Quinn Williams

ISAT 252

Morgan Benton

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Reflection

As an avid user of the internet, social media, and the occasional mobile game, programming and coding have always been areas of interest to me. I took a programming class in the spring of my sophomore year. I went into that class feeling excited. The possibilities seemed endless. I was ready to learn about this world that was behind the scenes of everything we knew. After a few weeks of being in the class, these feelings of excitement and optimism were quickly put to bed. While the content still seemed interesting, it was much more difficult than I imagined. I would spend time trying to figure out code, but it seemed no matter how much effort I put in, I was getting nowhere. I reached out to my professor at the time for help, and unfortunately that didn’t get me much further. So prior to this class, I had a very negative experience when it came to programming and coding. An experience that made me never want to give it another chance.

Before coming into this class I felt hesitant and anxious. I knew I had to do it again, but I really did not want to. I expected it to be every bit as hard as the previous course. Although I had a small amount of experience from the last class, I did not see that being an advantage for me. I expected to struggle from the beginning. I also did not think I would have resources available to me that would put me in a better position. Overall, I was nervous before I came into this course, maybe even slightly pessimistic.

My main goal that I set for myself this time around was to first and foremost, pass the course. This was the most important thing to me so I could move forward with my coursework. I also wanted to put my best foot forward and not focus too much on the past. I was nervous but working with you, as a professor, lightened some of that load. I also wanted to feel like I’d actually learned something this time around. I believe the first time I took the programming course I felt that I ended up getting so overwhelmed with it that I didn’t actually learn anything. Once I learned that we would be doing the weekly team meetings, I sort of got more excited. I knew that this would give me a chance to learn from other students, which could give me a chance to absorb a lot more, as well as bounce ideas off of my peers.

In order to prepare for these meetings I did some work outside of the classroom. I used websites like freecodeacademy.com and GitHub to learn new things and work on skills. On freecodeacademy.com I was able to get my basic javascript algorithm certification as well as my data structure certification. I also went through the certification for responsive web design. Through GitHub, I did the HelloWorld R, HelloWorld Python, functions and I also started the grade calculator with python as well. I also tried to figure out how to code an app but the zoom call that had the steps that went along with it, got deleted before I could complete it. I was also able to work with Dani who is extremely interested in coding and very good at it as well. By

working with another student, who also is my friend, hands on, I was able to follow along and understand a lot more. It was nice to be able to ask her any sort of question without feeling like she would be judging me for it.

As the semester went on, I was able to begin learning about programming without it seeming impossible. There were times where I felt that it was taking me a long time to grasp a specific language. That was frustrating for me because I was concerned about falling into the hole that I found myself in during my last go around with programming. At times, I would get deterred mainly because of stress from the semester itself, but also seeing my peers grasp the concepts more quickly made me concerned that I was missing something. So my goals changed slightly. I wanted to make sure I did not fall behind, and I also wanted to make sure I kept my head up and stayed focused. Another goal I had for myself was just to make sure I took care of myself. It is easy to get bogged down in school work and not make time to decompress. These goals developed as my nerves regarding learning the basics began to settle. I was able to refocus without fear or anxiety really getting in the way.

I believe these goals were met for the most part. This is seen through what I feel are my successes.

* <https://github.com/williaqm1/williaqm1.github.io.git>
* <https://github.com/williaqm1/functions.git>
* <https://github.com/williaqm1/helloworldR.git>
* <https://github.com/williaqm1/PythonHelloWorld.git>
* <https://github.com/williaqm1/grade-calculator-python.git>

This semester I think that I could have collaborated with more students to work on different programming projects outside of those that were assigned to us in class. This might have been fun and also a good way to practice some of the skills we were learning in a low stress environment. I also could have done a better job maintaining my mental health. I believe with COVID and quarantine it was even harder to find those stress relievers. Obviously, time I would normally spend with my friends was limited to 40 minute Zoom calls filled with chaos. Walking around on campus between classes was not really a thing anymore. I didn’t realize that those 10-15 minute walks outside were a way for me to clear my head after lectures.

Through these “failures” I learned that persistence is key. If I’d done some more practice outside of the class assignments I might have picked up on newer concepts more quickly. It also might have made the experience more fun. As far as learning from my “failure” to do self-care, I realized how important it is to make time for yourself no matter the situation. Sitting down, at the desk, staring at a computer all day is not how people are supposed to spend their time. We need time outside, time to exercise, time to just be really. Although I probably won’t be doing too much programming in the future, I think that I learned that if I were to take another class, I would take on a side project. Something like that could be cool to help me keep practicing my skills without having to worry about it being perfect for grading. When it comes to being better

about my self-care, I just need to remember the school, life balance. It would be better if I did school work outside of my bedroom. This physical boundary would be helpful in reminding myself that I do need some separation because it is not always as simple as it being a mental separation.

At first thinking about James Madison University’s mission statement, to produce “educated and enlightened citizens who lead meaningful and productive lives'', seemed like a big aspiration for a singular class. As I thought about it more, I can see how I have become more

educated clearly, but more enlightened as well. Starting with the obvious, I am more educated. I knew what programming was before, but I had no idea how to really do any of it prior to this. I believe having a professor who is available and approachable has helped this a lot. I was able to learn far more in this class than I anticipated. Being able to have those team calls once a week opened my eyes to what others were doing and what they were struggling with. This educated me because there were times when they were working on something that I had not thought about or looked at, and I was able to learn from them. As far as being more enlightened, I can agree with that as well. Knowing more about what goes on behind the scenes of things I use everyday like websites, apps, and games has definitely enlightened me. I found it interesting to learn about these things. It’s sort of like when they go into a factory and you see how your favorite product is built. You see all the moving parts and all the steps that bring something that gives you so much joy, to life.

The activities we did this semester did not detract to me getting to know myself better. I do not think it necessarily contributed to my road to self discovery either. I did not realize anything profound that made me fall in love with programming. I also did not have any extremely negative experiences with programming this time around which is great honestly. I would say it has helped me realize that while I do like coding and programming I probably would not want to do it professionally. It is fun and a cool skill to have. Not many people can say they actually understand or can write Javascript or website design. Outside of this class, one thing I have taken on is teeth whitening. I started a small business to sell charcoal powder and some tooth health services. I got my certification over the summer. I believe this activity specifically has pushed me to remember the love I have had for the dental industry and the technological advancements made there. I actually do have a website for my business. I used a platform to start it up. As I was using it, I realized some of the faults in how the platform was set up. One of the issues I found was how the pictures snapped into place, rather than allowing for free motion by the user. They also made it difficult to use a color scheme of your choosing. What I mean by this is that they would give you some color palettes to choose from. These palettes were full of complementary colors that would look good together on a webpage. Through this it would assign a color for the background, a color for the tool bar, a color for the words, and even that color would change when the cursor was hovering over it. This is all great to begin with but it became difficult when I wanted to make one specific thing a color that was not a part of the

palette. I could not just type the HEX code in for that specific box or whatever it would be. I would have to go over to the palette and change the color there. With this a few issues arised. It would change the color of all the items on the screen that were set with that HEX code rather than just making the specific thing that color. This is sort of small in the grand scheme of web design, but it was frustrating to me overall and I am sure that many other users found it annoying. I believe that small details like this is another reason I really would not want to do programming as a full time thing. It is fun here and there, but having to create something like a website platform or design an app seems like it could be extremely difficult.

Looking back on my effort and performance in the class, I would like you to send an A as my grade to the registrar.