Riley Volk

Dr. Morgan Benton

ISAT 252

May 5th, 2020

Semester Narrative

Coming into the class I was very excited to take this course. I wasn’t sure what exactly to expect as I hadn’t heard much on the class, but I knew many people that loved Dr. Morgan and liked how he taught. After the first day of classes I was thoroughly happy with my decision to take the course and was even more excited to continue diving into the world of computer science from a new perspective, the ISAT perspective! Leaving the computer science major was not a hard decision as I knew it wasn’t for me, however I did *really* enjoy learning coding and writing programs. I know myself and sitting at a desk all day writing code was not going to make me the happiest I could be. Still, I saw and still see coding as a vital part of today’s world and the future world. Some goals I put forward for myself in order to challenge myself were to learn a new language efficiently, as I already knew Java well and could recall how to write some code and some of the things and ideas I learned from previous coding experiences. Another goal I set for myself was practice coding at least twice a week. These two goals were what I went into the semester with.

During the first few weeks I was exceeding excellently in my goals. I was spending hours (maybe five to seven hours) a week learning about new coding languages or practicing what I was teaching myself. I first learned Python as that was the recommended language to learn from my computer science major friends. Python proved to be a very simple language when compared to what I already knew (Java) and thus within an hour and half I was as proficient at Python as I was with Java. This was really due to a tutorial I watched that converted the Java language into Python in a very simple way and manor. It was a lot easier to learn another language once you already knew one. The tutorial I watched was this one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLovcfIugy8>. It was very easy to follow along and do with the video. I actually made a program, written in Python, to try and teach others how to code. That will be in my GitHub Repository if I can find the program. I used the program to attempt to teach others in the class, and specifically my group, about the basics of coding such as “For Loops” and “If-commands”. But of course, as any one with programing experience knows all too well, Google is a man’s best friend when it comes to learning. I Google searched so much and I really wish I could say I saved those links or videos I watched but that is not the case, I did not think I was going to need to save them and if I ever had the problem again I could just simply reread the post or watch the video again.

Coding at least twice a week was not as challenging as I thought it would be, so I decided to up it to three and see where that put me. It actually ended up putting me in a quite swell place as I revisited an old website I had used when taking Computer Science 149 (CS149). CodingBat.com was and is an awesome tool for practice and there are so many tutorials on YouTube and Google that when you get stuck it is very easy to solve the problem. Not only did coding bat have their questions done in Java so I could relearn my old skills, but it also had Python so I could begin to develop my new skills further.

After learning (and relearning) Python and Java, I thought it was a good idea to take a suggestion Dr. Morgan kept iterating in class. Keeping my goal in mind to learn at least one programing language other than Java, I decided that learning two might not be the worst idea I’ve ever had. JavaScript was next in line on the programming languages and man did I underestimate the complexity of this one. This is when I took a full on nosedive into unknown territory, at least to me, and it did not turn out too great. I first attempted to write a FizzBuzz program in JavaScript but was unable to get it to compile. After reading an article (I believe this one <https://codeburst.io/javascript-breaking-down-the-shortest-possible-fizzbuzz-answer-94a0ad9d128a>) I decided that I was probably a bit over my head. It was around this time as well that ISAT 152 began to ramp up its workload and I began to fall off my coding horse.

Up until this point I was feeling very successful and manageable. I was learning and I wasn’t too concerned where the course was going. However, with ISAT 152 getting increasingly tougher, I decided to spend more time focusing on that rather than coding. Additionally, this was when I started to seriously consider leaving Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC). These two issues took over the forefront of my mind and I began to let coding slip into my afterthoughts. I routinely failed to achieve my weekly goal of coding three times a week and changed it back to two, and then one as I continued to fall behind not only in my own learning but also in class. I hadn’t fully understood what we were doing in ISAT 252 for some time and assumed that with my previous coding experience I would be able to catch up no problem. This did not prove to be the case however, and I quickly became lost in class as well. I saw what we were doing and why it was important to learn (test driven coding is undoubtably superior and there are reasons as to why its taught) but I did not understand how Python’s or JavaScript’s testing worked and I didn’t put in the time to understand what was going on. I made little to no effort in looking up tutorials, I simply shut off and tried to push through. Looking back, I am not sure why I didn’t simply look up a solution to my problem(s), there’s definitely tutorials out there and posts to read. It simply didn’t cross my clouded and overwhelmed mind.

I am not one to sit in sulk or complain about my situation and make excuses as to why I didn’t do the work expected of me and expected of myself. I see failure as a great teacher, albeit rather harsh at times but nevertheless a great teacher. What failing my goals has taught me a few things: One, I do have the time, I just need to prioritize it and be disciplined. Two, take a step back and look at the problem, analyze, and execute a plan. Lastly, coding professionally isn’t for me. The first lesson is something I’ve slowly started to realize over the past year or so. I do have time, I have about 24 hours a day in fact, how I choose to spend that time is up to me but how I use it affects not only my life but those around me and those who depend on me. Once I lost my way in class, those who came to me for help were soon lost too and that had a lot to do with me. The second lesson is a lesson I have been reading about recently in a book called “Extreme Ownership” by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin. Detaching myself from my emotions, from the cloudy mind, and taking a good hard look at my situation, I could have easily seen the way out, but I was too caught up in the moment and blinded myself to the path out. The last lesson I one that I thought I already knew but not with any certainty until now. I know now that programming professionally isn’t for me for a few reasons. For starters, I do not do well sitting at desks for long periods of time. This is a vital skill to have and to be able to stare a screen for a long time may be a skill that nearly every young adult seems to possess nowadays it’s the act of working as I sit and staring at the same page for hours might drive me insane. I am an active person, I love to be outside and running around doing things. Another reason professional programming isn’t for me is that I simply do not have the mind for it. There are people in this world that have a mind geared to think in the way programming works. People good at math think differently than others, that is why they’re mathematicians. That is why they’re computer scientist and I am not. My mind does not think or work like a programmer, I do not put it above me or anyone else to learn to become proficient at programming but I do think that we are hindered, in comparison to those whose minds think like computers, in our ability to become experts. To me, it’s a lot like professional athletes. They are more than likely to be genetically superior than any other athletes, that is why they’re the best. Not to say they didn’t work hard to get there because they certainly did, but that they do in fact have an advantage. An unfair one some might say but I think of it as a gift they have that I do not need as I have other gifts they do not have or need.

This semester has been a strange and unstable time. COVID-19 certainly did not help and made this semester even stranger and (at least for me) much more challenging. All my grades have suffered tremendously, especially ISAT 152 as I find it quite challenging to teach myself physics. I learn best with hands on experience, asking questions and visually seeing how things come together. Quarantine has also not been nice to my extravert side, forcing me to find new ways to gather energy and motivate myself to do work. As for my final grade for this class I am perplexed as to what side I should take. Give myself an “A” because I can, or should I take the grade I think I deserve for my lack of effort in the end. I would like to take this time to apply the second lesson I learned from this past semester. Taking a step back, I can see how much time I wasted or didn’t use properly, I can see how lazy I was and how disheartening as a professor that must be. I believe this is the greatest lesson I must learn from this semester, to take ownership of my actions (more like lack thereof) and give myself a C+ to B- as my grade. An overall goal I had for the semester was to get a 3.5 Semester GPA, but I did not put in the work to deserve that reward. I believe that a C+ is the grade I deserve because of my lack of effort in the final weeks of the class, especially after the COVID-19 outbreak and quarantine. I have been a “lazy fool” as some would say, but in being a lazy fool I have found the first baby steps on the path to putting the burden of responsibility on my shoulders, but I still must atone for my actions.