



base camp  
</CODING ACADEMY>

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## Base Camp Coding Academy Newsletter

Spring is a busy time at Base Camp.

The class of 2018 is racing towards graduation in May. Their focus is being split between working hard on the core curriculum, and the reality of entering the workforce in three short months. Practically this can mean a morning spent in the classroom working on a large database project, and in the afternoon leaving the classroom to visit a technology company and sit down for a real job interview.



At the same time Base Camp is back in the area high schools working with teachers to build the class of 2019. Nominations have been coming in since early January, and we will begin interviewing these nominees in early March. If you are an education professional and know a rising senior with the maturity and work ethic to succeed at Base Camp, please nominate them by February 28<sup>th</sup>. (<https://basecampcodingacademy.org/nominate>)

### **Classroom Progress:**

The class passed through the second major assessment checkpoint at the end of December, with the Base Camp board spending a full day completing Enablement interviews and evaluations with each student. These checkpoints are crucial in determining how each student is progressing towards their technical and professional goals.

In this second year of the Base Camp pilot we are actively stress testing our systems based on lessons learned here as well as the feedback from companies where our graduates are working. Our goal is to provide an excellent software engineer, as well as an excellent team member and contributor to any team culture. We have raised expectations in all categories this year, and we are beyond proud of how the students are performing.

Following Python, HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, the class is now tackling Java using enterprise-grade tools like IntelliJ. They have recently finished a section on relational databases using SQL. These sections of the curriculum are brand new content for Base Camp; the class of 2018 completed last year's full curriculum in early January, allowing for four months of new content.

Student portfolios are available to view here: <https://basecampcodingacademy.org/student-portfolios>  
(These portfolios are constantly updated as students add their latest work; definitely worth checking in periodically.)

The Mentorship program is also in full swing, with students meeting weekly with an area software engineer to share their progress and struggles at Base Camp, and often the challenges they face outside of the classroom. These relationships provide encouragement and guidance that pays dividends in each student's sense of self worth and accomplishment, and we have found the relationships continue long after our program ends.

### **Classroom Visitors:**

Vince Jordan, the founder and CEO of Lobaki in Clarksdale, MS, brought a full virtual reality setup to the classroom to expose the class to yet another industry growing at a rate that is outpacing the supply of software engineers. Each student was able to experience a virtual reality program, and then sit down with Josiah Jordan, the CTO of Lobaki, to review the code of that same program. VR programs are now substituting for real world training for delivery drivers, assembly line workers, welders, and even medical students performing cadaver dissections. The future growth for this field is enormous, and Vince is doing amazing work in Clarksdale to spread awareness and expose Mississippi's youth to this technology.



Dr. Mustafa Altinakar, the director and research professor at the National Center for Computational Hydroscience and Engineering at the University of Mississippi, spent an afternoon in the classroom demonstrating their web-based, automated dam-break flood modeling and mapping tool. A model that can predict the impact of flood damage was an application for their coding skills that was brand new to the class. When Dr. Altinakar and his team of engineers took the class straight into the code underlying their model, the students were pleasantly surprised to find they could understand what they were looking at.

We have had a number of visitors to the classroom for quick pop-ins and words of encouragement. Thank you to:  
Dick Scruggs, a Base Camp Founding Sponsor  
Steve Russell, the Executive Director of the North Central Planning and Development District  
Our friends from Clarksdale, Jon Levingston and Steven Jossell  
Michael Burgevin and Erika Berry from the RePublic Schools

### **Field Trips:**

For the second year Base Camp was invited to the Speaker's Edge multi-day workshop at the University of Mississippi, where our students were paired with judges and graduate students for the workshops that culminate in a public speaking competition. This event in early January is one of the first opportunities for Base Camp students to swim in the wider world of business for an extended period of time, and they return to class with a new level of energy and focus. Thank you again to Randy Harrington for making Speaker's Edge happen, and for including Base Camp.

Four students attended the Clojure SYNC conference in New Orleans in mid-February. Please see details about that trip below.

Dr. Mustafa Altınakar invited two Base Camp students to visit the National Center for Computational Hydroscience and Engineering at the University of Mississippi. These students prepared for their visit with an elective project using the Google Maps and Street View API to get a better understanding of how geo-location data can integrate with a decision engine.

