I started coding Python around 4 years ago. After spending many hours coding personal projects and making small games using Pygame, it was becoming clear that there was a lot I did not know. I had reached the point where I wanted to add save states to my games, allowing a player to pick up the game where they left off. My woefully inadequate solution was to create a text file locally and paste the save data to it. But what was stopping the user from editing the file? I knew I could forget publishing a game with such a shoddy mechanic. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was around this time I decided to take the step of enrolling at Algonquin College to study computer programming.

Pygame went to the backburner as I delved into introductory courses. Coding in college was SQL queries, UML diagrams, HTML; these were foreign to me, and at first it wasn’t clear why I needed them. College was nothing like the narrow slice of Python I had learned making games. But I pressed on and slowly a different picture came into focus. I learned that nearly every business (and game) runs on a database. I learned that what I had taught myself could loosely fall under the umbrella of “back end”, but that that was merely one facet of a complete tech stack. I learned that nearly every programmer must work with JavaScript at some point in time, and there’s nothing wrong with learning front end code.

Eventually the day came when I submitted the last assignment. I called my mom. I called my aunt. It was a joyous day.

College introduced me to a wide swath of different topics. Frankly, more than I wanted to learn. In hindsight I understand that the world of programming is far bigger than I thought it was, and starting out it is difficult to wrap your head around the big picture. (Personally, I like to delve deeply into one or two topics.) If you’d asked me four years ago, a program that brought students from beginning to advanced in Python may have been what wanted. What I needed though, was to expand my horizons. I didn’t know what I didn’t know. And I am thankful to college for teaching me what I did not know.

It was a narrow slice of the coding that first introduced me to the programming world, and college that helped me understand my place in that world. Now that I have graduated, I am excited to continue my journey. It is my hope that I will soon turn this hobby into a lifelong career. They say coding requires continuous learning, and I look forward to that opportunity.

-Nicholas Zettel