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ISAT 252

A Semester of Coding

This semester has certainly been a very interesting one. I knew that this class was mostly online and computer based but I didn’t expect it to become 100% that’s for sure. Overall, I am fairly happy with the class and what I have achieved and honestly there were points that I somewhat enjoyed the “coding experience” as I like to call it. Despite setbacks and this now unfortunate state of affairs our country is in, I feel like it was able to rise above and reach my personal goals.

My expectations coming into this class was that I was simply going to struggle. I have never enjoyed coding and most of the time I treated it like homework. Something to get done, copy down, and turn in for as many points as possible. I also had no clue how you were as a professor. I honestly was just trying to avoid Teate because he and I have a bad track record unfortunately, though I doubt he remembers me from his physics class. Anyway, I was bracing myself for a hard and annoying time struggling to follow along and honestly probably just copying, pasting, and praying through the class. What I found was much different. I found a class in which I had actual freedom to learn and to set my own pace, as long as there was one. I could actually attempt to learn coding without being on a no brakes train that wouldn’t wait for me if I fell behind. I was happily surprised nothing more nothing less.

My goals were simple, get to a point I could actually somewhat understand and internalize what was being said and what was being done on a screen. Whether it was YouTube videos, in class, or just passing by another coding class. With my experience in R utterly frustrating me with how much of a complexity jump there was, for languages like python and java. I knew I had to make a choice about my goal early on. I had to pick a language and stick to it otherwise I would just be spreading out my frustration. I then decided I would learn at least the basics of python and execute some code with said information.

What I managed to do was surprising even to myself. I learned how to create calculators and how to pick out specific info off of grids I created. I learned to make my own classes and pull them out for other code I was working on. I felt like I was creating a miniature growing network of work and info I had already learned and coded myself. Over time I felt that if needed I could easily go back and understand what I had written due to the fact it was always at my fingertips. I didn’t have to scroll through a 500-page textbook anymore, my textbook was already on my screen, fully tabbed and ready to show me the info I needed. I visited many tutorials like exercism (which I never got working) and several that you had recommended. There was only one that I stuck with, and that was freecodecamp. It gave so many options for how I wanted to learn. I had initially tried learning java using their in-site interface but I didn’t enjoy copy and pasting files over into VSCode over and over. But after I committed to Python, I found several great video tutorials that made a day of coding not a slog, but an actual learning experience I could get behind. Mike Dane was the one who made a Python Basic’s tutorial that actually gave me the option to not be banging my head against a brick wall and to really gain an understanding. Overall, I know my hours were low but I sunk about 35-50 hours give or take into working outside of class. That is just as long if not longer than most games I play. I am certainly satisfied after that much time in a game so I am satisfied with what I did in that amount of time with coding.

Overtime my goal only changed slightly as I didn’t want to just go through basic’s. I wanted to attempt to make code that I felt I had put effort and time into. I wanted to make code based on something I was interested in but wasn’t going to be too complex. Once I found my idea and theme, I made two goals. A stretch goal to strive for but not get upset about if it wasn’t reached. As well as a main goal that I would reach no matter what. I decided I wanted to re-create some game systems from a game I played as kid. My main goal was to re-create the “RNG” system from a game called Fire Emblem. The cool part about this was that there were two such systems attributed to the series and I wanted to code both as they weren’t too dissimilar. Then I wanted to try integrate that “RNG” system into a character/stat page to make characters I make go against each other using the aforementioned system.

In regards to success, I feel I made a certain amount of success for myself. I completed the tutorials and even went back through them several times to try and write the code myself before they had typed it on the screen. I learned how to make a simple MadLibs game, I learned how to have people type their name and age into my computer and I can automatically send a message back. I can see many future uses for my frat with that last one. When it came to building the calculator, I got pretty good at remembering the code itself and the practice really helped. At first importing and pulling in modules made little sense to me especially making sure your classes were properly coded and would import and integrate well into your code. But now I feel I have a firm grasp on how code itself is supposed to work. My biggest success was re-creating the “RNG” system from Fire Emblem for both the English versions of the game as well as the Japanese (Which are harder for certain reasons actually explained in the code). I also coded a way to put in your own numbers and chances to test outcomes. I actually made a tool I can use going forward in the game if I want to test my chances in the game itself. Of course, because it is intrinsically a chance that means my code won’t 100% predict what will happen, it alternatively does act as a cool tool to just test your luck before you commit to your choice in-game.

