Ben Johnson
Artificial Life

Artificial Life Reflection

Grade: A

For this class, I self-assigned myself an A. However, I could see an argument for an A- since I was late to class a decent amount of times. *But*, I feel like I always contributed to class in a positive way and tried to continue an argument or concept explanation.

Towards the beginning of the term, our focus was more on the biological, which I was not too comfortable with. So I tried to do a little bit of research on evolutionary biology and even some ways it relates to programming and how to code artificial life. That was where I tried to complete the in-class projects as seen in my 3_30_Project.cpp in my Evolution as an Algorithm folder. I think it was a great starting point. Once I got the hang of it, I really started running with it. It was also nice that the class coincided with my job application process because I started using LeetCode about halfway through the term and could understand the evolutionary algorithms better.

After the biological focus, we started getting more into the theoretical and asked what artificial life can do, what it can simulate. It often dealt with running programs like MABE to see what factors drove evolution. I felt like I was attentive to class and the discussion. It was sometimes a little challenging, just because discussing code can often be confusing when you haven't written it personally. I think these paper discussions are where I really felt a sense of understanding. I had two paper discussions where after every paragraph, I would do a quick summary of it to help other students and myself keep track of the complex readings. I think this helped to facilitate better paper discussions. I had a firm grasp on the material. That's why I submitted my perusal engagement and paper discussions for the "Diversity Paradox", "Large Image Datasets", and "Stochastic Parrots" articles!

Finally, I think that my hackathon and final project were really helpful in solidifying my grading in the course. For the hackathon, I made a really concerted effort to get a deep understanding of the code, which made adding on to it much easier. I think my program turned out well, I was able to get it to run and generate some positive data! For my final exam, I chose to focus on implementing new functions in MABE2. This was a pretty straight-forward project, but I still think that I completed it very diligently and attached it under the Evolution as an Algorithm folder.

I will say, I did really love this course. It was a great mix of coding, theoretical, and ethical questions. I like that now, we're able to have more of a discussion on whether *modern* practices are safe and/or beneficial to the general public or marginalized communities. I think that as "software engineers" (I say in quotes because I have all of 3 summer internships to put that label on myself) don't really stop and ask if we *should* but only if we *could* (along with if it

is profitable but I could also go on my anti-capitalism rant for a while, perhaps another reflection). I really did enjoy this course. I think it was a great way to end my time at Lawrence, and I'm happy that the computer science department has such a great new faculty member to turn the department into a factory of Google CEO's (not really, but that'd be cool in a *could* instead of *should* way).

And just like that…I'm done with college.

(that was a S** and the City reference <3, idk about you but I'm very samantha)