

My Second Four Years and Where I'm Headed

While there might be an advantage to cramming all one's education into a few years when one is young, I might actually suggest that people take fewer classes, keep one foot in the working world to develop real world skills to compliment one's official education, and spread their education out. There are at least two reasons for this.

When you are older, you have more resources. Although I enjoyed my first bachelor's degree, I was able to really live the life of a college student with the second. I had a job that allowed me to afford to date, party, and travel like I never could the first time around. Hell, this past weekend I got to combine all three in the last of 101 hikes all over Alabama. I have more pictures of the past six years than of the previous 36.

Second, as one ages one has the time to explore and discover where one's talents and interests lie. One takes classes not for grades but because one wants to learn something. For this reason, and many others, I have long been a proponent of courses from the Teaching Company; one can continue to learn at one's own pace and at less expense than a typical university. After taking time to meditate and pursue divergent paths, one can bring experience and nuance to one's intellectual life and find a path that has heart. Some people find their path before they go to college as a teenager; most people I know are still looking for it. I don't see any sense wasting time and money in pursuit of an education that one won't use, as most individuals are today receiving training in fields they are unlikely to work in.

I am fortunate that there's been a similarity in my training and my profession, even though I didn't realize it at first. My undergraduate degree was an interdisciplinary degree combining all the courses (but not the labs) of psychology and biology degrees; it's in Psychobiology. My graduate degree is in the interdisciplinary field of Cognitive Science; this combines psychology, linguistics, philosophy, neurobiology. I clearly cannot contain myself to a particular field. Hell, in between these events, I found time to co-write two young adult encyclopedias on astronomy and archaeology, become an expert on the discovery of the planet Neptune, and give conference talks on various issues in philosophy.

For a second bachelor's degree, UAB requires at least 30 hours of course work and a minimum 2.0 GPA. Although I can't claim any of the 90 or so Teaching Company courses I've taken, for the past four years at UAB, I have 75 hours and a 3.82 GPA. That's magna cum laude and more than enough hours for a second degree.

What would you call the field that combines multiple courses in sociology, forensics and the legal system, micro and macro-economics, history (Western, Roman, and American), and politics, as well as courses in linguistics, geology, astronomy, Western music, and mass communication? I also learned practical skills, such as how to interview/film/and edit oral histories, to ballroom dance, kayak, and discover that golf was not for me. If you allow me to add my Teaching Company courses, we'd also add many courses in art, literature, and the history of thought (both east and west). To myself, I consider all this to be the application of the scientific method to questions about humans. I want to know what kind of species we are and what our species has done. So I call all this, "integrated social science."

I wish UAB had a degree in it. I think I would have earned it. Instead, it seems I've spent the past two decades trying to invent it. I'm about to fly off to a school to persuade them to let me teach it. If they don't, I'll keep applying till someone does.

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