Campus Activism: Class Registration

As it comes time to choose classes, I find myself with the (good) problem of there being too many classes I want to take and not enough time to take them all. This means I have to find a way to sort through and prioritize what will be most important for me to learn. In doing this, I’ve been thinking a lot about how the classes I take now will benefit what I do later in life in so many different ways; in practical ways as well as providing necessary background for each situation that I may find myself trying to help.

Recently, I had a conversation with a student activist about how he splits his time between work in class and work outside of class, and he said that his activist work outside of the classroom feels more important to him than time in classes. When I was thinking about this later as I was figuring out my own priorities, I wished that I had pushed back by arguing that you are in school to take classes to inform your work later in life. While I believe active work outside of the classroom is so important, I find that, in college, I feel like I know so little and there’s so much more I need to learn. Through this argument, I came to the conclusion that focusing on my classes, and making sure that set of classes is a diverse one, is a form of activism itself. Our jobs as students are to make sure we use this time to inform our later work, and I think that thinking you never know enough about a subject (especially when you’re only an undergraduate) is dangerous. If I enter a space after graduating and try to help improve that space, such as volunteering in another country, but I’ve never learned about the context, culture, and nuances I walk into, especially if I am given a position of power or authority, then it’s very possible I could do more harm than good.

Deciding what is most important for me to learn has meant looking at what I know least about that is still relevant to my life. Race and ethnic studies have recently felt like a increasingly important area to study, and I think that Afro-Am classes should be required in colleges (and high schools). I think that, after high school, I fell into the arrogance of thinking I knew an adequate amount about race. Now I feel like I need to know more and that I can never know enough. I’m now feeling the pressure to make sure that I don’t have the same mistaken arrogance with other topics, because I believe it’s really important not to.
Another piece of advice I can offer when looking at classes (advice I've gotten from my advisors) is to take classes that will teach you the technical skills that you might lack. For me, this is computer science or related math/science-oriented classes, like environmental science. These will be important subjects in the future, and I know nothing about them.

I think the classes you take in college (when you have room for them, I do realize I'm very lucky to have flexibility in my schedule that other majors don't) are a really important part of building the knowledge you will use throughout your whole life. Taking advantage of what's offered instead of taking it for granted is something I really hope I do and is one of my biggest pieces of advice for any incoming students.

Classes I’ve taken that I recommend:

- **Middle Eastern History 1 (History 130) with Anne Broadbridge**
  - She is an amazing teacher, and the class explains so much about the region that not enough Americans learn about (and studying this region is so important in light of our influence/impact/intervention there).

- **World Politics (Polisci 121) with Vincent Ferraro**
  - Probably the best professor I’ve ever had.

- **East African Politics (Polisci 348) with Carlene Edie**
  - Any class in African politics, history, or literature will fill the horrible void created in this country surrounding basic understanding of the countries, people, histories, (anything really) of this part of the world. Professor Edie is a great teacher, but this course has a very specific focus, and if you want a more general introduction, I’d look at the intro African history classes in any of the five colleges.

- **A foreign language, but continue with it past beginners level**
  - I strongly recommend Arabic with Professor Nahla Khalil. She is a great teacher and cares so much about her students.

If anyone reading this has any recommendations, I would love to hear them.

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