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ISAT 252

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Reflective Narrative

Thinking about what to write has been a little bit difficult for me to put together because this semester in of itself has been different for me. It wasn’t a typical semester because I missed the fall semester to complete my army training, so coming back into the school atmosphere was a bit scary. I was anxious and went through a phase of anxiety because I wasn’t sure whether I could remember how to efficiently manage my time and bring back my study techniques. Not only was I worried about that but, since I missed a semester, I was behind for being on track for graduation, and that led me to take 19 credits for the spring semester. In all of my college career, I’ve never taken more than 16 credits, so I knew this would be a challenge. Above taking 7 classes, I was also an RA, a part of several clubs as well as being committed to serving the national guard one weekend a month. I was still dedicated to making this semester my best one yet, and I was motivated to make sure it happened. The first few weeks were difficult because I couldn’t necessarily get a sense of what my weekly routine would be with everything that I had going on, but once that was fixed, it got better.

I decided to take ISAT 252 because I had heard a lot about how knowing programming as a skill in any career would set you apart from your peers. And of course, I wanted to be the one graduate that knew a little bit of coding. My original plan was to minor in computer science and see where that would take me, so this class was supposed to be the stepping stone of whether this minor was something a truly wanted to pursue or not. I wanted to see if I would enjoy it, and to be completely honest, this class was challenging for me. Not having any background in coding was frustrating because the people in the class at least had an idea of what it was; thus, I knew a little vocabulary, and I was the oddball out every time we met in class. I was discouraged when my group met the first time because they seemed to know a lot more than I did, but fortunately, they were so sweet and was willing to help me in any way they could. My expectation for this class was to try my hardest to at least understand one thing. I wasn’t expecting to learn how to code professionally in a semester, especially with the schedule I had. I knew I wouldn’t be able to spend a lot of time on it because it was supposed to be a trial and error type of class for me. If I was asking myself about what I took out of this class, I would say that I at least know how to start a code using visual studio code. One of the codes we did in class that I actually understood was the fizzbuzz program.

In learning how to do it in class, I spent about 2 hours outside of class trying to figure my own fizzbuzz project to do, and that part was fun. I made sure to follow through everything Morgan’s website told me to do to earn points. I did well with that because I know how to follow instructions. I downloaded R, nodejs, Java, Python, and basically everything I was supposed to download to be successful. I also wrote Hello world, which is all on GitHub. I know that was very simple, but I was excited nonetheless that I was able to do that without struggling as much. I spent a lot of time googling what to do, and it helped a lot. My group was terrific during the first weeks of class, then everyone started getting busier and busier, which made it challenging to meet up, so I struggled by my self to figure things out. Google could only help with so much especially dealing with someone who didn’t know anything about coding.

So the things I actually did was follow the website code4yourlife and followed the instructions on there to write some simple code like hello world. Then I tried to use exercism to get better at writing code. Since exercism had step by step instructions, it helped me understand what I needed to type and run before moving forward. So, I got really excited when running the test turned green because it made me feel like I was doing something right. It was all fun and games till I got to a point and was stuck for like a good week. I couldn’t figure out what I was doing wrong and the instructions telling me what was wrong with the code was very vague. After that, my morale went down because I couldn’t figure it out for the life of me. Since I was following the step by step tutorials, I wasn’t able to save my work because every next page was something different and not a continuation of the previous work. To be honest, when I got stuck and couldn’t figure out what was wrong, I gave up on it because of my frustration and decided to try something else. My goals at that point for the class went down a lot because I was convinced I wasn’t learning anything valuable. The question I always asked myself was, although your goal is to learn how to start writing code, what good is that for anyone if you can’t run the code successfully or write an excellent full code? At that point, it just seemed like my goal wasn’t a good one to accomplish for the rest of the semester. I had to remind myself that this class was an introductory course that was meant to help me acknowledge whether coding was something I would like to do in the near future. Realizing that made me feel a little bit better.

As for my goals over the semester, I believe that although I don’t know as much as I need to, to efficiently write code, I at least know the basics of starting one. Should I need help, Google is always there to save the day. So overall, my goals for the semester was achieved through constant trying to follow along in class as well as follow the instructions on the code4yourlife website. In terms of reflecting back on my failures, I am disappointed that I wasn’t able to really enjoy coding. I really thought I would pick up the excitement in it and actually pursue the computer science minor, but unfortunately, I feel like I have too much going on to commit to that. In determining a computer science minor, I would be adding another semester to my college career, and I’m already a year behind because of ROTC. If I feel like I really want to try again in the near future, I’ll probably take some courses online to get certified.

JMU’s mission statement is to produce “educated and enlightened citizens who led meaningful and productive lives.” In reflecting back on this, I feel more educated in terms of all the classes I took this semester. There was some information I already knew, and I definitely learned a lot more in those classes. I am also enlightened at the fact that I can attend such a prestigious school with caring and compassionate professors who want to see you succeed. It keeps the morale of both students and teachers up when we can encourage and help each other grow. Morgan, you are probably one of the very few professors I’ve encountered in all my twenty years of the living who genuinely cared about the student’s well-being as well as gave them the benefit of the doubt. Knowing that you can trust a professor with information, and he’ll do his best to help, make a student feel safe and try their hardest to succeed in that class. So thank you for making every encounter beautiful.

I believe I’ve earned the grade “A” not based on evidence of me writing code because, honestly, I’ve sucked at it. I’ve earned an “A” because I came into the class with an open heart and mind with the mindset of learning something new. I feel accomplished knowing that I’ve tried my hardest in this class, and I’ll take so much valuable information with me on my next journey.