Lizzie Emch

ISAT 252 Final Narrative

Coming into this class, I did not have that many expectations. I took AP computer science in high school, hated and did not do well in it, and took a vow to never code again in my life. My vow quickly ended when I entered JMU with an Integrated Science and Technology major. I realized that with the major I have, and the field of work I want to go to, I will have to return to programming and understand its mechanics. Freshman year, I took ISAT 151 which required us using excel. Wouldn’t you believe it that something like excel, used coding? After AP Comp. Sci. and the nightmares of java, I thought all coding languages were difficult and evil. But after taking a semester of ISAT 151 and going through the excel labs, I realized how most languages aren’t as difficult as I thought they were. After I took telecom in my fall semester of sophomore year, my outlook on software and hardware programming changed completely. I got interested in it again. I think the only expectation I had with your class was to fully become interested and invested in programming.

My learning goals in the class was to become proficient in at least one programming language and to grow an appreciation for programming in general. I will say, though, these goals were only created after spring break started. For the first half of the semester, I did not put aside a lot of time for ISAT 252. The structure of the course was not something I was used to. I did not know how to really learn with the lectures we had. I figured out though, after the COVID-19 pandemic became serious, that if I wanted to learn something and get better at it, I had to take time out of my schedule and teach myself throughout the multitude of sources online and looking through your recorded lectures. Coding isn’t something that can be taught strictly from a classroom. It’s like math. I can’t just sit through a lecture and automatically become a math wiz. I have to sit down on my own time, go back through what we learned, and understand the knowledge myself.

Unfortunately, I was not able to go through every lecture and designate a lot of time to this class when we went back home, as well. I work as a part-time manager at the grocery store Wegmans. This pandemic increased our sales and the number of customers we had, so naturally I was scheduled from 32-40 hours every week. With work and 5 classes, I really put this class aside. After persuasion from my classmates, especially Nolan, I realized that I had to get in the groove of programming. I downloaded PyCharm, a visual environment for python. I also created an account with the website udemy.com and went through an “Introduction to Python Programming” free course. This course was roughly 5 hours and was divided into around 50 clips that were 3-10 minutes each. For the past three weeks, I have been going through a couple of clips a day, understanding the concepts of the python language, and working on some easy exercises. I also went to the codingbat.com website and worked on both of the warmup tab exercises, which was around 20 exercises. I spent around 10-15 minutes per day, for the past 3 weeks on this class. My goals from the beginning of the semester shifted slightly by the end of the semester. My goals of being proficient in Python and for me to have an appreciation for programming were mostly met. Currently, I want to continue programming every day, and try to become proficient in java again. I recently went through my old laptop and found some old java programs I did in high school. I want to re-do those programs and also mirror them into python. I am sectoring in IKM, and am taking your 340 class in the fall, so continuing my programming habit into the summer would be very beneficial.

I felt successful in this class recently. After I finished the “Intro to Python” class on udemy, which was a couple of days ago, I felt pretty comfortable with python. I wouldn’t say that I am extremely proficient in the language, but I can write some lines of code on my own. Doing the 6 exercises that was provided to me through that tutorial and working through all of the coding bats without hitting the “solutions” button gave me confidence in programming. Even though those six exercises were a line or less of code, as you can see in GitHub, I was happy that I could complete that. Overall, understanding the language, after hating the thought of learning anything coding related, was a big win for me.

I think the biggest area where I failed in this class was entering the groove of it so late in the semester. I should have taken advantage of the in-class lectures, when we had them, but I did not. I only started really caring about this class when Nolan nudged me to. Even when I started caring about this class, I wish I dedicated more time to it. Instead of 15 minutes a day, I wish I worked on programming for 30 minutes a day. If I started practicing coding earlier in the semester for longer sessions, I would have been a lot more successful with Python.

I think what I have learned most from my failures is to not procrastinate as much and to focus my time on something useful. Even though I was working a lot, when I wasn’t working, I was on my phone, on Netflix, or on YouTube for hours. I could have used that time on this class and other classes. For the summer, I definitely want to continue coding everyday and learning about new languages. There is so much to learn in this world, especially online. The free resources are endless. As stated above, I am planning on taking ISAT 340 in the fall, so with my increase in coding from the summer, I think I would want to develop a phone application for college students and cooking. This is still a raw idea, but I would love to develop it through coding. If I continue to have the drive I have now of coding, I would be able to do something like that.

JMU’s mission statement, to make "educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives" speaks a lot through all of the ISAT classes I took this semester. I feel a lot more enlightened after this semester. After the COVID-19 pandemic started and we had to stay home, I did not think I would learn anything from my 5 classes, but I learned a lot. I learned more about time management and procrastination and how to deal with them. I learned about how much of a complex system life is, and how if I do not fulfil one part of my life, like exercising or sleeping, it will impact my ability to work and educate myself. I learned about self- drive, especially through this class. Lastly, I learned about community. Even being far way from JMU, all of the classes and organizations that I am in are active. Even more active then what they were when I was physically at JMU.

I am thankful that I have lived through online school, especially through this crisis. Even though I love being at JMU physically, I never realized how amazing so many aspects of my life were and still are. Even though online school had its negatives, and my time was more divided at home, I think I have realized that I want to continue information knowledge management and do something with it in my future careers. I am leaning towards Environmental Information Systems, or something dealing with the connectivity between environment and technology. I think I deserve a grade between the C+ to B+ range. My drive for this class was not high in majority of the semester, but I think by the end of it, I found my motivation in this class and have been learning a lot, and will continue to learn during the Summer and the next years of college.