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Computer Science and UST Reflection

My time at the University of St. Thomas has been challenging, engaging, and full of growth. I came to the University of St. Thomas as a transfer student from Iowa State University in Ames, IA. I had come to UST with low confidence in my Computer Science skills, as I had not performed too well at ISU. I came to UST needing to change myself into a better developer as well as a better student as a whole. Through the CISC curriculum and general education of UST, I have come out as a much more well-rounded individual than how I had started. The University of St. Thomas highlights its mission as, “Inspired by Catholic intellectual tradition, the University of St. Thomas educated students to be morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good”. The University of St. Thomas also highlights the following convictions: Pursuit of Truth, Academic Excellence, Faith and Reason, Dignity, Diversity, Personal Attention, and Gratitude. Though I won’t be touching on all these convictions in this reflection, I have experienced and practiced all these convictions in my coursework during my time at the University of St. Thomas. Finally, I will conclude by emphasizing how the work I have done will be ‘All for the Common Good’ in the future and the workplace.

The University of St. Thomas pushes a curriculum of leadership. More than just leadership, the University of St. Thomas encourages students to be “Morally responsible leaders who think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully”. These are all very good characteristics to have, and I feel that through the CISC curriculum and St. Thomas curriculum I have become a more responsible leader who has been prepared to think critically, act wisely, and work

skillfully. Of all the courses I have taken, there was not one course that did not include critical thinking. This ranges from English and Theology to Statistics and Computer Science. Professors design courses, so that they are challenging, yet make students think like they never have before. Thinking critically is an important skill to have and to keep. Problems arise in our everyday lives in work, life, and play. Critical thinking helps weed out bad choices that we may make and lead us on a path that may be better. In Theology, I took a comparative theology course that forced us to critically think about religion from an objective view. This allowed me to look at other religions and my own in different ways like never. In my Math and CISC courses, I was required to have good critical thinking skills, or some problems just couldn't be solved. Having good critical thinking skills as a leader is an important skill to have and I believe a focus on it at the University of St. Thomas has been a great benefit to me and other students.

The next characteristic that the University of St. Thomas highlights for its morally responsible leaders is to "act wisely". Though I can't say that I always act wisely when making decisions, I believe that the curriculum at the University of St. Thomas has taught me to think better before making decisions. This is not something that is instructed directly, but rather something that has grown for me during my time at the University of St. Thomas. One area that can be highlighted is generally getting work done. An important lesson that I learned through my time at the University of St. Thomas is "Get it done now". This is a simple concept I worked on over the last two years as a student at the University of St. Thomas. In my time before St. Thomas, I would put off work for other distractions. This leads to schoolwork or work in general not getting done and eventually items getting piled on top of each other. Through the rigorous coursework, I have taken at St. Thomas, I have rewired myself to get things done at the moment I get the chance rather than putting them off for later. In a rigorous program like CISC, concepts

usually build on top of each other through this I learned to ‘act wisely’ and make better decisions from the start to still be on top of my courses by the end of the semester. Even though I slipped up a few times, I greatly improved my decision-making and felt that I have started to act wiser as time goes on.

In the University of St. Thomas’s mission, their final highlight for students is responsible leaders who ‘work skillfully’. Through courses, my professors, and projects I have worked on at the University of St. Thomas, this is one area that I have improved upon greatly. Upon graduation, I believe that I will have the skills to be an effective member of any software team. In contrast to my study habits before coming to St. Thomas, I never really studied for any exams at St. Thomas. Most courses are structured in such a way that students must know the material well to do well in the classes. This included content taught in non-stem courses like Theology, Philosophy, and English. For most of my time at the University of St. Thomas, I was forced to understand and apply concepts that I have learned to complete assignments and do well in exams. This type of coursework pushes students to absorb the information better, but also retain the information for longer. Teaching students how to ‘work skillfully’ paved a path for another important skill that I will hold on to as long as I can – skillfully working smarter, and not harder. I have learned through my projects and coursework that putting in hours and hours on end to complete something is not the best approach to completing a task. Rather, I learned that putting effective time and effort into a task allows for a better result. This can only happen when one can identify when they should step away from a task for some time to clear their head. Before my time at St. Thomas, I would spend hours trying to study and memorize. This never worked for me and will never work for me in the future. Working smarter has paved the way for another valuable skill to have, and that is picking up complex ideas quicker. In a field that is constantly

changing and evolving to fit the needs of people, learning large complex ideas and system quickly is an important skill to have. I believe that St. Thomas has prepared me for this through the courses and projects I have worked on.

As a part of its mission statement, the University of St. Thomas has 7 convictions that it includes. I would like to reflect on four of these convictions. St. Thomas highlights 'Academic Excellence' as their second conviction. This is something that has become important to me during my time at St. Thomas. Before coming to St. Thomas, I did not care about grades. All I wanted to do was pass exams and classes. There is something unsatisfying about going about coursework this way. I realized that I not only wanted to get better grades but learn the content. What I found out was obvious - by really learning the content I will get better grades. The projects and coursework at the University of St. Thomas helped me do this. In the CISC program, all the courses I took were engaging and at some point, in my career will hopefully be useful to me. On top of just the course work, the projects that I have worked on were meaningful and helped solidify concepts. The combination of these two made me strive for academic excellence and has inspired me to continue the path as a lifelong learner.

Another conviction from the University of St. Thomas mission statement that I tie into my projects is 'Personal Attention'. Through the courses and projects, I have worked on, I feel that I have become a better developer and thinker. Through Philosophy and Theology curriculum, I have learned to think about the world in a much different way than I had done before. Philosophy and Theology not only force students to reflect on behaviors and actions of our world but also allows students to look at themselves and question why they do certain things. Getting this different view of the world has forced me to become a better person and strive to do work for the common good. Through the CISC program, I have learned to become a better and

more effective developer. This has led me to strive to become the best version of myself as a developer, as I can. Of course, this will take years and years of hard work, but a focus on 'Personal Attention' and becoming the best version of oneself at St. Thomas has given me the motivation to keep pushing forward.

A final conviction the University of St. Thomas has highlighted that I would like to touch on is 'Gratitude'. I am very grateful for the numerous professors I have had and the courses and projects that I have taken part in. Most of the professors I have had have been motivating, helpful, and have cared about their students, and liked to see us succeed. I am grateful for these professors and all the hard work that they have put into curating such great classes. Even during Covid, as many professors had to adjust, I feel that I received a top-level education. The professors created the courses and projects that I have worked on at St. Thomas and I am grateful for every professor I have had. Each course on its own taught me something profound and important, even if it wasn't just the course material. The projects I have worked on during my time at St. Thomas as developed a variety of different skills that I will hopefully use for the rest of my life and I must show gratitude for the opportunity that I was given.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at the University of St. Thomas. Through the courses I have taken and the projects I have worked on I have learned so much about the world that surrounds us, the world of Computer Science, and about myself. The University of St. Thomas has instilled strong skills, values, and convictions in me that I will hold on to for the rest of my life. I hope to translate these skills and values to any environment I am a part of, whether it be professional, personal, or other. The University of St. Thomas has taught me anything that I do should be for Common Good and I hope to carry that for the rest of my life. Go Tommies!