My failures were small in the overall scheme of things luckily. I wasn’t able to reach my stretch goal because my mind is still reeling from attempting to create a user interface (Just the VSCode terminal but it’s still cool t reach even there) for so many moving parts like selecting a character, another character to go against. Then having the code calculate and run an RNG scenario saying who did what, who won and so on. It was just a little too overwhelming so I resigned to just keeping to my recreated RNG system. I also feel like I failed when it came to trying to get into other languages. Once I understood python and had committed for a while, I just didn’t have the motivation to start over with a new language. So, I feel I failed at really expanding my coding knowledge in a broader sense.

In response to my failures I internalized that I need to find that motivation that I had for learning python and just redirect it towards other goals no matter if it is just starting from step 1. While I recognize my failure to learn other languages, I don’t think I will be pursuing any other coding languages on my own anytime soon. I enjoyed learning python but then again, I don’t think I would have taken time to learn it on my own outside of this class. I’m thankful but I simply don’t enjoy coding that much except for the bounds of what I know.

I feel enlightened in the experience I have gained. I understand what it takes to code and how it is to be someone who has to write code. While what I wrote was simple, I understand the process of research, set-up, code, test, re-code, test, frustration, re-code etc. till your eventual success. I like that I can now relate to those who do enjoy coding and who are pursuing it further I can actually understand what they are saying and doing on a basic enough level to appreciate it. Educated wise I feel I gained a certain amount of education but coding is a fairly hard thing to educate someone on. Unless they are learning about the process itself. Which I very much appreciate that you focused on in our class. It prepared me for actually trying it myself and allowed me to teach and achieve to the point I am at now.

This semester has been tough overall for self-development. I was VP for my fencing club I was also in a frat and several other clubs. My days down to the hours were fairly planned and packed. I enjoyed being busy as the previous semester I wasn’t busy enough and had become to be burned out. That was what this last semester was about mostly, re-sparking my motivation to finish college and to get my degree and move on as an adult. I feel that despite the early summer break I want to go back to school more than ever now. I’m ready to buckle down and get my work done for my degree. Personally, growing I feel I have matured a bit more but overall; I am happy with who I am as a person currently. Of course, there I things to strive for, and I do, but I am content with where I am at currently. In the future I hope to simply find exactly what I want to do and succeed in it. I have always been a go with the flow person and that opposite side of it is that I don’t necessarily have a direction right now. What I do have though is good people who support and care for me so I think when the time comes, I will have what I need to take the leap further into the future. But for now, I am more than happy getting my education and having a good time at JMU.

The grade I would obviously love to have is an A+ but I don’t know if I exactly deserve that. I was absent fairly often and did not put a large amount of time in this class like I had for my other classes. A fair amount of being lazy was involved but I also enjoyed the “take your own pace” approach you offered. I was in control of my learning and directly in control of my grade. I remember telling you several times I hate coding and am utterly confused and baffled by it. I still am for most of it but now I feel I have a fair amount of experience to review it with an honest heart.

It simply is not for me; I talked a little about this before but I just don’t have the “coding bug” to do this for a living. I am humbled certainly by the experience and enjoyed reaching my goals but I do not think I will be continuing, except for other projects that require coding, in the future. I feel it is up to you most of all to interpret what I have said and to give me the grade you think I deserve, but overall feel I a B to and A- is appropriate. I have been honest and hope you can appreciate that I have been ever since day one. But I am happy you changed my mind about being so displeased with coding. I don’t abhor it anymore and I have an actual appreciation of it now thanks to you.

Thank you for an amazing semester and an amazing classroom experience. I regret every day I wasn’t able to make it to class. I can’t wait to see you in ISAT again Dr. Benton.