How Carefully Do Students Choose Their Electives?

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Do students choose electives wisely? Or do they choose them haphazardly, thinking that they are not important? From my own experiences and observations and from talking with various professors, I have come to the conclusion that too many of us are taking this latter attitude.

When we are faced with the problem of choosing electives, what governs our choice? The majority of us do not base our choice upon the proper criteria. Unfortunately, most of us base our choice upon the following:

1. How much work is the course going to involve? Many times we avoid courses because of the work involved and choose so-called "snap courses" for our electives.
2. We like to choose a course that is known to be an "average builder." I think all of us like high grades, so by choosing electives that assure us of high grades we build up our all-college or all-university averages.
3. The hour and day the class is given sometimes influences our choice. Most of us try to avoid early morning and Saturday classes. Consequently some excellent courses are avoided.

Why do we students take such an attitude toward electives? Are we lazy? No, I think not, at least not the majority of us. There are lazy students, but the majority of us usually have something that influences our choice. Extracurricular activities are a big influence upon us. Many times we go to the snap course because our activities are such that we just wouldn't have the time to put into a course that involved more work.

Another influence on our choice of electives is the great emphasis put on high grades. Because of this great emphasis on grades we students schedule electives that will give us this high average.

Student influence is also many times a big factor in our choice of courses. Many electives are chosen from the opinion of a student who has had the course, and most times we never stop to think whether the student has evaluated the course honestly. Thus we stay away from or go into a course entirely on other students' advice.

To summarize, I think the majority of us students are not choosing our electives as carefully as we should. Our criteria for choosing these electives should be changed. Snap courses, easy-graded courses, the hour and day the class is given, and student influence should not be the bases upon which we choose our electives. With these items as our bases, we certainly can not expect to achieve anywhere near our full potentiality.

Electives are becoming more and more important. If they were not, our colleges and universities certainly would not continue to include them in their programs. We students must recognize this importance and start choosing our electives more carefully.

Through electives, at most of our schools, we have all kinds of opportunities to develop ourselves. Electives in the physical sciences, including physics and chemistry certainly increase our potentiality. Not only will the principles learned in these courses be valuable, but we will become much broader in our thinking. Electives from the biological sciences are almost a necessity for agronomists today. Social sciences also are a necessity. With the amount of contacts an agronomist makes today he must be able to meet and get along with people socially. We can certainly prepare for our future social life by scheduling electives in etiquette, marriage, clothing, psychology, and others.

Will we awaken and choose our electives carefully? Yes, if we can be made to realize the importance of these electives to us. This is properly the function of the advisor. Many advisors, however, are not sufficiently close to the individual students or to the courses being offered to advise effectively. They must realize the forces now acting on students in choosing their electives so that they can deal with these, and in addition must know the students and the courses about which they are providing advice. If the advisors will accept this responsibility in advising their students conscientiously then we students will also do our part by accepting our responsibility and choosing our electives carefully.

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