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ISAT 252 Reflection

There is a very long backstory as to why I decided to enroll in ISAT 252. I came into JMU as a Computer Science major. Even before I came into college, I was super hesitant on deciding on Computer Science. Basically, my whole family had been telling me how Computer Science was and still is growing constantly and that I could get a good paying job after I graduate. Sounded all good to me, so during my senior year of high school I took any class that was supposed to help me with Computer Science. I took Calculus, Statistics, along with a computer class on design and web technologies. Come freshman year at JMU, I started off with CS101. I came in with no experience whatsoever and practically the whole class is filled with people who have some experience to a whole lot of experience and background knowledge of CS. CS101 was a challenge for me and to be quite honest, I came out of it knowing barely anything because I was so lost. The fact that I came into the major with little interest and a lot of hesitance definitely hindered my ability to actually learn and try to like CS. After that, I had to take CS149, probably one of the hardest classes I will have ever had to take in college. I started off pretty well in the class; we had to do plenty of coding exercises for homework and it really made sense to me for a good amount of time. I genuinely thought that I could take an interest in CS because of how easy I was picking up the basics and finishing the homework in a decent amount of time. Overall, just not struggling a whole lot in the beginning. Then came the downfall. It was midway through the semester and I found myself completely lost. I didn’t understand anything, I was trying to understand what was being taught, and I fell behind…way behind. The easy thing would’ve been to go ask for help, but at that time I had fallen so far behind that I would’ve basically had to tell my professor that I didn’t understand anything we’d been learning for weeks. Not a few classes or one class, but multiple weeks. I had such a horrible time with that class that it really caused me major anxiety, so I withdrew from the class and switched my major. Now here I am, majoring in SMAD with a concentration in Interactive Design and applying to be a Computer Information Systems minor.

The whole point of this backstory is that I’m still trying to give anything involving computers a shot; more than that, my major still involves computers just adding design into it. My minor consists of knowing about computers as well. The whole reason I decided to enroll in ISAT 252 was to get another chance to grow an interest in computers. I’m going to have to do coding in my major at some point and it was important for me to go into this class with an open mind. I wanted to leave my horrible experience in the CS major behind and focus on getting a new perspective, with a new professor, and try to understand or grow even a little interest in programming.

My expectations for this class were simple. It was to learn more about coding and gain a new perspective on it. I’m not going to lie, but even when I told myself to not go in with a negative attitude or any thoughts that would hinder my learning experience, I still had some. It’s hard to try something again after you completely failed in it the first time. However, I did actually have some faith in myself and I really came in with the expectation that I was going to do my best and obviously complete the whole class. Not withdraw from the class weeks before finals. I expected to have troubles because I find that I’m not a natural born programmer who understands everything about coding easily. I expected to hit some bumps in the road, but I would make sure to try to do my best to figure things out on my own. My expectations going into ISAT 252 was to try to like coding or find some little interest in it even though I despised CS149. I wanted to grow a bit more interest and change my opinion of anything related to programming. All I was expecting was to get a different professor’s outlook on coding and learn differently from how I learned while I was in CS. Coming from a little CS background, I was expecting this class to be similar. I was expecting to have a lot of coding exercises and tedious coding homework. Even if that scared me, I would still try my best to gain interest.

As I said before, my only real expectation going into this class was to have an open mind and get a different perspective of programming with a new professor. My learning goal was to not judge or go into something knowing I had a bad experience with CS. I was going to keep up with what was being taught and try to actually understand the basics of coding rather than fly through it just because I had to do it in class. As we started following along with tutorials in class, my goal was to obviously keep up with it and if I got confused or lost, I’d try to figure it out myself. I wouldn’t let myself get way behind like I did in CS. Another goal was to work on practicing outside of class. With four other classes, it’s very easy to get sidetracked and focus on a class more than the rest. Although I found that I was doing the minimum amount of work during class with following along and everything, my goal was to spend some time at least outside of class time on things. Whether it be finishing code that was being shown in class or getting more familiar with things like the command line, navigating the terminal, or VSCode.

What I did for this class was pretty standard. I would follow tutorials that were being done in class and try to keep up with using the terminal on my laptop. I followed along the best I could with all the FizzBuzz tutorials that were shown in class. I tried following every step to navigate from the terminal into VSCode where we would then type out more code. VSCode was very confusing at times if I’m being honest. I did have all the necessary extensions and repositories, but it didn’t always make sense how to navigate around VSCode and what I was or wasn’t supposed to have on it. Along with FizzBuzz in Python, I started it in JavaScript. I downloaded everything I was supposed to; VSCode, Git, Python, and then configured my dev environment. I worked on the badges that were initially assigned to us at the beginning of the semester. Truthfully, there were a lot of times where I was completely sure I wasn’t doing everything right. Whether it be running tests, running failing tests, committing changes to code, or even the basics of the command line. I watched a number of videos explaining the command line because I’m almost positive at some points in time I did not have everything installed into my terminal. If I didn’t understand how to get something done that was presented in class, I just watched a ton of videos on it. I would go on Stack Overflow to search up what I’d been having trouble doing or go on GitHub and watch tutorials explaining fundamentals. While we were still on campus, I would spend on average about an hour and a half on coding after this class. I would work on what was shown in class right after my class ended since I had about a 2-hour gap. This became a pretty consistent routine while we were still on campus.

