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Choose Your Own Grade Essay

This semester, I was hoping to expand upon my appreciation and understanding for computer programming, and the community it reaches. With no background knowledge of software development, I was eager to build a foundation of software application development knowledge by familiarizing myself with the techniques associated with it. One of my main expectations was to thoroughly understand one or many of the web standard languages. I expected that through this process, I would gain professional skills and knowledge applicable to clients or servers in a real system. Because I came into this class with a limited knowledge of computer programming, I ultimately wanted to be able to comprehend the software development process beyond its own system, I wanted to gain an appreciation of its services and the people it reaches beyond its own entity.

My initial goal for this course was to gain the 40 points necessary to achieve the "choose your own grade" option. I knew that in order to accomplish this I would have to dedicate a significant amount of time pushing myself to complete available labs. I was aiming to do this because I knew it meant I would have to complete labs that I wasn't necessarily interested in or ones I was intimidated by. In order to reach the 40-point mark, I would inherently have to complete labs that were outside of my comfort zone. By completing more labs in a shorter period of time, I knew that it would assist me in discovering which labs I liked and which ones I disliked. When I found what interested me, I set a goal of learning this aspect of the course more in depth so that I could develop a significant skill set regarding what interested me. I wanted to focus in on what I believed I could succeed in and then put more time and effort into this activity so that I could obtain practical and applicable skills that I could continue using beyond this course.

Before the course started, I figured I would be familiarizing myself with a multitude of programming languages and I aimed to become proficient in these languages. I learned early on that for myself in particular, it takes a massive amount of time and practice to become an expert in a programming language. I then had to adjust my scope so that I set practical learning goals for myself. Rather than wanting to learn as many languages as I could, I altered my goals that suited my pace of learning. I decided to invest my time in very specific areas of research that interested me and didn't require one to be proficient in a multitude of languages. I felt more knowledgeable by researching the field and certain aspects of it (issues in CSS, how communication has changed from the incorporation of the internet into everyday life, the importance of collaboration and open-source coding) than I did when I was simply trying to cram programming languages into my head. By narrowing down the scope of my learning process, I found that I was developing the in-depth knowledge I craved without simply trying to acquire a number of skills that weren't especially applicable to my daily life or future.

I feel I was successful in expanding my skillset involving programming, especially concerning HTML, CSS, the history behind CSS and HTML, learning the progression of communication through technology, and the difference that open-source collaboration can make. I also feel I widened my perspective by trying out other labs, even if I may not have succeeded in completing or thoroughly understanding them. I practiced with Python, Angular, JavaScript, GitHub, and PHP – all of which I developed an understanding and appreciation of. Although these didn't end up catching my interest, I still put forth time and effort into understanding the applications of each, and how they are incorporated into software development. I successfully discovered which aspects interest me and decided to invest more time into these (specifically HTML, CSS, changes in communication over the decades, open-source collaboration, and the history of CSS). I am satisfied with my level of understanding of these topics and the time I put into developing skills associated with each of these.

An issue I came across over the course of the semester was leaving projects unfinished. If I found a particular lab to be difficult, I often became discouraged and decided that I wouldn't be good at the project even if I invested time into it. This trend led to my failure of fully executing particular labs that I originally planned on finishing. If I had executed each of these unfinished lab and devoted more time to it, I could have amplified my stock of knowledge from this class and further explored topics that could have ended up being intriguing to me. In terms of being able to apply my skills to real-world situations, I believe I failed in doing so with my HTML document. Although I completed the HTML Semantics labs and composed an intricate document, I never applied my CSS or JavaScript skills to make my HTML document accessible online. In these aspects, I believe I did not meet all of the expectations and goals I set for myself.

