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# Letter: General Education Is 'a Shared Responsibility'

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To the Editor:

Michael Clune ("Degrees of Ignorance," December 11) wants to save general education from the bite of AP credits, reduced requirements, and "faux interdisciplinarity." I agree that pawning general education off onto high schools, unaccredited course providers, and others, or otherwise doing it on the cheap, abrogates our responsibility to educate full participants in civic and work life.

However, the vision of general education that Clune defends is hardly an inspiring one. As far as I can tell, his solution to the various attacks on general education is to double down on disconnected introductory survey courses that he describes as "freedom," but which many students experience as fragmented and irrelevant — which helps to spark precisely the kinds of assaults that Clune is lamenting.

Rather than an incoherent set of courses to get out of the way, general education can be purposefully designed so that students learn to connect progressively higher levels of knowledge and skills across the disciplines, and apply what they know and can do to authentic questions and problems. Students do need to learn basic disciplinary methodologies — enough to say that beyond their majors, they are literate and numerate in ways that help them understand important issues and contribute to addressing them. But if we want students to be able to transfer their learning to a variety of new contexts, faculty and staff must be willing to model that effort.

Clune implies that interdisciplinarity in general education inevitably means a dumbing down of specialized ways of knowing, with faculty haphazardly applying shallowly understood concepts from disciplines beyond their own. But if there is genuine dialogue among faculty who help one another understand the basics of their areas of expertise, then interdisciplinary approaches to general education needn't constitute malpractice.

Done well, cross-disciplinary work results in better mutual understanding of, and more respect for, what we all do in our respective disciplines. Scaffolded across students' time in college, it can also ensure the highest-level outcome for general education — helping students learn to draw on multiple perspectives to solve complex problems. That outcome is a shared responsibility; reinforcing the silos won't accomplish it.

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