertaking here.

General education no longer provide students with a basic body of knowledge in all areas of learning-- not great works of both western and non-western traditions, no basic skills in reading and writing, and no basic understanding of math and science. A student going through these courses will not have a coherent sense of the history of ideas or masterworks. No history of philosophy. No coherent view of world history or literature. No view of essential ideas in science.

Or maybe the entire content of general education courses needs to change. They need to be more skills directed and more career directed or they need to be replaced by internships. I do not see this program at Maryland addressing any of these issues. It is just trying to re-sell what it has been selling

The question that should have been posed is what are the weaknesses students bring with them to college: they are poor readers, they lack reading comprehension when it comes to any matter that is complex or difficult, they lack basic skills in how to take notes, how to listen to a lecture, how to study. Higher education has come to ape the lower grades with its student center learning. The student will determine all. The subject that actually needs to be learned is cast aside for what students like or not like, what they can tolerate, what will not upset them, what will not impose too much time and effort, etc. Well, the problem with this is that in higher education what matters is what you need to master and the student must learn to submit to this not what is or is not interesting. Much of what we all study may not be interesting all the time or it may never be interesting this does not mean you do not have to master it. We merely set students up for failure because as soon as the going gets tough they drop out or go into less demanding courses. Does any one think that these are the attitudes that will get student or higher education to make the progress required. The world gets more complex and students and higher education become more simple minded. I recall a past that seems so long ago in which there was more sink or swim and less hand holding we needed to do for students. It may not have been perfect but I wonder if we have arrived at a point that it is impossible to demand of students difficult and hard work without any games and tricks. And we should not blame the students only but colleges that are only interested in how many students attend not if they learn anything of substance after 4 years or more.

General education courses should be places in which students get to practice what demanding learning requires not merely a class for them to have a fun time. This has always been a flaw in American culture--the weak mindedness that now exists in higher education that wishes to refute all that is too demanding, too complex, too hard. Now higher education must be for those who do not wish to undertake the hard work of learning. And I am afraid to say that this attitude exist not only among too many students but among too many tenured professors and college leaders.

One begins to wonder at what point will students get introduced to college level work. After they graduate from college?

25 people liked this. Like

collegeeducator 1 day ago

Well, that was a depressing view that categorizes all students in a negative light. If you start with these types of stereotype assumptions, it is not surprising to read your conclusions. I have worked at open admission community colleges and selective Research I institutions (currently at a Big 10 institution). I have been at it for more than three decades. It is easy to attribute student behavior to all being AD. Well, some actually are AD, but most get bored with US. The problem is US. Until we accept we are a part of the challenge (maybe the biggest contributor), then progress will never be made. I teach both large, entry level courses and small graduate courses. I enjoy both for many reasons. I continually innovate with my first-year students and conduct research to determine what works and doesn't. I plan to always teach an introductory college course for my career. A simple method I use to get to know students is invite them for a private interview with me.

About half the class take me up on it. I find the experience transformative. There is a cost I suppose in terms of time. But, I think it is worth the investment. Getting to know your students one by one certainly changed my outlook.

5 people liked this. Like

Reythia 1 day ago

I'm an engineer. With respect, NO teacher or teaching method can make linear differential equations interesting to almost any students. It's just a dry subject. And that, plus the difficulty of it and time needed to master the subject, is why most people don't become engineers or mathematicians, not because of any faults with the teachers.

Sorry, but sometimes subjects are hard and boring, and they still need to be learned. That's true in ALL majors. Right now, a lot of students don't want to take boring classes and they don't want to work really hard. That's unfortunate, but dumbing things down won't help.

10 people liked this. Like

sciencegrad 1 day ago

Too true. I welcomed my gen ed courses because they were often a break from my dry technical courses.

Like

Reythia 1 day ago

:) Yeah, I squished in marching band, choir, and German language classes to break things up, when I could. Which, for the record, involved petitioning the dean of the engineering school to take more than 18 credits a semester -- a common petition, as it turned out. But I could only do that since my AP classes got me out of a lot of the mind-numbing freshman-level gen ed classes. The few I was stuck with were AWFUL. "Our Changing Planet", really? It was middle school science class, but without my excellent 7th grade science teacher. *sigh* One takes what one can find to fit in one's schedule, usually.

(And for the record, if there are any of you reading this who organize college class schedules, you might consider NOT offering every single language class 5 days a week for an hour. It's almost impossible to take them if you're a STEM major with lab classes. What's wrong with 3 days a week for 1.5 hours instead? We'd waste less time switching our minds over to the foreign language that way, anyhow! /rant off)

2 people liked this. Like

socratease2 1 day ago

I completely disagree with this dissertation length argument. Innovation in teaching does not equal "fun time," where the hell does that come from? I don't get the nay-sayers on here who continually bash all creative ideas in teaching that might actually improve student learning. Instead, with zero analysis, let alone evidence, all we get from the likes of blowback (good handle for him) are diatribes about "rigor," "toughness," and "not coddling" students. This isn't the Prussian army, this is higher education. Anyway, if you think the "hard work of learning" is accomplished by tuned out students in current lecture classes who sit asleep, surfing facebook, porn or whatever, I would think again. Have you been in a large lecture class recently?

