

Student opinion: Extra PE credit hurts seniors

Krajicek argues new requirement limits college, career preparation

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For years, graduating seniors at Yutan High School have created their final academic schedule with one thing in mind: what comes next? Whether that includes a college-level math class, a general education credit class such as Southeast Nebraska Career Academy Partnership (SENCAP) courses or several other academic classes to promote their future, senior year is meant to seamlessly transition students into college and adult life. But with a recent change to graduation requirements, many seniors faced a sudden academic burden.

The addition of a second physical education (PE) credit for high school students, mandated by the Nebraska Department of Education, may seem like a good idea at first. Another credit hour of PE promotes healthy habits among the student population while keeping students active. However, for many seniors, this forced them to give up a period of their academic school day that could be used for career-focused classes simply to make room for another PE credit.

This requirement is specifically frustrating for students who are already heavily involved in activities and sports outside of academic hours at school. As a student who has been involved in volleyball, track and competitive dance all throughout high school, physical activity is already an enormous part of my everyday schedule. Between practices, games, rehearsals, competitions and endless training sessions, I spend far more time indulging in physical activity than any weights or PE elective could offer. Yet, even after exceeding average activity standards, I am still forced to give up an academic credit hour to fulfill a PE graduation requirement.

Previously, one PE credit was sufficient and was met by the required freshman-level PE class. However, seniors who have already had their courses planned out for years are now being forced to take another PE credit instead of other electives that would directly benefit them in college or their chosen career field. For example, I plan on majoring in sports marketing and media at a four-year university to further my journalism career. While planning my senior year schedule, I had to pick and choose which extra classes to take because I had to fulfill a new requirement. As a result, a class that would have provided me with hands-on experience in content creation and media production was replaced with a singular PE elective.

For other students looking to fulfill basic college requirements, it takes away an opportunity for real-life college credits that could end up saving them thousands of dollars. Colleges consider the courses that students take while in high school, and career programs like SENCAP provide real-world experience that can lead to future certifications, jobs and plans. Replacing these opportunities with another PE credit does not prepare students for life after graduation but delays the process instead.

Another thing that makes this change to graduation requirements even more frustrating is the lack of flexibility for upperclassmen. Seniors are already balancing college applications, financial forms, jobs and other responsibilities outside of school. Adding a last-minute requirement forces students to rearrange the schedules they've planned their entire high school career around. The school should have thought this out and granted seniors the opportunity to be grandfathered into the old graduation requirements.

Not only does this oversight unfairly affect the upperclassmen, but if the goal of physical education is to encourage an active, healthy lifestyle, then the current policy also fails to recognize the students who are already living that reality. A more reasonable solution would be to allow students to earn PE credits by meeting a required number of verified athletic or training hours through organized sports, competitive dance and other similar activities outside of academic time. This would uphold the importance of physical activity while also acknowledging the discipline, commitment and physical demands many students already have.

When requirements prevent students from taking classes aligned with their futures, does it really serve the best interest in all students? While physical education is very important, enforcing an additional PE credit, especially among students who are already physically active, takes away opportunities from students to prepare them for their future academic and career goals. If education is meant to support students and help them succeed after graduation, then the graduation policies should promote that, not hold them back.