My main solution to the failures I encountered over this semester is to persevere in completing, understanding, and appreciating every project I take on regardless of my interest or skill level. I understand that I may not end up being an extremely successful programmer, but if I contribute time and effort, I can at least bring myself to being a skilled programmer. I wish to go forth with the mindset that even if I'm bad at something or don't possess much confidence about it, I can still learn an immense amount from the project by completing it and reflecting upon it. From this experience, I feel more educated in a sense that I have instilled within myself the will to learn from every experience and appreciate the lessons it can teach me if I allow it to. I can easily become discouraged if I allow my weaknesses to hinder my progress in projects, but by pursuing my own interests in this class I was enlightened to take my education into my own hands by directing the movement I made entirely. I believe that by being able to point out and learn from both my successes and failures, I have become a more educated and appreciative student.

This course immensely aided me in being able to acknowledge my flaws and weaknesses as a student. In terms of the near future, I hope to be able to apply a learning method by which I embrace my flaws rather than being discouraged by them.

In this sense, by accepting my own flaws I can further my success by working to improve them rather than allowing them to hamper my success. Although I felt enlightened by being able to direct my own learning method, the course did not improve my grasp on what exactly I am destined to do in this life. I understand that I will not succeed as an expert programmer or software developer but I hope to be able to find a means by which I can incorporate my skills from this course into my future career. Regardless, I know I will carry with me a great appreciation for those devoted to working in this field and the time they put into their projects for the greater good of the community.

I felt more motivated to explore my own interests in this style of course because I could invest my time in areas that I wanted to rather than areas I was being forced into exploring. In a past class, I had to work with Python and was entirely discouraged from further working with it because the programming language was pushed onto us so heavily. It frustrated me that we weren't allowed to direct ourselves to learning an alternative language and as a result I became aggravated with the class and exerted less effort than I could have. After the course, I struggled to withhold an appreciation for the subject and hoped to never again address Python. In this course, I was allowed to explore my own areas of interest, and this was especially helpful for me because I could invest time in areas that I felt I could succeed in. If I were to have to again complete labs that I disliked or felt overwhelmed by, I would have further heightened my dislike for the subject. Instead, I surprisingly found topics of interest for myself that I felt I could succeed in. This made a huge difference for me because I learned that I didn't have to force myself into completing labs just to get points, I could instead devote time to areas interesting to me and topics that would prove beneficial for my future.

If I were to take this course again, I would definitely recommend that the course be structured the same. I think that offering students the incentive to choose their own grade if they accumulate 40 points by a certain date is the best structure for this course. If I didn't have a goal of meeting 40 points by a certain date, I wouldn't have been motivated to complete as many labs as I did or invest as much time as I did into these labs. I also wouldn't have explored the labs that didn't interest me. By forcing myself to work up to 40 points and complete certain labs I had no background knowledge in, I actually learned what it was I enjoyed and what labs I particularly did not enjoy. This class structure helped me to pursue labs I didn't understand and thus invest more time into the labs that ended up being enjoyable to me. I believe this course structure is beneficial because regardless, students will have to invest time into completing class labs or exploring new lab topics to obtain points. I think this prevents students from being entirely lazy and putting off labs because they know the number of points they have doesn't matter. It also rewards students who put in more effort early on in the semester by allowing them to then take their own path after they have completed a number of labs and hopefully discovered which ones they wish to continue pursuing.

For this class, I would like to request an A to be reported to the registrar. I found that I have contributed a significant amount of time and effort to the labs I have completed, and the projects I have undertaken outside of the labs. When completing each lab, I ensured that I had an in-depth and developed understanding of the topic, rather than just rushing through it to obtain the points. I practiced the techniques I learned with each task I undertook to make sure I could actually utilize my skills. I also allowed my interest to take me to activities beyond the labs in this class. I explored other topics I found intriguing and again spent time developing skills for each project. I also made sure to obtain some background knowledge on the lab before executing it, either by talking to the professor or doing some online research. Besides just following topics that I enjoyed, I invested time in other areas that I struggled with or did not necessarily enjoy. I wanted to make sure I challenged myself in this course by investing time in differing areas with different levels of difficulty. Aside from the skills I gained, I am extremely satisfied with my reflection of this course and the path I have decided to take up in continuing to utilize what I have learned. That being said, I hope to continue exploring my weaknesses as a means to either evolve them into strengths or simply understand and appreciate them rather than becoming discouraged by them.