Reflection 2 Ethan Merrill

Alright, I was too ambitious. Over the past 7 weeks I learned a lot about web design, but even more importantly I discovered how little I really knew about the fundamentals of HTML and CSS. I have always been aware that my personal preference when learning is to aim for the shiny item on the cutting edge and try to minimize time in the fundamentals. I prefer this because in my eyes, the shiny item is what is *useful*. That useful thing might be the latest Javascript framework, a highly complex video editor, or a new CAD Application. These examples are the opposite of calculus, physics 101, or even HTML and CSS. As a result, I throw myself into the deep end, learn by trial and error and sometimes come out the other side having learned that shiny new skill. Ideally, I then learn the fundamentals of the craft slowly, all while producing something that I wanted to create using the shiny new tool. I am well aware that this may not be the most efficient or proper way to learn things. This course forced me back into learning web development the old fashioned way: Fundamentals first.

Learning the fundamentals still was not easy. My search history is littered with "XYZ CSS" and "XYZ HTML" queries, and I spent many frustrating hours attempting to resize an image using responsive techniques. Through these trials and tribulations I have two takeaways: first, I can take anything and make it hard, and two learning fundamentals can pay off.

As I said earlier, I tend to gravitate towards the shiny thing when choosing new things to learn. This can result in learning the hard and or long way. When I finally gave in and started building a website with no framework and hardly any Javascript, I made it more challenging by focusing on making the site responsive. Flexbox checked the shiny-new-thing box for me, and became a smaller, but still very useful tool to learn.

Finally, I am glad that I took a step back and learned the basics. Due to a good dose of arrogance on my part, I was very reluctant to cave in and build a simple, static site. The evolution was as follows:

1. Full Fledged React App, dependent on a server, with a Firebase database
2. A self built Javascript Page router to make a Single Page Application on a static site (technically it would have run without a server!)
   - I learned a lot here, but it was a not reliable. I have a good reference project to build on in the future.
3. A HTML/CSS/JS website with minimal Javascript to manage collapsibles.

This site is far smaller and simpler than what I set out to built, but I feel like I know it inside and out. I even know how I would make it better if I were to do it all again from the ground up. If I was attempting to build on top of thousands of lines of someone else's code (a framework) I would most likely still not have a clue what was making the site work or not work, even after 7 weeks.

Reflection 1 Ethan Merrill

First of all, I am excited to be taking this course as my humanities Practicum because on its face it seems to be the intersection of many things I am interested in and hope to build skills in. I did depth in writing because I value good communication skills highly, and hope wanted to improve my technical writing abilities. The web aspect of this course is also of interest because I've always wanted to be capable of building a website from the ground up for myself and others. This ability aligns well with my long term goal of working entirely

remote (Novel Coronavirus made this a reality in the short term as well!). Working remotely is another reason I am focused on writing for the web. I plan for working on the web to be a big portion of my life.

I'm hopeful that I can use this class to build the personal portfolio I have been envisioning for myself for years now. Although I have big dreams, like many others, I often struggle to realize them and this personal website has been a perfect example of this. In fact, it has gotten to the point where I am not starting new projects because I want to document them on a new site--which I do not have. This project will involve learning to use technology beyond simple markup. However because I am quite comfortable with markup, I would like to push for an additional challenge. The new technologies I plan to use are React which is a Javascript Framework, Firebase to manage the data, and D3 to visualize the site map. I consider myself a self-directed learner and am genuinely looking forward to building a working knowledge of these tools.

Something I am still not comfortable with nor confident in is my grammatical abilities. Although I used to think I was a fairly proficient writer, I had some peer-review experiences while writing my MQP paper which shook my confidence. Just now I put this document through Grammarly. The other writing classes I've taken at WPI (Technical Writing, Writing for business) were more focused on the technical aspect of writing in specific contexts that didn't give me much opportunity to improve my grammar skills. I think that this practicum will be a good opportunity to brush up on my understanding of grammar, and perhaps regain some lost confidence.