Ron and Misty Feder hosted and sponsored an etiquette lunch at Grit in Taylor, MS for the full Base Camp class. Misty worked with Grit to provide a lunch menu of tasty and messy dishes, and worked with the class on how to professionally navigate through a meal while on a job interview, or at dinner with coworkers or clients. Thank you to Ron and Misty for their generosity, and to Grit for opening specifically for this event.

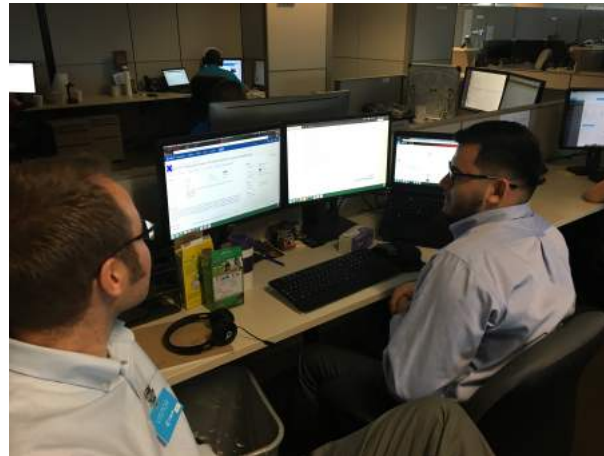


And every now and again the class takes a short walk to HeartBreak Coffee in Water Valley.



### **Class of 2017 Update:**

Glen Evans and Kagan Coughlin were in Jackson earlier this week, and had the chance to surprise several of our graduates at CSpire. Glen and Kagan have started working on Base Camp Phase 2.0, and nothing reinvigorates them for the mission of Base Camp like seeing these young professionals glowing in their new careers.



**Thank you:**

Base Camp exists because of the incredible group of volunteers and sponsors who choose to find a place in their busy schedule for us. Our students are the recipients of kindness and donated efforts of every sort, and the fall brought us yet another unexpected contribution in the form of Wade Meena. This young man structured his fall semester at Ole Miss to allow him to spend several hours, several days a week, in the classroom acting as a TA for the instructors, and a mentor for the students. We were sad to see him go, but know the MBA program at Millsaps will keep him busy, not to mention his work schedule with CSpire, and continuing to act as a mentor to the graduates who are working there.



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*Base Camp's Technical Director Nate Clark took four students to New Orleans in February for the Clojure SYNC conference. (Three Base Camp graduates form the class of 2017 also attended the conference in their professional capacity as software engineers at CSpire.) Nate kindly submitted the following debrief about the conference. Many thanks to Nate for making this trip happen, and to the organizers of the conference for donating tickets for the Base Camp students.*

Base Camp's trip to Clojure SYNC was primarily about one thing: community.

**--The world is big--**

The students learned more about the size and diversity of the software development community. McDonald's \*and\* the BTC grocery exist. Java \*and\* Clojure exist. Ole Miss \*and\* Base Camp exist. The students got to hear from a small but real community. They were able to get a sense that they don't need 100,000 jobs; they need one good job at a time. This is a big win for their sense of agency. Hearing about these opportunities has started plenty of conversations that start with "If I work really hard do you think I could..."

This diversity also applies to walks of life. Students spent time talking to developers from France, India, Germany, New York, and San Francisco. They listened (with more intent than I expected) to presentations from an MIT AI researcher, a New Orleans coding boot camp graduate, and the creator of ClojureScript.

**--Community is important and everpresent--**

The trip also reinforced the Base Camp community. Adam Tutor, Martin Guzman, and Keegan Faustin from last year's graduating class came to the conference. They gushed at the students about the importance of the people you're around and the value of the opportunity they have been given. Adam is a strong example of the value of expanding your community, and Martin and Keegan talked about the value of supportive community and online educational resources.

**--Community is greater than Code--**

A surprisingly small amount of the conference was about "coding." Overwhelmingly, the message sent was that people are more important than the tools. In the words of one of the speakers, "No one gives a damn about Clojure." How we organize and participate in teamwork dominates the difficulty in any practice. The first speaker

received a round of applause when his final slide said: "At scale, all problems are people problems." Later in the conference, another speaker corrected him with "All problems are people problems."



Martin Guzman (BCCA '17) and Keegan Faustin (BCCA '17) spent an hour in the hotel lobby chatting with Gerald Sussman, Professor of Electrical Engineering at MIT, the coauthor of *Structure and Interpretation of Computer Programs*, and inventor of the Scheme programming language.

