Reflective Writing – Eric Grimm

1. Think back to how you felt at the beginning of the course. What were your expectations?

I did not know what to expect, honestly. I was not sure how the hybrid system was going to work. All virtual classes seemed to work pretty well in the spring. I would say that I prefer virtual classes to hybrid classes. In the hybrid setting, the virtual students feel cut off from the rest of the class. The virtual students can hear the professor okay, but they are not able to hear any of the discussion from the rest of the class. Completely virtual classes are definitely preferable since all students can participate and everyone can hear each other. However, in a more technical class, like Computer Networks, it is not a huge issue since there is less discussion.

In terms of my other expectations, I expected the class to be in the Scrumage format and utilize the Specs grading system. This is my third class using the Specs grading format, and I have come to prefer this system to traditional grading. All of the assignments and quizzes are not as stressful because I do not have to be overly concerned about getting an A. I can focus on doing what is necessary to get a satisfactory grade. That helps me to focus on learning the material effectively and not just focus on getting an A. In my first Scrumage class, I was a little annoyed by the fact that we had to do challenge projects in order to get an A. However, I have come to enjoy the challenge projects. I think that they enhance my learning in Scrumage classes.

2. Tell a story about a topic, problem, or assignment from the class that challenged you. How did you respond?

The Shakespearian search engine was a very challenging project. I did not interpret the instructions correctly at first. Instead of parsing the plays all at once when starting up the server, I was parsing the plays every time the user made a request (a complete waste of resources). Once I realized my mistake, I struggled to implement the parser at first. However, I was able to reuse some of the code from my first attempt, and I was able to get the parser working. My next challenge was figuring out how to build the index. I tried to store all of elements separately. For example, I stored the act, scene, actor, etc. as separate strings. This made it very difficult to deal with the play line information on the front-end. In order to solve this issue, I combined all of the play descriptors into one string. This allowed me to easily deal with the JSON objects on the front-end and display the strings on the webpage.

3. Tell a story about an interaction you had with another person because of this class.

Even though my group has not collaborated that much throughout this class, we still got on WebEx together a few times. It was nice to be able to chat with my teammates. We have been in the same group for multiple classes now, and it has been weird not seeing them around on campus. When collaborating on WebEx, we have been very productive because there is not much unnecessary chatter. When we worked on projects together in person, I do not think that we were as productive.

4. Other than programming, what have you learned from this class that you can take forward into your other classes or post-Rollins work?

I have learned a lot of background information about computer networks and internet security. Some of this newly acquired knowledge has come in handy. I had a technical interview near the end of the class. I had it the week that we talked about DoS attacks. During my interview, the interviewer asked me to explain different types of attacks, and one of them was DoS attacks! I was also able to answer some of the other questions on the interview using my experience from this class. I was able to talk about some of the projects that I have worked on and some of the topics that I have learned in this class. I think that the Scrumage classes have been a great preparation for working in industry.

5. What has been your experience on learning during the pandemic, whether that was in-person or remote? What did you find most challenging? What (if anything) worked well for you during this time?

I talked a little bit about this in the first question. It has definitely been harder to learn during the pandemic. I feel like I have a lot more on my mind. I find myself getting distracted more easily, and I have a lot less motivation to do schoolwork. The mental exhaustion from worrying about the pandemic has taken a toll. However, I have managed to keep up with my classes. Despite learning remotely this semester, I feel that I am still learning effectively.

6. What are your thoughts on online vs. in-person education? Do you think there are positive aspects of online teaching that we should incorporate into our regular classes?

I think that online education is more efficient. There is not much small talk at the beginning or at the end of class. Most classes are straight to the point. At least this is the case for completely virtual classes. I think that hybrid classes are worse than both in-person and virtual learning. A lot of time is spent dealing with technical issues. Also, hybrid classes seem to get derailed very easily. In some of my classes, a lot of time is spent making sure that the online students are participating in the class. This time adds up and it means that we cover less material. Classes should either be fully in-person or fully remote. I think that the hybrid system is not very good, but it is not horrible.

7. Metacognition is the act of thinking about your own thinking. The single most important skill you can develop in college is self-awareness about your own learning process. What have learned about your own learning as a result of being in this class?

This class did not feel like a Scrumage class. It felt like a regular class except for the fact that we were using the Specs grading system. Yes, we did complete all the projects in groups, but (at least for my group) there was not much collaboration. This was mostly because I was virtual, and the rest of my group was not. However, the other members of my group were not meeting with each other on campus either. We also did not have our group meetings during each class.

The main reason this class felt like a regular class was because we had lectures every time we met. Thus, most of the learning was done in class and not on our own time. I began the class by attending the lectures and reading the assigned sections of the online textbook. By the third sprint, I realized that I did not need to read the textbook chapters. We covered everything that was necessary for the projects and quizzes during class. In previous Scrum classes, there was the occasional in class lecture, but most of the learning was done on our own. I do not think that this class contributed much to my ability to learn on my own. It did show me that I can still learn fine in a typical lecture style class, though.