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Independent Study Reflection Paper

For my twenty-hour independent study project, I was unsure initially of what I wanted to do. I had a few ideas floating around, but nothing really grabbed my interest. My partner Nick, a graduate student in the Computer Science department suggested that I learn web development and build a website. This project is an active learning experience, valuable for work and personal endeavors, and a chance to learn some very new skills and put them to use. I learned a lot from this process about how to code, build, and design websites, as well as practicing problem solving and learning what to do and what not to do in time management.

Upon finishing the W3schools HTML tutorials, I felt like I had a pretty good grasp on the language. This isn't the first time I've attempted to learn HTML, but last time I didn't have as much motivation. Since a lot of this was a review, it wasn't too difficult. There was a small JavaScript section that was challenging though. I am a little worried that I won't be able to understand JavaScript when I get to it, but Nick has the confidence in me that I currently lack. I still don't know everything obviously, but I know enough for a good base for JavaScript, and I know enough that I can start practicing to get better.

In the 3 hours I spent on CSS, I didn't get quite as much done as I had hoped, but I still got most of it completed. What I did complete, I feel that I have a good grasp on. I think that I expected to get more finished because of how much of the HTML I completed, not factoring in as much as I should've the fact that I had already learned a good bit of HTML prior to this

project. At this point, I decided to make a local webpage with the materials I would submit as my project in the page. If I want to make a full website at a later date, with more time, I can, using the knowledge I have gained from this independent study. Submitting a local page would be difficult on your end, which I didn't realize at the time, so I have a GitHub hosted webpage, with my own code.

I started learning JavaScript through a book called *Eloquent JavaScript* that Nick found online. I read the Introduction and Chapters one and two, as well as completing the exercises at the end of chapter two. When I was trying to learn C# over the summer, I had done one of the exercises, called FizzBuzz, which is a popular interview question for programmers. This time, it was much easier for me to complete without help from Nick. The third exercise was really difficult, and I could not have gotten through it on my own, I don't think. It doesn't seem like something that I will need to use in a website, but I guess I'll see if it comes up again. That question took so long, I went over my 2 hour schedule, although I also read the introduction which I hadn't planned, so hopefully I'll be able to make up that time.

After the first two chapters, the *Eloquent JavaScript* book got a lot harder. I took a pause to regroup, and Nick suggested that I finish the chapter I was on and read about the browser JavaScript so that I could understand what I'm using JavaScript for in the context of a webpage before switching to W3Schools, which is a lot more accessible for someone with my slight knowledge of programming. *Eloquent JavaScript* is a well-written, thorough book, but it is meant to be poured over slowly and thoroughly, which is not really the point of this project. Over the summer, I may start back through the book when I have more time. W3Schools is easy to digest and easy to parse into the pieces needed because of the way it is set up.

About halfway through the JavaScript learning process, Nick suggested that I step back and watch a few videos on what the internet actually is and how it works, which cleared a lot of things up for me. I felt like I better understood what I am doing and why. The last video, as hard as it was to listen to, was helpful for me to understand what servers and clients are, which is something I previously knew nothing about. These videos are in my bibliography in the order I mentioned them.

The second half of the time I spent learning JavaScript was on W3Schools, the same website I used to learn the HTML and CSS. JavaScript is a real programming language similar to C#, unlike HTML and CSS which most programmers don't consider in the same way. This make JavaScript harder to learn and implement. I tried to incorporate as much of what I learned as possible into this project. My name changes colors on the Home page, which is an example of JavaScript, specifically the setInterval function. The pop-up on the Home page is a window.alert function using JavaScript. I also used JavaScript in the About page with the button to make the "about me" appear. Most of what I learned in JavaScript was math functions which didn't seem particularly relevant.

Building the website was incredibly frustrating and a little bit scary at first because I felt like I didn't learn anything. Once I stepped back and looked at the basics to reorient myself, it started becoming more intuitive and rewarding. I had a lot of fun putting this together and watching it come together like a puzzle. The first outside pieces were tough to find and put together, but the more I put in, the easier the next thing was to put together. I enjoyed this independent study a lot, and I think that with more practice, I could make some really beautiful websites.

Learning to program or do web development, as Nick frequently tries to get me to do, is uncomfortable because I haven't really had to learn any new skill since high school. I read a lot and learn a lot of facts and ways of thinking but actual skills like math or science is not anything I am currently practiced in. Programming is something I do have an interest in, but likely wouldn't do on my own because it's difficult to learn. I'm grateful that this class gave me the opportunity to learn something worthwhile that I might not otherwise have time for in my busy life.