Restructuring 207 (placeholder title)

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**ABSTRACT**

In Grinnell College students get introduced to CS through a structured three course multi-paradigm sequence. Seeing the success CS1 and CS2, that use media computation and robots, respectively, to teach functional and imperative programming, have had with enrollment and student satisfaction at the end of the course, it was due time to incorporate a more motivating technology, and not just the Eclipse IDE, into CS3, that teaches object-oriented programming in Java. Recent studies [2] have shown that students are more likely to enroll in courses pertaining to socially relevant issues, which is why we have decided to restructure the course. Out hope is that with the introduction of a relatively fresh technology – mobile application development on Android, and an overarching theme of computing for social good – with the help of the Ushahidi platform, students will learn how to solve complex and relevant problems with computing with an exciting technology that will ultimately enhance their learning experience and convince them to pursue computing more in depth.

**Categories and Subject Descriptors**

K.3.2 [**Computer and Education**]: Computer and Information Science Education Features – *Computer science education, Curriculum*

**General Terms**

Design, Experimentation, Languages

**Keywords**

Computer science education. CS3. Android. Ushahidi platform. Object-oriented programming. Java. Course materials. Lab-based course. Interdisciplinary approaches.

# INTRODUCTION

This paper describes a reconstruction of the last course in a three course multi-paradigm CS introductory sequence taught at Grinnell College. Our goal is to incorporate tangible software development techniques, under an overarching theme of computing for social good, in a course that introduces students to object-oriented programming.

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# CONTEXT

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## Motivating Technologies

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## Multiparadigm Approach

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## Computing for Social Good

Unfortunately, incoming students who have no previous computer science experience are often under the misconception about what a computer science course or major actually entails. Studies have shown that freshmen tend to avoid taking computer science classes because they think they’re boring, tedious, and irrelevant [3, 12]. Not only that, but students, especially females, tend to choose majors that are easily relatable to social good [2], which is something they don’t associate with computer science. This is why educators have recently tried to incorporate the theme of computing for social good in introductory computer science classes. As such they can provide students with meaningful and tangible projects that have an impact on society, and give them an incentive to continue their computer science education.

## Introducing Version Control Systems

Even though version control is essential to software development, very few CS courses actively emphasize and require their use [4]. Another misconception about CS, is that it’s a very solitary field. By introducing students to version control systems early on, we hope to both teaches them good software development practice, and show them how many CS disciplines require a collaborative team effort. By doing so we hope to disprove the aforementioned misconception and promote the idea of teamwork.

## Redesigning CS3

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# MOTIVATING TECHNOLGOIES

In the early stages of our project we decided to incorporate a new technology and theme to our CS3 course, in order to provide students with a tangible technology for which they can program, and a theme that motivates them, and gives them the opportunity to impact relevant issues. This would provide a natural transition from CS1 and CS2, whose workshop style teaching has proven to be very successful. In May 2013 we sent out surveys to students and faculty, to give them a chance to be a part of our decision to restructure the course. More than 80% of the survey takers were most interested in incorporating mobile development with an overarching theme of computing for social good. In order to teach them how “real-world” software development works, we decided to give them a fairly open-ended collaborative final project where they work closely with a client, and apply what they’ve learned about using a version control system throughout the course.

## Android

In the past few years, the revolution of mobile computing has made software development much more accessible. It is our hope that students, having used mobile phones for most of their life, will find programming for the platform stimulating and exciting [10]. Because Android is natively based in Java, and as a mobile framework, very object based, it was a clear choice. The GUI design gives students tangible objects they can work and play around with, which reinforces the aspect of object-oriented programming, the ultimate pedagogy goal of this course.

## Ushahidi Platform

The Ushahidi platform is an open-source software that was released in 2007. Its goal is to collect relevant information about a certain topic through crowdsourcing to visualize the information on an interactive map. It was first used in the Kenya’s 2007 presidential election to collect reports of violence and voter fraud via email and text message, to place them on a map, thus informing and educating the public of corruption that was happening around them. Even though it can be used to gather any kind of information, Ushahidi deployments tend to address pressing social issues. Each Ushahidi deployment provides a large data set of reports. Each report has many different attributes, so it essentially alludes to an object. Because data structures and efficient data processing is a very large part of a computer science education, Ushahidi provides a great collection of motivating data that students can manipulate.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Final Project

Another thing our surveys showed was that professors and students have a desire to work on a project with a client earlier on in the CS curriculum. Working with the department of Service Learning and Engagement, we were able to find a number of interesting projects that students could be able to initiate on campus (wellness/self-care and accessibility), in the town (the Chamber of Commerce, Drake Public Library, the United Way…) and with faculty (Sociology, Prairie Studies, Leisure…). The final project is going to include:

* Students working in a team of 3 or 4 people
* Decide what issues they’re going to tackle and find a client
* Create an Ushahidi deployment pertaining to that issue
* Work with their client to understand what best suits their needs
* Educate the client on how to maintain their deployment

A few example final projects might include reporting on:

* Racial incidents
* Transportation in Grinnell
* Failures of “Self Gov” 1
* Client mapping

## Git

We chose git as our version control and source code management system because of its flexibility, relative ease of you, and speed. We wanted to use an SVN that has all the functionality that we need, yet doesn’t add too much overhead to the already packed course. There are many pedagogical and student benefits to using git [5]. Educators can keep better track of student work via git than via email, they can easily identify potentially bad work habits, and better collaborate with their students. At the same time, students learn to work better in teams [9], they are more motivated to submit assignments on time, and they ultimately build essential skills for their future careers.

# COURSE PLANNING

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# PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

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## Technology Experimentation

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## Introducing Git

Because we wanted students to familiarize themselves with git, and develop a habit of using it regularly, we decided to introduce it in the first week of the course. We wrote several comprehensive readings and accompanying laboratory exercises that thoroughly explain:

* What version control systems are
* How to use GitHub
* Git specifics through examples (via terminal and Egit)

Students will be responsible to fork weekly projects posted on the class’s GitHub account, and submit them by sending a pull request. The instructor will then look at their code, and evaluate it accordingly. When the students are working in teams, they will have to create a joint public repository.

## Establishing an Ushahidi Server

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## Developing an Ushahidi Java API

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## Designing Android Course Material

An important challenge we faced was, how to incorporate a fairly complicated realm of mobile application development for Android, without adding too much overhead to an already dense course. After some failed experimentation with MIT’s AppInventor, and writing wrappers, we decided it was best to provide the students with readings and accompanying laboratory exercises in a weeklong introduction to:

* The Android SDK
* Creating an Android Project from scratch and what each generated file is used for
* A holistic overview of using XML for the GUI

We immerse them in Android development for a week, where they explore and create apps with our guidance. By the end of the week students should be familiar with basic Android app development practices, and know how to manipulate both the Java code and the XML code to achieve simple functionality. At the end of the week, we present them with a larger-scale skeleton app, which sets up the structure for their projects in the following weeks.

They start out with a basic “Annoying Kitty” app, where they put an image of a cat on the screen, and a button, that when pressed, produces a meowing noise. The following projects deal with data manipulation like sorting and searching with different data structures to verify their efficiency, and figure out what types of data processing they’re best used for.

## Final Client Project

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## Reorganizing Course Material

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# INTERACTING WITH GITHUB

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# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

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1. Elaborate on what Self-Gov is. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)