

Teaching Programming with LiveCode at Brigham Young University

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A good way to engage students. Cross-platform. Easy-to-use.

Since it was founded in 1875, Brigham Young University has aimed to assist its students in the development of faith, intellect, and character in a stimulating setting where commitment to excellence is expected and the full range of human potential is pursued. LiveCode user Devin Asay, a Lecturer and Associate Research Fellow in the computers and Humanities department, has been using the platform to teach his students the basics of programming regardless of their major.

Students outside of the Computer Science major tend to shy away from courses that involve programming. LiveCode was selected for its English-like language and intuitive interface in the hopes that programming could spread to other departments.

We caught up with Devin Asay to learn more about why he chose LiveCode and how he uses it in his courses today.

Asay: "Like many educators, I wear a lot of hats, and one of my jobs is teaching a course in introduction to programming for non-techies. These are students majoring in humanities, language, philosophy, English and linguistics. They're all people for whom a little bit of programming might be useful but who don't have the time or the temperament to take two or three years of Computer Science. I teach LiveCode in two courses. I think it gives the students a good tool to create custom things that they need in their future careers as teachers, or indeed in whatever they end up doing."

RunRev: Do you find that students use these programming skills further down the line with their degrees?

Asay: "There is always a percentage of students that do. Of course there are some who are just glad that they got through that class! But there are always a number of students every year who go on and take the second semester course. And every once in a while I'll hear back from one of them asking 'how do you do this in LiveCode again?'"

RunRev: How did you discover LiveCode and how did you start using it in your course?

Asay: "I came from the HyperCard world; I'm a Mac guy from years ago. I started using HyperCard in 1989 and our original courses were based on HyperCard so we did that for close to 10 years. Everybody knows the story of HyperCard withering away. I spent two years searching for a true successor to HyperCard with modern features. I looked at nearly everything including RealBasic, iShell, SuperCard and bunch of different programs. But then I found LiveCode and the rest is history."



Education Case Study

RunRev: Do you find that the students pick it up quite quickly?

Asay: "It varies for a number of reasons. Some people just don't think the way LiveCode requires, and others latch onto it and say that it's the best thing since sliced bread. Everybody who goes through the course at a minimum has the experience of learning to think in a new way. That's what programming is all about. It's learning to think in a way that's logical, step-by-step and deliberate. That learning is very valuable in itself."

"I have a number of students who never in their wildest dreams thought they would be able to do programming of any kind, but who then went on to take the second semester, went on to become my assistant, or do some programming project work. This basic knowledge changes their career focus and direction a little bit."

Professor Devin Asay is a lecturer in the Computers and Humanities department at Brigham Young University. For more information on his program and to view his complete curriculum using LiveCode, visit <http://livecode.byu.edu/indexgeneric.php>