

When you decide on a major—whether it's engineering, history, or creative writing—you likely envision yourself in the jobs aptly described by that major: an engineer, a historian, or a writer. In addition, "The jobs we go into aren't nearly as simple as the majors we studied preparing for them," Hanstedt says, while describing an architect. Only a fraction of what an architect does is architecture. The rest of the time, they are managing personnel, dealing with political issues in the community, looking for new business, and many other tasks. Related: Find scholarships for your major

Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, has a general education program called Integrative Studies. The program is well known in the higher education industry: it has been used as a model at another institution and has received multiple grants over the years to redo the curriculum and include experiential education. Regarding students who think general education requirements are pointless, she says this option isn't right for everyone. There are plenty of careers where a pointed program, like an associate degree, might be the perfect foundation for a skilled position. But a truly well-rounded education will help students think for themselves, "deal with unforeseen issues, think critically, and solve problems." These programs, often referred to as "gen eds" or core curriculum classes, are a collection of credits required by all majors for a degree. No matter what your degree (BS, BFA, etc.) and how many credits are required for it, these classes are added on top of your mandatory major courses with the intent to broaden knowledge beyond what's required in your field. But with many students thinking courses unrelated to their majors are completely pointless, we're left to ask, are general education requirements a waste of time? Paul Hanstedt is an English professor at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, where he was also the general education director. He authored *General Education Essentials: A Guide for College Faculty*, and he also boasts the nickname and Twitter handle "Curricular Geek." (Besides, if you start your own freelance writing business with a dearth of skills in math, you may find balancing your budget especially taxing.)

Moreover, recent studies show that many incoming college freshmen are actually not ready for the rigor of college class work, underprepared by their high school courses in core subjects like science and math. Umbaugh emphasized what a general education curriculum enables students to do: gain broad knowledge, learn intellectual and practical skills, understand cultural differences, evaluate ethical consequences, and make connections across academic disciplines. Umbaugh emphasizes the fact that students concentrate so hard on what they'll select as a major that they often overlook the importance of learning general skills like problem solving, communicating effectively, and analyzing information. Hanstedt references a study done by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) in which 91% of employers said they are asking employees to take on more responsibilities and to use a broader set of skills than in the past. Webster University's Dr. Bruce Umbaugh, a philosophy professor at the St. Louis, Missouri, school, led the redesign of the University's general education curriculum into what is now called the Global Citizenship Program. "We think it's really beneficial for students to step outside their comfort zone...look at issues and problems from other perspectives, and to interact with students who see things differently," says Wendy Sherman Heckler, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of University Programs at Otterbein. "Sometimes, students are upset about gen eds because they feel it's not career preparation, but we'd say it's just the opposite, especially in an age when students will change careers multiple times," Sherman Heckler adds. Hanstedt

says the biggest problem with gen eds is not the courses themselves but the fact that the importance of these courses often isn't self-evident to students. For Otterbein graduates as well as those from other colleges, the benefits of a general education curriculum are not necessarily seen while in school but become evident once graduates enter the workforce. There are jobs that didn't exist previously, and these jobs have no set major—for example, someone with a career in social media doesn't have a degree in social media but rather communications, marketing, or journalism. What exactly is general education? he says.