



A Student's Experience of a Class of One

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BACKGROUND

I have worked for IRD for 14 years as a tax investigator and have been studying part-time towards a Bachelor of Information Technology since its inception in 1996. In 2000 I applied for and was given a transfer to IRD's Information Technology division (as an Analyst/Programmer) and final year study grant. This grant enables me to study full-time while on full pay to complete my degree. One of the requirements of this award was that I study JAVA and if possible COBOL. IRD uses COBOL 74 and is one of the biggest users of COBOL in the world.

I approached Dr Samuel Mann about the possibility of learning COBOL and after enquiries were made it was established that this could be done.

A suitable textbook and COBOL compiler were agreed upon and 4 programming assignments and one report assignment were issued.

1. My Experience

I have had three or four meetings with Janice for mostly procedural matters relating to what she wanted for the assignments. Nearly all of my learning has been self-taught from the textbook, web-based sources or trial and error experimentation with the programs.

I have mixed feelings about this paper and feel that this type of study is not suited to everyone. I needed to learn COBOL, so my motivation levels were very high, but still I have enjoyed doing this paper. In saying that I would not want to do my whole degree this way as I feel the need for interaction with

people. I think this is an excellent option for those students who want to cover a topic that would not otherwise be offered, and where the expertise to teach it is available. This type of study would suit someone who:

- ◆ is really focussed on their goals
- ◆ is resourceful and able to work on their own
- ◆ has the perseverance to work through problems with minimal assistance.

2. Advantages of this type of study:

- ◆ Flexibility of study - as I had no classes or lectures to go to I had no timetable clashes and could plan my study to suit myself, within the time constraints of the course.
- ◆ Direct relevance to industry requirements - I can learn what I will need for my future employment and make it count toward my degree.
- ◆ Caters to individual's requirements - in my case there is nowhere else in Dunedin (and maybe New Zealand) that I can learn COBOL.

3. Disadvantages of this type of study:

- ◆ Isolation - I had no classmates to consult with and had to rely heavily on my own self-learning. I have gained a lot in the past from seeing how my peers solve problems in different ways.
- ◆ Basically one style of learning - self-taught, from a textbook. This learning style will not suit everyone. Lectures and classes allow greater flexibility in this regard.
- ◆ Unstructured apart from assignments set. I did not find this a problem but it may be for others. (See also Smith, L. (2002) Class for One, this volume)

