

Interview with Znala Williams

Upon the preparation for a youth conference led by Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma, in which I would be sharing a game I developed, I met with the other presenters on a zoom call. One of the presenters, Znala Williams, would be talking about coding and its applications. Znala Williams is a young, black, woman, studying at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Our interview occurred over email on December 2nd, 2020. The purpose of this interview is to provide background information on coding, its application, and its importance before exploring a more centered analysis of a coding application.

Transcript

Najorae: What are some common applications of coding and what have you used coding for?

Znala: One of my favorite things about coding is that there are many applications for it. You can find relevant uses for programming in almost every field you can think of. I use coding for research. I am a Molecular, Cell, and Developmental Biology major and my life goal is to do research on gene regulation and transcription. Though we do a lot of hands on (a.k.a. "wet lab") work in my preferred field, the best way to process the data we create is by using computer programs. I currently work in a lab that does research on cell growth, and the program we are using calculates which stage in development the cell is in using its size.

Najorae: What jobs can people have and have you had that involves the use of code?

Znala: As coding is a skill that is difficult to master, there are many people looking to hire people to code. You can be in business for yourself, meaning you take on projects for companies and sell your code to them individually. In addition, you can work for a company like Google or Nintendo and have a consistent job. In my field, you can work in bioinformatics and get paid to process data using your own programs or programs found on the internet.

Najorae: What programming languages and/or platforms have you used to code?

Znala: In highschool, I used the coding language C# to create games and interactive modules. Now, I use Python3 because it is better suited for data analysis.

Najorae: What are some important tips or things to keep in mind when coding?

Znala: IT WILL BE DIFFICULT. And that's okay! If your code isn't working, take a break and try again. It's not something you can bulldoze through. If you're making your own program, then

don't assume that there is one way it should look. There are many ways to code for the same outcome. All that matters is that it works. Test your code for every possible situation to avoid glitches.

Najorae: Where are some places people can go/resources people can use to learn how to code?

Znala: Code academy is great for beginners. Also, if you're working on a project and having trouble, Youtube and Google have plenty of solutions. There is a high chance that someone else has encountered the same problem.

Najorae: What is the most fun or compelling thing to you about coding?

Znala: To me, coding is like making art. There is no "correct" way to code, as long as your code works. You can be as creative as you'd like. Also, once you understand the language, there are no bounds to what you can create and accomplish. You can learn as many languages as you'd like. Just make sure that you are learning the language which is relevant for the goal you wish to accomplish.

Najorae: Why is learning to code or about coding important?

Znala: I think it's really important for people to understand how to code, especially as the world relies more and more on technical innovations. I think it's especially necessary for people of color, especially black people, to learn how to code because it gives you access to endless career opportunities. We are also seeing lots of code that isn't inclusive towards people of color and black folx. This is why we need more coders of color, so that we can be properly represented in technology.

Overall I am happy with the outcome of the interview! The answers were very articulate and insightful. It went well, although I'd wish to have connected with her sooner. I overall enjoyed hearing her input on the questions and it was very helpful for me as I learn code and as I share about my process.