Tyler Raniszewski

Reflection/Narrative

My expectations coming into ISAT 252 were simple, I expected to spend a lot of time in front of my computer with a command prompt pulled up. I expected to sit there frustrated at my computer for hours on end not understanding what the heck was going on for 90% of the time but somehow managing to find my way through. I didn’t expect just how good I’d become at troubleshooting when I was doing my programming, but you learn pretty quickly after failing a bunch how to troubleshoot your problems significantly more efficiently. Overall though, I did not expect to be doing what I’d say was over half of my learning in this course from my dining room table back home in Pennsylvania. I think being thrown for a loop made me put my schoolwork on temporary backburner that made me inevitably work harder when classes started to wind down.

A learning objective that was important for me to lay down before I entered this class was that even if I didn’t enjoy the material, I would go into it with an open mind because if I didn’t it would have made the entire class a miserable experience. It was important for me to remind myself of that because I’ve had experiences with what I’d call a prelude to a true programming class in high school; I absolutely hated my programming class in high school because I don’t think I understood a single thing that we talked about the whole year, so a bad first go at it left a bad taste in my mouth. I also set a learning goal for myself that I would get an A in this class through determination and perseverance. I’ve struggled to stay determined in college, but this semester specifically lit a fire under me to kill it in all of my classes and I’m happy to report that I’m doing just that. Beyond personal things, my learning objectives specifically for programming were just to give it my all and try to understand what I simply could not in my first exposure. I think this semester, having to do something on my own, I think it was very beneficial in a lot of ways because it made me focus in order to be able to produce something at the end.

What I actually did outside of our classwork, the weeks on fizzbuzz and all of that stuff was some research into the rust language; which I looked into before realizing that it was built for experienced programmers, a title which I simply did not possess. I got back into python, dug deeper than what that simple euler problem had exposed me to. Over the weeks, I’ve followed a tutorial on YouTube by *Programming With Mosh* who essentially teaches people how to code through virtual demonstration and follow-along, and then between exercises has challenge sections were the student is supposed to regurgitate previously learned information in order to self-check and see if they have grasped the concept well. He then goes over the answers to the challenges and you get to see where the code he’s written is different from what you as a student has, and it’s a good opportunity to see how a professional does it. It’s almost like the way I’d imagine myself learning another language, it’s really important to be detail oriented to grasp the full understanding of the language. After I followed a decent chunk of the tutorial, I took it upon myself to follow a more complex tutorial manually building a website through the use of a combination of Visual Studio Code, PyCharm, and Django. PyCharm is very much like Visual Studio Code in terms of functionality, it is just what was used for the tutorials and so I used both interchangeably. I got to understand the fundamentals of web-design and used third party websites like “GetBootStrap” to help me find what I needed. I also would say I was a frequent visitor of Stack Overflow this semester, it has been a very useful tool and almost sort of a crutch to help guide me through this unknown territory I was exploring. I’d say I probably spent a good 5 hours a week programming before spring break, and since we’ve been in quarantine, I’d say I’ve spent a total of 40 hours watching tutorials, doing exercises, and testing myself through challenges.

Overall I think my goals remained pretty much unphased minus the goal that at the end of this semester I wanted to build a website (this doesn’t mean on my own or have it be pretty) but be able to build a website while understanding what I was doing and why I was doing it. I came up with this goal right after we started our journey together online, I think being on my own and the idea of having to do the work myself made me excited to try and see what I could do. The goal of keeping an open mind has remained constant throughout too, because to be perfectly honest I thought I was really give up after the quarantine took effect, I just didn’t enjoy coding in any way shape or form, but I’ve pushed through and so my goals have really just become to get through and push myself to see it through to the end.

One thing I think that indicates my personal success is my ability to build a game. This game doesn’t have animation, it’s just a simple command prompt script that has one menu for help, other than that it’s just an execution of commands. The reason I dictate that as a success, well, I dictate it a success because I didn’t think I was capable of programming anything that made sense in any way shape or form, and the game was the first time I had done something that I had actually felt was more than just a and b, I had to do some thinking to get through it. I had to trouble shoot and use the tutorials I had been watching to help myself complete it. I also feel like my pure amount of time would point to my successes, the will to get through and remained determined even though times are tough and the course-load isn’t something I necessarily enjoy.

