Ever since my first STEM camp back in the 6th grade, I knew I wanted to be in a STEM-related

job. This camp opened my mind up to the gender and racial inequalities in the STEM field. I felt

that it was my duty to help combat and close these gaps so that we could reach a more diverse

and equal society.

As my education progressed, I began to see technology advance. It wasn’t until my junior

year of high school that I learned about the technicality of the society we lived in; through my

high school JROTC program, I was given the opportunity to work at Jackson State University for

a coding summer camp. This camp lasted about 3 months and it was virtual. This was the

beginning of the pandemic and it was my first transition into the online universe. Throughout the coding

camp, we accomplished many different projects. These concepts were things I had never been

introduced to before and there were some students who already knew these concepts that I did not.

This encouraged me to learn more about the programs scratch and python. I felt like I was

behind compared to my counterparts, so I felt empowered to catch up to them. Jumping right into

programming was very overwhelming for me because I still struggled with the fundamental concepts.

Fortunately, after the summer program was over, I was chosen as a top scholar in that program

and was able to work with them for the duration of my senior year of high school. The instructor,

Dr. Robin Ghosh and coordinators, Dr. Shonda Allen, and Ms. Galina Lobadina believed I had

potential in the technology field and felt this was a good major for me to have once I attended

college. This top scholar program wasn’t as invasive as the summer program because of the

educational school year. Even though we didn’t meet as many times, we still learned more about

machine learning and python and we were also introduced to deep learning. We used the site

Kaggle to data-mine for the topic we were researching. This allowed me to learn about image

classification and even voice recognition. After this program, I felt like I was only scraping the

surface and did more research on jobs in this field. This led me to stumble upon data analysts and artificial

intelligence engineers. These were the two I had my eye on and knew my passion to pursue my interest.

As I transitioned from high school to college, I began to instantly give it my all in my

programming class, Computer Science I. In this class, we learned C++. I had already been

introduced to python and C++ wasn’t anything like it. My professor, Dr. Jacqualine Jackson, had

broken down most of the concepts and I was able to get the basics. I was thinking that I had a

pretty good understanding of the language and that I could code almost anything until I had met

an upperclassman. They were using terms I had never heard and using methods and functions I

was never exposed to. That's when I learned that being in the classroom was thirty

percent of the learning process when coding. Everything I did outside of the classroom was just

as important as everything I did in the class. When outside of the classroom it was my responsibility to

practice and put in the work in order to get better at programming.

My first semester was a big eye-opener for my future in the technology industry. It taught me that

I must go out and do my own research and no one is going to sit beside me and make sure

that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing anymore. I had to wake up every day and push

myself to be the best I could be to get where I wanted to be in the field. Because I was an

overachiever in high school as well, I came into my first year of college with 42 credits meaning I

was already starting on the sophomore level of college. I basically was thrown into the deep end

of coding without an introduction but I feel like this prepared me for what I have coming next in

my life and I am ready for it.

As I started my second semester of college, I thought I had learned all the lessons that I needed

in my first semester but I was sadly mistaken. I had about 57 credits, meaning I was one class

away from being a junior. I was thrown into junior-level courses, and I was trying to keep my

head above water. Between work, school, and coding; practice things the concepts started to become a little

overwhelming. I wasn’t practicing my coding skills as I should’ve I was solely relying on what

I had learned in class to help guide me into getting better. I was only doing okay until we had our big coding

project as our final and that was what had helped me get into the next level of my coding career.

The majority of the project was to create an application that could fix a problem in our community. This was a very daunting task for me because there was no rule book or template for our project. We had to come up with the rules ourselves and make sure that they met the requirements we had set before at the beginning of the semester. I was fortunate enough to come up with an idea to help combat the Covid-19 learning loss with an application. This application allowed teachers to create an account, see students' grades, see which students were failing in a certain area, and suggest different courses that students could take to help improve in that particular area in their classes. Following my experience with learning how to code from the very beginning. I knew that this project would resonate with me to complete it in the best way that I can!