Narrative Reflection

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ISAT 252 defied nearly every expectation that I had about what a programming course could be. ISAT 252 is the first programming course I have taken in college. Before taking this class, my primary experience with programming was within select courses that I took in high school. Clearly, it has been a couple of years since then so when I entered this class, I knew I would not have a wealth of knowledge to fall back on. Additionally, I am fortunate enough have many friends within the CS Department at JMU. They continually share how they must take rigorous courses with high amounts of work. Knowing that programing can be a difficult subject in and of itself even if you have years of experience in the field, I knew that that starting essentially from scratch was going to be a challenge. However, within this class I was surprised to find that instead of being confronted with impersonal assignments and an endless wave of PA's, I was greeted with work that required me to collaborate with others and seek meaningful connections.

The first badge I completed for this class was the socializer badge. I met with another student who I did not previously know and was able to pursue an authentic conversation that led to discussing deep subjects with which we could share our personal experiences. Never would I have expected to have these experiences in a programming class, but I was able to find deeper meaning than the six points allotted to my grade for completing the badge as I was able to form a connection and relate to another person. We talked about subjects as difficult as mental health and how they impacted our loves and were able to give each other encouraging words. Immediately I knew that this class was not to be taken for granted because the ruling principles that were embedded into the structure of the class went beyond just simple busywork. We were pursuing something more.

This belief was only furthered upon my first meeting with Professor Benton one on one. We shared coffee at the East campus library and talked about a multitude of things. In that time I was able to share my background and the experiences that shaped me into the person I am today. I shared my anxiety towards grades, a future career and being able to stay on top of things and was given advice by Professor Benton that stuck with me. He told me how his partner believes there are two main things that a student should try to accomplish during their time in college. Those are to create social connections/network and pursue liminal experiences. It was surprising to be told this by a professor. Ordinarily I would expect to be coached on always making time to study turn my assignments in on time and aim for the best GPA I could achieve. However, with Professor Benton this was not the case. Instead, he cared about the significance of this portion of my life.

I shared how much I valued the people that I had come to know at JMU and how I was fortunate enough to be able to lead a radio show where I interviewed other students to gain new perspectives about what people attribute importance to in their lives. This led to me and Professor Benton workshopping an idea to create a similar environment with the professors in the ISAT Department. Professor Benton and I talked for nearly an hour up to the point where he nearly ran late leaving for his next class that he had to teach. That conversation set the benchmark for the rest of the semester as I knew I could easily approach Professor Benton with whatever was on my mind.

Unfortunately, if I'm being honest with myself, I did not achieve as much in the class as I wanted to. For a multitude of reasons including difficulties in other classes as well as an unexpected global pandemic, I was faced with numerous drawbacks that limited my capacity to pursue programming on my own time. I take responsibility in the areas where I was neglectful. However, I knew that at the end of the day what was important was how I responded to this new subject of programming. I never intended to be a software developer or data analyst or anything that required a significant background and understanding code. As such I had never truly pursued learning the various code languages available due to the belief that I would not utilize such knowledge. yet to my surprise professor Benton was able to tie coding and programming two bigger themes and concepts that I could relate to. Time management, personal work ethic, and collaboration were just a few that he touched on, but already I could see how programing was far more applicable in my life than I had ever expected it to be.