5 people liked this. Like

fortysomethingprof 2 days ago

I wonder what the reaction would be if these kinds of courses replaced the last two years of high school.

5 people liked this. Like

archman 1 day ago

Heh, a "flipped classroom" model *is* high school teaching... But we call it something different to make it sound more innovative.

2 people liked this. Like

jamesrovira 2 days ago

Sorry, but as long as you're talking about "large class sizes" there's going to be little meaningful engagement with students or evaluation of their work, which is where real learning and skills development comes from.

10 people liked this. Like

bnmoore 2 days ago

Weeding out of the unfocused; the real reason why entry courses' requirements are so very hum drum...seems to me.

Like

chrisfreeman 2 days ago

"He also earns high praise from his students for a simple tactic: He stops his lectures every five or 10 minutes to ask them questions, and he listens to their answers."

Earns high praises for actually teaching, instead of being a dispenser of information, shocking!

16 people liked this. Like

fortysomethingprof 1 day ago

"But the most valuable part of the effort may be something even simpler. Faculty members from different disciplines are explicitly encouraged to try new teaching methods. They can come together and talk about teaching in ways that have never been validated before."

I thought the most valuable part was supposed to be what students actually learn. And just how is that being measured?

1 person liked this. Like

rshoenberg 1 day ago

The cynicism of these comments and their rejection of the purposes of general education espoused by thoughtful people exemplifies the problems with the average run of general education programs.
The most important goals of a general education program are to teach students to communicate effectively and think analytically in order to deal with complex problems. Requiring students to distribute their courses across the major domains of intellectual endeavor should help them to understand varying modes of expression and analysis, different ways of seeing the world.
Making the main purpose "mastery" of some body of knowledge that will be forgotten as soon as the final exam is over is not a useful way to use general education.

Judging from their brief descriptions, the I-courses do require students to think analytically and develop problem solving skills in their respective domains of knowledge. How much and what kind of writing they require is not stated, but in at least some cases writing seems to be intrinsic to the course. They certainly do not seem easy courses. I don't see why these commenters assume they are.

The central purposes of general education are epistemological. Courses should focus on the varying modes of expression and analysis and standards of truth in the major domains of knowledge. It seems to me that the I-courses do exactly this. It will be interesting to see if the University of Maryland, College Park, can take these courses to scale, can give all their 10,000 or so underclassmen experiences like those described here. That is the challenge for all large universities and UMCP deserves much credit for its efforts.

[In the interests of transparency, I should note that I served as Dean for Undergraduate Studies at UMCP for 14 years, from 1972-86, and was the first person to serve in that capacity. I wish I had had the imagination, persuasive power, and resources to mount an initiative like this one.]

19 people liked this. Like

fairday 1 day ago

Higher education must stop this continuous tinkering with curriculum in the name of innovation. This idea of making courses "fun" is terrible. It starts in K-12 and is seeping into college. College is meant to be rigorous and we must challenge students to apply themselves, to study and not to give up when they encounter difficult subjects. The tinkering in mathematics education in K-12 has produced a generation of college students 70-80% of whom place into remedial math as freshmen. The same thing is happening in the sciences where the attrition rate in general biology and chemistry courses approach 50%. We cannot continue with these so called innovative experiments that ultimately dump down the curriculum. There is a lot to be said for maintaining tradition in tried and tested methods of teaching and learning. I always here the statement that we need to reach the students where they are. All well and good but students need to be made aware that college learning demands grit, peserverance, and hard work. Faculty must do their part to convey knowledge to students but in the end it truly is swim or sink.

10 people liked this. Like

LynMinn 1 day ago

Alas, the "lot to be said for maintaining tradition in tried and tested methods of teaching and learning" would mostly be said by the approximate half of college students who ever complete a degree, and then we'd have to discount about half of them because their skills don't demonstrate any learning gain over four or five years of tradition in the tried and tested ways.

1 person liked this. Like

bethmason64 1 day ago

I just got hired as an adjunct instructor to teach intro philosophy in a state university. The department chair picked up on my enthusiasm and commented that providing students with an interesting and persuasive introduction to the field might inspire more philosophy majors and minors. I agree. When I took my first philosophy class as an undergraduate, back in the early 80's, my life was forever changed.

That experience has stayed with me all these years and I honestly look very forward to introducing my students to the perspective shift that comes from grappling with some of the big ideas and questions in life. Even if I never teach anything more than intro philosophy, I'm thrilled, because I get to expose undergraduates to a whole new way of looking at and thinking about the world. I get to be the shepherd and I'm both honored and humbled by this opportunity!

4 people liked this. Like

mjkelly 1 day ago

What a refreshing post! I have little doubt your future students will prosper with you as

their teacher.

2 people liked this. Like

Reythia 1 day ago

A lot of these classes sound kind of interesting. As an engineer, I'd have been interested in the materials class. I suspect a history major would have been really engaged by the history class mentioned and business major by the economics one, etc. And probably there would be some cross-over between them, where students who picked one major still have a lot of interest in another. So it's great to have a wide selection of interesting introductory classes open to everyone.

