Chat Room Reflection

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For our final project in Computer Networks, we had to create a chat room server, and interface to use. This was the culmination of the other theoretical and programming assignments we had done in that class. Since our server had to connect to a network, we learned about how our server interacted with a network and an operating system. When a chat room server has set up, we would always specify the port to use and connect to. The chat room also had a specific protocol that the entire class chose and we had to implement the protocol. Our class had five basic command to use, which were login in, checking other users on the server, closing out of the connection, and sending either a private or public message. This project introduced the concept of parsing, which is to separate words with spaces and have a specific word perform a specific function. While I learned about how to implement a program to connect to a network and allow a user to perform specific functions, the most important aspect of this project actually taught me about how to work in a group setting and how to create a project with other people.

My partner for this assignment was Tony Garcia. We both agreed to work together and write the chat room server, as we were allowed to work alone or with another person. While many programming assignments are written alone and many classes have labs where students work together, this was one of the few programs I wrote with another person. Tony was busy in the month before the project was due, so I had to create the server file and work on it by myself for a while. By the time Tony and I met up, I had the server created and could use all the commands needed by the protocol, as well as have the server give feedback for certain actions. Despite this, I was using putty to test out the server, and needed help creating a user interface with buttons. Tony introduced me to the development environment of Eclipse, and I fell in love with it. I had tried using Dr. Java with all the other previous assignments and this slowed down the results of debugging many of my programs. Eclipse had the advantage of being able to change one variable name and applying it to the whole program.

Tony and I had to look up many ways to create an interface, and we both took turns writing code and thinking through the algorithms of how the screen could interact with the server. We both had to be patient and give up most of our Saturday and Sunday before the project was due to make the screen work. Sacrificing time to get the project done is something anyone can learn in programming by themselves, but coordinating when to meet and discussing ideas are important qualities to have as I transition to the work environment. Working in a team of two taught me about compromising as there were many times where Tony and I had different ideas about how to implement the chat screen. When we often combined our ideas, we found great success and were happy with how we had an interface and how the buttons implemented server commands. We were both happy when we turned in the project and could simulate a chat room and run the protocol. While working together on a project can relieve the stress off of one person, it can help to have multiple perspectives on how to implement a program and have a discussion to create more efficient software.