ISAT 252 Reflection

Coming into this class, I had a very muddled and negative view of programming. I had been thrown into it in ISAT 215, without any background, and programming has terrified me since. My mind is very good at learning physical math’s and sciences, like physics and calculus, but coding really challenged me. I know people just say coding is like any another math, but it was not presented to me in that way and was hard for me to grasp. Therefore, my goals for this class were to find a way for me to learn code, in a way that worked for me, and break down the negative stigma. I was not fully set on becoming a master, I just wanted to understand what was happening, and how it was happening, when I did something. When we were introduced to GitHub, I was incredibly confused, and another goal became to understand that website. This proved harder than I thought, as for a while I felt like I was just memorizing commands and blindly following along in class. Eventually I came around and started to understand the very basics, which was a huge win for me.

Before spring break, I tried to stay on track of Code 4 Your Life, and follow the tasks set out there. Once we went into quarantine, it got a lot harder. You allowed us to go our own paths and find things that interested and worked for us. At the time I was still very lost in programming and did not even know where to start. But I decided to redo Hello World programs and repeat them until I could do them and understand each step. I reviewed the fizzbuzz work we did in class and tried to piece together what everything meant, how the code worked, etc. I got Exercism, like you suggested, and worked through some of the beginner projects in Python. I also worked on my GitHub skills, as it took me a long time to get a hang of. I felt quite slow in everything, as I knew most people do not get stuck on GitHub for weeks. But I did. Eventually I came to understand it and how to make repositories and move work onto them. Overall, I estimate I spent around two hours outside of class each work, even to come to these very basic understandings.

As the semester switched to online, I knew I was going to have trouble dedicating time to coding. It’s still something I have to work to understand, and doing it what felt like completely on my own was not appealing. I honestly had trouble staying motivated for any class. Therefore, I kept my goals small and attainable, just wanting to get a basic grasp of coding. I did succeed in building a foundation, as I think I have a general understanding on how to do very basic code. The small repositories I have on GitHub show the bit of code I was able to produce, which I really tried to write without looking up hints. In those ways I feel successful, but I feel that I failed in finding a good way to learn code. Maybe because I was doing it on my own, but learning online is very hard for me. I want to be engaged and truly taught. Reading directions off the screen, which Exercism did, made it hard. I wish I could have figured out a way, because I really do want to be able to code proficiently. I think it is a very valuable skill in today’s age, and at the very least, it is important to understand what your computer is doing. I think I learned that I need to be more proactive in my learning, and I should have asked you for help right from the beginning. I know we started very slow, but I felt that once we had been in class for a month or so, it was too late to tell you I was incredibly lost and confused. I was embarrassed that I was having such a hard time, and that I waited to long. I thought you would judge me or be disappointed, but I know I am very wrong there. You are probably the least judgmental professor in ISAT. I feel that if I had met with you and worked through very basic things, I would have such a better understanding. Instead I felt more and more left behind in class as we moved forward. I know I made a huge mistake there, but now I have learned that if I am really not understanding the material, I need to go the professor immediately.

As for JMU’s Mission Statement, I wish I could say yes. Its not necessarily 252 alone, but between everything that has happened in the past two months, I feel very lost. As I mentioned earlier, I learn best in a hands-on environment, but that was not possible because of the circumstances. I think my education suffered because of it. I’m not ever talking about grades - I lost a joy in learning and desire for more. I thrive in communities and interaction and was deprived of that. I know it is nobody’s fault (unless you’re a conspiracy theorist), and what we’re doing is for a greater cause, but I do not know where to direct my energy and emotions. In normal circumstances, I would find joy in doing things like mountain biking, rock climbing, hiking, and just straight up socializing. While I still try to mountain bike on my own, it’s not the same without a community. I can only sit around and read, watch Netflix, draw, or stare out the window for so long. I want to move and see the world with people. But staying inside has really made me lose the fire for life. Being deprived of the things that I love makes me realize how important they are in my life. And while all the things that I do are important to me, nothing means more to me than the relationships I have with people. What quarantine has really taught me is that I find true happiness in communities, and I think that is a great thing to be in love with.

Ultimately, I think I deserve a low B in the class. I succeeded in some of my goals, like coming to a basic understanding of programming, knowing how to work GitHub, a terminal, and so on. I also do not have a negative connotation with programming. But I did not find a sufficient way of learning code. Most of all, I did not come to you when I needed help. I think I really failed there, as it was all on my own doing. I hope to learn more in the future, as this is not the last I want of programming.