It was until we all had to transition to online where I honestly got too comfortable and laid back. If I’m being honest with myself, I know that I could’ve done more coding practice. Over the course of being online, I know that there were a handful of websites mentioned that we could use to learn basic coding. I decided that I would put in some time to use one of these sites because it would be beneficial to me and make me more productive while at home. I started using freeCodeCamp a good amount when I could. I learned Python in CS, but I had forgotten it easily after withdrawing so it was good to do basic exercises again. I chose to do JavaScript exercises and even though they were very beginner level exercises, I still enjoyed completing them. The feeling of completing an exercise makes me feel good about myself because it makes me feel like I understand coding even just a little. I noticed that I was able to pick up on some of the basics quite easily such as variables, assigning variables, and strings. Understanding how to write certain code for the exercises and completing it correctly instantly makes me want to practice more which is why I kept doing a lot of the exercises. I would say I spent at least an hour doing these exercises every couple of days. I know that my learning goals really changed into one goal once we started online class. It was really just to be productive as much as I could because being at home for classes is probably one of the worst things ever. Once we started online classes, I completely lost motivation for everything. Getting up and being productive was super hard for all my classes and not just this one. All my goals turned into one goal which was to just be productive as much as I can and do coding exercises. It was to learn from those exercises and again, try to grow more interest.

As I reflect on the whole semester, I think that I was most successful in keeping an open mind. Although I still have doubts whether coding is something I can eventually learn completely, I still kept an open mind to try to learn and get a lot out of the class. I could’ve easily just not done anything in class, not follow any tutorial that was presented in class, or work on some of the code outside of class. I really did find myself working on things when I could or when I was trying to figure something out on my own. There were a lot of times where I got lazy and didn’t keep up, but at some point, I told myself I can’t just not do anything. I don’t think I fell behind as far back as I did in CS which is huge. Even when having doubts on whether programming is for me regardless, I was successful in not completely slacking off. I say that I was successful in not slacking off, and what I mean by that is I didn’t just show up to class. I didn’t just show up, sit there, and do nothing. I actually followed along with what was being shown in class even when I was completely sure I was doing nothing right. At times, I’d be paying attention, trying to follow along, but practically the whole time I was trying to figure out how to correct what wasn’t matching up on my screen compared to what was being shown. Overall, I think I was successful in keeping myself from not fully slacking off as well when I had already started thinking programming probably isn’t for me.

I can definitely say my failure was not spending more time dedicated to this class, mainly outside of class. I paid more attention to my other classes more than this one. I’d go to class and I’d try to keep up and do what was being presented in class, but my lazy side won most of the time after. There were many times where I’d be sitting in my apartment and think “Wow I really should be working on 252 stuff.” I’d push it to the side because I knew that I could go to class and focus on code there. I’m not going to lie and say that I coded every single week and I coded every day during this whole coronavirus situation. I will admit that I got super unmotivated and coding was my very last priority. My attitude of keeping up and not getting behind was kind of a fail towards the end of this semester. I’m still proud of myself that I actually took the time at some point while I’ve been at home to take advantage of one of the coding exercise websites. Other than that, I failed with keeping up the attitude of spending time on this class and getting to a point where I did barely anything. I believe that knowing these failures gives me more reason to think more that I’m probably not meant for programming. Although I’m going into a major that has to do with code, graphic design, and user experience, I am 100% convinced that strictly coding will never be my thing. This makes me a little intimidated too because I question whether or not I’ll be able to enjoy being in this major. If I wanted to learn how to program and understand it, I would’ve probably done a lot more over the course of this semester, in class, or during this online class. There’s just not a lot of passion or interest that I would’ve liked to grow, so knowing I failed with this makes me scared. I know that going forward in my major and if I get into the CIS minor, I’m really going to have to work and obviously dedicate myself. I can’t fail at dedicating time or fail at not being productive because in the end I’m still going into a major and minor with computers. I can’t get lazy and slack off. Next semester and until graduation, my goal will always be to not fail at dedicating my time to something I’m going to be doing in the future.

All that being said, I can honestly say I’m more educated and enlightened on what’s right for me. I took this class mainly because I wanted to find out for myself if programming was going to ever be something that I took interest in. The answer is no, programming by itself is not my thing. However, I learned that I don’t have to stick to coding if I want to have a job relating to computers. There are so many different fields within computers, so I ended up wanting to incorporate design because that’s something I’m good at. I’ve always gravitated towards the idea of programming because I heard that if you loved anything math related you could do well in programming. I’ve learned that even though I love math, I don’t have to push myself to try to like something. It’s good to try to explore and find your interests, but I learned that it will most definitely not work out if you’re constantly trying to trick yourself into thinking you like or may like something. I’m proud that I tried this out and I don’t have any regret of learning a lot from CS and this class. I would’ve never known anything about coding if I didn’t keep exploring. I never really gave up the whole idea of programming because I wanted to learn more, and I didn’t just want to drop it. Overall, I learned more about myself and what I shouldn’t pursue and what I should try to pursue. I know now that I can still pursue a major that still involves computers and will allow me to have a good future job, hopefully. However, I won’t go completely into the hardcore programming field of computers. I learned through this whole process of being in these computer courses that I want to do more with web design and user interface/experience. This whole process of learning about whether or not I liked coding led me to change majors and made me pursue a Computer Information Systems minor and I’m okay with that.

In terms of grades, I would like an A or A-. I’d be completely fine with an A- or if I’m strictly going off of how much I did for this class, I’d compromise with a B+. I’m not really the type of person to be so confident and tell someone what I want, especially something as important as grades. Ideally, yes, I would like any form of an A. I really think I did my best with trying to keep up the attitude of not giving up anything about programming so easily. I really tried to keep an open mind this whole time and I practically forced myself to start coding exercises during the time we’ve been online. I don’t think anyone with the slightest bit of interest in programming would do coding exercises in their free time if they knew programming wasn’t for them already. I tried keeping up with most of what was being done in class and I’d work on it during class and outside of class. I didn’t just do nothing and sit there during class; I would actually try and that’s why I would like an A- or even a B+, if an A is me being too generous for myself.