CSC3122 Reflective Essay

The Mobile Computer Systems Development module required me to design and implement a mobile app of my choosing. As well as writing code for the actual app, this also involved producing various design documents to facilitate it. Whilst I had experience creating and utilising some of these, specifically in the Web Technologies module I took in semester 1, most of the aspects of the coursework, crucially the coding aspects, were entirely new to me.

During the team project module in year 2, I learned enough about app development to know the most efficient way to build an app for a beginner was by using android studio, building an app in java for an android phone. Other alternatives were considered, but since I didn’t own a mac computer it was impossible to write an iOS app, and the ubiquity of android phones meant that developing for android would give my app the largest user base. Despite being proficient in the use of java, I had never used android studio or written an app before. Therefore, since I’d also need to familiarise myself with the basics of android coding, I decided to keep the actual idea of my app very simple. I decided to design an app based around timing, that featured a countdown timer, stopwatch and alarm clock.

The first set of documents that needed to be created were a moodboard, fontboard and storyboard. I had previously used these in the Web Technologies module, so was familiar with their design. However, due to the more open-ended nature of this project I found these documents, particularly the storyboard, both easier to produce and more useful in informing my choices upon designing the app. Whilst in Web Technology, perhaps due to my own limited grasp of the accompanying framework, the design documents were not returned to upon producing the final product, in this module I relied heavily on the fontboard and storyboard and I feel like the finished app reflects these initial designs much more clearly.

Another component of the first part of the portfolio was a business case. Since the analysis of similar systems was one of my duties in the team project, I was confident that I knew how to successfully produce a business case. Since my app only featured basic functionality that is included as standard on most phones, there were many similar apps that I could analyse which lead to my business case being strong.

By far the weakest aspect of the first part of the portfolio was the user stories and personas. I had never created these before, and I haven’t returned to them since. I think because my app was so simple and the number of similar apps were so numerous, I couldn’t envisage other users using my app over the other more professional alternatives. Therefore, the idea of inventing random people, none of whom had any connection to the app seemed like a pointless endeavour. The user stories were slightly more successful, since they helped me to consider different features the app could have. Not all the features proposed in the user stories have been implemented in the finished app, but it was good to think about features that could be included at this early stage.

The second part of this project involved the actual coding of the app. As previously mentioned, I had no prior experience with android, however I recognised the java syntax and took to coding in android studio quickly. I found android studio an excellent IDE to work in, and the number of available tutorials ensured I never felt lost or struggled during the coding portion of the project. I now consider myself to have a vague knowledge of android studio and would be a lot more confident in including more advanced android features were I to develop more apps in the future.

As mentioned above, this is the first app that I have developed, and as such it’s functionality is very basic. Therefore, if I were to do this project again, with the knowledge of app development this initial attempt has provided me, I would have chosen a more complex app. This would help with the design phase because the storyboards and personas could become more elaborate, and the coding would be longer and show off a greater range of skills. However, the more complex the app became, the smaller the niche for it would become, so a happy medium would need to be found between complexity and appeal.

In conclusion, I enjoyed participating in this module. The android studio skills I have gained by producing this app are a solid foundation and can be built upon to develop more advanced apps. I am now much more confident in the use of android studio and the skills needed to develop apps in general. Furthermore, I can now appreciate the value of using moodboards, fontboards and storyboards in the development process, and the effect they can have on the finished product.