But I wonder. If I was a freshman again in aerospace engineering, I'd probably try to take such a class if it was even tangentially related to my major, since let's face it, it'd be a lot more interesting and relevant-feeling than intro physics and calculus. On the other hand, I'd be deeply irritated if some well-meaning counselor told me I HAD to take even an excellent class in history or art or economics or whatever. Not because the class wouldn't be good, but because I wouldn't have the TIME to take it and still stay on-track with all my engineering classes. That's a major struggle for a lot of us, you know, trying to get all our required classwork done in four years. Like most engineering students, I took 18 credits every semester and STILL could barely cram everything in to graduate in 4 years.

I guess what I'm saying is that I'm happy to see various professors offering interesting and (hopefully) rigorous classes and I'm all for keeping them open to students who want to investigate a particular major or topic. In fact, I think it'd be a great idea to require them as part of a major related to the subject. But I'm completely against school regulations which force students to take classes outside of their major. That's critical in engineering, where the in-major classes are intensive and numerous, but it's important in other majors too, particularly if students are paying for their own schooling. I sincerely hope the U of Maryland is taking this into account, and not just piling more classes on top of students. Unfortunately, most schools do not, so I'll remain a bit cynical on the subject until I hear otherwise.

Like

sciencegrad 1 day ago

ABET allows for plenty of freedom for a university to have a relatively high number of gen ed credits required for graduation. My undergrad department required 21 credits of humanities courses.

I totally understand where you're coming from, but when you say you oppose requirements to take courses outside of one's major, I have to strongly disagree. I'm sure you've seen how terrible many engineers write. In my opinion, the two most important things an engineer could learn from outside courses are writing and thinking conceptually. It's far too easy for an engineer to graduate, even with a high GPA, by just understanding how to grind math. After all, those are the easiest types of exams to grade. Even in my graduate program, I see students who don't have a clue what is going on in any of our classes, but can still ace the exams because when it comes down to it, the exams are basically just testing our ability to do calculus, differential equations, linear algebra, etc.

1 person liked this. Like

Reythia 1 day ago

What was your major, and did you finish in 4 years?

In aerospace engineering, it was a crunch, even at 5 classes a semester. Especially if you tried to fit in "voluntary" computer programming classes or other technical subjects. Not impossible -- I did it -- but frustrating, since being forced to take certain branches of humanities classes meant you couldn't take, say, the geology classes that really interested you. To this day, I don't see the point of taking out-of-major freshman-level classes which didn't interest me and taught me little I didn't come out of high school knowing. The junior-level geology and german classes I squished in were far better -- but I got no humanities credit for them or the computer science classes. Figure that.

Like

sciencegrad 1 day ago

I don't want to state exactly what my majors were, but I have a BS in a "traditional" engineering discipline and a BA in a humanities major. I didn't finish in exactly four years because I had a rocky start to college and dropped out for a couple years. It ended up taking 9 semesters plus 3 summers (with 9 credits each) to finish both degrees. Only 9 or so credits transferred from my freshman institution, so that time frame would be possible for a freshman with very few credit from AP or something.

It definitely required packed semesters. A quick glance at my transcript shows that I took an average of 17 credits per semester. Since this was on top of a part-time job during the academic year (20 hours per week minimum) and full-time work during the summers, I definitely didn't get to enjoy much of the social aspect of college, to say the least.

As for the humanities requirements for my BS, we didn't have to take freshman courses and we weren't limited to specific departments. We were simply told to get 21 credits of approved humanities courses, where the engineering college only approved the courses they deemed to be rigorous enough. So no music appreciation classes, for example.

1 person liked this. Like

johnnugent 1 day ago

I'm puzzled by the critiques that commenters above have leveled at the I-Series program, since they don't seem to be based on the information in the article but rather on misrepresentations of it. Several comments criticize the program as intending to provide students with "fun" rather than rigorous content and effective teaching methods, but that seems at odds with the largely positive reviews of the courses and complaints that students find them too *hard.* This evidence also seems to counter the claim made by commenters that no engaged learning can happen in a large class. Some commenters criticize the program as mere repackaging of existing courses for PR reasons, while others say the problem with these new courses is that they *are* new and that's the problem. It can't be both. One person comments that there's no evidence that these kinds of courses will fix the problems identified in Academically Adrift, but isn't it likely that the "limited learning on college campuses" that Arum and Roksa observed was the *result* of the good old fashioned "basic body of knowledge" courses that the first commenter celebrates? Finally, the critics who have commented here don't seem to acknowledge the value of colleague-to-colleague discussions about teaching that are built into the I-Series program. Good learning doesn't occur without good teaching, and it sounds like this program gives faculty members incentives and structured opportunities to think systematically about what they do in the classroom. Personally, I would have loved to take these kinds of courses as an undergraduate.

10 people liked this. Like

spammy1129 23 hours ago

the problem with education today is that starting from elementary school, we teach kids to memorize and not to think. these new intro courses DO teach kids to think, and i say, bravo.