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ISAT252 Programming and Problem Solving: Personal Narrative

Prior to enrolling in this class, I had a little coding experience through a computer math class I took in high school. I also used to write Arduino code in my free time and coded a functioning motor propeller for a tiny plane I built back in the day. I assumed this class would be basic level coding and exploration of various computer languages, which it was, for the most part. The first few classes were very familiar to me when we went over basic characteristics of coding and syntax, but it started picking up pretty quickly with the use of GitHub repository and what not. I am now taking Computer Information Systems at James Madison University and have now explored a side of coding that I never thought I would enjoy.

Coming into the class I assumed that it would be a basic Follow-Along-Lecture, but I was surprised at how much exploration and self-experimentation the class would lead to. A goal that I set for myself was to become better at coding and hone my skills with each language. I may not be the best programmer or best coder in the class, but I think I now have a better grasp on coding and programming. At first the goal was to code simple lines, such as a “hello world” program, but I found myself doing more exercises (example via coding bat) to the point where I could dive into more complex functions and evolve that goal to be able to code more complex programs.

I was flying through the simple coding exercises online and it made me feel accomplished and sparked a big interest in the world of software development and coding. Although I am very deep into my education and it may be too late to take Computer Science courses, I see myself learning languages and sharpening my coding skills on the side. Professor Benton gave some great information and explanations about the professional realm of coding and software development and it seems to be a hobby that is not only enjoyable but can distinguish you competitively among applicants of companies.

I use tutorials on Youtube and have done exercises online but I felt as if the best way to really learn programming was to mess around with programs, compile it, and see what happens. After the compilation doesn’t return what you wanted it to then you could always go back and tweak it until you get the desired run. I think I achieved my goal by getting comfortable with a wide range of coding and syntax, however I do not believe I achieved my long-term class goal. I do not think that I am completely adequate enough to be proficient at python and other languages to the point where I can start a complex program from start to finish, and I found myself to be confused with Test files and keeping up with some of the coding that was happening in class. I am able to look at code and know exactly what that code will produce once it is compiled but I find it sometimes hard to start code and get it all done and complete. The terminal shortcuts and directory maneuvers are also a weak point of mine due to my lack of experience working through the directories and out of the terminal. Most coding that I do is through a coding software and I am able to click “save”. It is definitely going to take some practice and time to be able to work effectively from the command line.

I applied the skills and knowledge I gained in this class to my 3D modeling class and I also successfully coded a number of simple programs to practice my coding skills. For my 3D printing and modeling class I used a software called OpenScad, this software uses code in the C++ language to import shapes and allows you to edit the dimensions and location of these shapes on a three Dimensional plane, with functions such as scale(), rotate(), mirror(), translate(), Union(), etc. with the skills acquired in ISAT252 I was able learn the language and the configuration of t software fairly quickly in comparison to my other classmates. I also coded simple programs like a magic eight ball and a dice roulette game (both using JavaScript).

I was doing very well keeping up with the class and being proactive while at JMU but the semester took a weird turn for the worst due to the COVID19 outbreak. Living at home has definitely been a struggle and aside from the daily responsibilities of being home, I found it hard and frustrating to keep up with my classes. The course load all moved online and my professors used different forms of communication making it much more confusing to keep track. I attended majority of our ISAT252 classes while at home and it definitely was a bit more difficult to follow along via WebEx than having professor Benton stand in front of the class. That being said, I found myself getting lost and not having much free time to clear my confusion. I’ve had a lot of busy work and being home has made it very hard to enjoy my school work and learning. I know that I would have learned much more and done a lot better with coding and creating programs if I made more free time for myself and was more engaged. The COVID situation is not ideal but I can’t use that as an excuse for any of my failures because in truth, a person can make the most out of any situation and I think that I am just now figuring this out and doing the best with what I can in quarantine. In the future, I hope to be proactive again and do my work diligently, if only I had realized the hole I was digging for myself earlier. My grades aren’t bad in my other classes, I just feel as if I have not learned much this semester and have just kept up with assignments rather than retaining the information and actually teaching myself at home where we can’t attend lectures.

JMU’s Mission Statement is to produce “educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives”. I feel a lot more educated in the area of coding and after trying to relearn a semesters worth of knowledge in my other classes, I feel more educated in whole, but it definitely has been stressful the past few weeks. This semester has not been the ideal form of education but now that it is coming to a close, I am just hoping to make it through with a smile and good grades. I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed our class, ISAT252, and Professor Benton was very cool and made everyone feel relaxed and comfortable to participate and talk even with the given circumstances, something that a lot of professors aren’t able to do or try to do. Overall, I feel less enlightened than before, I have been confused from the start of online learning due to the confusion of assignments, what needs to be done, self-learning, etc. No matter what I do, I still have a feeling that I am missing something. I appreciate the professors who are being understanding during this time and I also hope that they are managing the quarantine well.

As I said earlier, I started out the semester strong and I was exercising frequently, going to the gym after our 10am ISAT252 class, and eating healthy food that I had at my place at JMU. I was getting in the swing of things and using my past time well, I was content and had a better understanding of my capabilities. Being home has definitely thrown me off those rails and I find myself waking up in a different mood every day, just going through the motions. I know that this change is only temporary and soon enough, we will all be looking back on these times but recently my activities have been minimal and I’ve been confused, so I guess I’m knowing myself less than before. I am getting to know the person in the mirror and finding interest in things that I can do indoors, like video games. The quarantine has halted the progression of my better understanding of many things and this is largely due to my personal attitude and I am working on getting back to where I was earlier in the semester.

My first year at JMU was rough, I didn’t transition into the college realm well and my study habits were awful, messing up my grades. Second year was better, I got into the swing of things and made a lot more friends at school. Fall semester 2019 was the worst, my grandma who practically raised me and meant a lot to me passed away and I was stuck in classes that I really didn’t have an interest in. I tried pretty hard but a lot was going on and I didn’t come close to the grades I wanted and it was very hard on me. I came into Spring semester very strong and completely changed my habits, my viewpoint, and my work ethic. Now my grades are looking good and I need to keep it up in order to recover from those bad semesters. I am sure if we were still at school, I would have attained an A in ISAT252 and wouldn’t be as confused as I am now with my other classes as well. I hope that I can display a better understanding of coding in efforts to get an A or A- in the class. I would like to be able to show my mom the progress I’ve made and make her proud, it was just bad luck being hit with a pandemic in a time where I was the most proactive. I do appreciate the work and education in this class, it’s a class where you are actually supposed to learn and everything is built around that rather than assignments to be recorded and graded and I can’t think of any class that really compares to it. I participated and talked in class lectures and I was thoroughly engaged, just hoped that we could’ve had more classroom experiences.