



David Gould hopes to help students use higher education as a means to discover their passions in the new course, Life Design: Building Your Future

Designing a Life

New UI course aims to hone students' passions

Not getting accepted into nursing school may be the best thing that happened to Alexandra Brandt.

Despite the December University of Iowa graduate's longtime goal of becoming a nurse, the rejection ultimately fueled her passion by forcing her to explore further what it was she wanted to do. The Canton, Mich., native switched her major to interdepartmental studies, focusing on global health, and enrolled in a new University course last fall called Life Design: Building Your Future.

"I thought the course would be a good way to understand what route to take," says Brandt, who still intends to pursue nursing but says her global health studies have made her more well-rounded. "It hit home the message that it's okay to not have your degree figured out. There are different roads to take when you are pursuing your passions, and that was an inspiring message I took from class everyday."

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--David Gould

“For many students, the expectation for college is that it’s the path to a degree, which will lead to a better career outcome. But a degree guarantees nothing now. The world is changing so fast that the jobs they wanted going into college may not exist by the time they graduate,” says Gould, who taught two sections of 100 students each last fall and is teaching one section this spring.

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The course, which meets twice a week, is open to students of all majors, from first-year students to seniors. Each week Gould invites special guests to speak and asks students to turn in journal assignments on a variety of topics (“To whom would you dedicate your college education,” for example, or “Talk to your parents about the day you were born and ask them about their hopes and dreams and fears”).

Speakers have included Tony Hsieh, the CEO of Zappos; Amir Hadzic, a Bosnian refugee; local blues musician Kevin Burt; and former Iowa wrestler Mitch Kelly, now a clinical associate professor of educational psychology in the UI College of Education. Books are recommended rather than required, attendance is not taken, and there are no tests; while this casual approach was a bit of a challenge for Brandt, she says she found the motivation to attend each week.

“The class was so interesting, I didn’t want to miss it,” she says.

Gould admits the course is an experiment of sorts, but says he is pleased with the results thus far. Student feedback indicates that the most resonating points have been about the importance of mentors and getting involved in campus activities, learning to differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic passions, and the value of taking risks.

“Mick Jagger was an economics major, and Michael Jordan majored in math,” Gould notes. “What students major in won’t bind them to a certain life. They need to find their signature strengths.”

For more details about Life Design, check out the course web site at www.uiowa.edu/~lifeclass.