Just because I do feel satisfied with what I was able to achieve and the things I have done successfully, I think there were shortcomings, as is natural with a project like this. I feel as though I failed to see the point of doing these exercises sometimes more than anything. To elaborate, I feel like sometimes I’d get bogged down in a situation I couldn’t understand or figure out for a few minutes, or hours, and hate my life because I would get so frustrated I’d want to quit and stop coding, potentially never look at a command prompt again! I think sometimes I failed to follow through to a truly full extent of my very first goal, I know that there were times I at least felt like I needed to try and do better in fulfilling it. I think this tendency to stray from what I’d call an original homeostasis with the class definitely was something I could’ve prevented. I think I learned that even though I may not enjoy the topic, learning in of itself is what I like more than anything; It feels significantly better to sit there for hours and get through a problem than it does to sit there, whine like a child, and give up because you don’t feel like putting in the work to get through. I honestly feel like this class has helped me with my discipline in school and other aspects of life.

To be honest, I do feel more educated. I feel more educated because even though I feel like there was still places I was fuzzy on, and there were times where I hated what I was doing, I still pushed myself to be willing to learn enough so I could at least succeed. I also feel like education is more than what the individual experiences in terms of character growth, and I feel like as a person I’ve definitely grown for a multitude of reasons this semester. I don’t think this time period of quarantine and uncertainty has been easy for anybody on this Earth, but I just think being able to be optimistic and finding a reason to continue to this semester with the same drive I had when I went into it is a trait I have definitely seen genuine growth in. It’s not to say that I’m not a determined person, but I know that I have a pretty laissez faire mood towards a lot of things in life, just because I don’t see the point of being serious all the time; so being able to make myself buckle down and focus on this, just all school work in light of all that’s been happening, it makes me realize how much I value my education, and thus I feel more educated because I feel that I’ve extracted more from this semester because of the adversity we’ve faced.

I one-hundred and fifty five percent say that I dislike coding, it’s something that I don’t like due to its stagnant nature. I am a very hands-on person, and while coding is hands-on in the sense of building in what is essentially an infinite online world, I feel like the physicality of a hands-on project is lost. To give a better perspective, I am building my family a ladder garden bed on our fence in the next week to grow herbs. I am physically getting the wood, cutting it, sanding it, putting it together, and adding the soil and other necessities to produce a fruitful harvest later in the year. The being outside aspect, the element of doing this project in nature, I really enjoy that, I think it just makes me a more genuinely happy person because I thrive in the outdoor setting.

I would like an “A” in this class, but I am going to keep this explanation simple. I genuinely just gave a lot of effort to produce something that I felt was worthwhile. I know that the resulting website wasn’t a website that is user ready, but I genuinely feel like the time I’ve put in has helped me to understand that coding is a very useful resource in this world, and something that could be genuinely beneficial to me in the future if I were able to pick it up as a side-skill. Just because I dislike it in no way means that I can’t learn to, right? The “A” just comes from the fact that I actually had to push myself in this class to see it through to the end.

* What were your expectations coming into this class?
* What learning goals did you set for yourself?
* What did you actually do? List the tutorials and websites you used/visited. Estimate the amount of time you spent outside of class.
* How did your goals evolve over the course of the semester?
* In what ways did you feel you were successful?  Please refer to specific, concrete artifacts that would serve as evidence of your successes.
* In what areas do you feel you failed to achieve your goals?
* Please reflect on what you think you've learned from your failures, and what, if any, plans you have to address those issues in the future.
* JMU's Mission Statement is to produce "educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives."  Do you feel more educated?  More enlightened?  Less so?
* How have your activities this semester contributed or detracted from your knowing yourself better and having a better grasp on what you want to do in the near or distant future?
* What grade would you like for me to report to the registrar for you, and why?