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New Website Helps Students Study Mandarin Online

By Cathy Dausman



Acalanes High School student Will Goldie.

Photo Cathy Dausman

Will Goldie loves a challenge. Recently, the Acalanes High School junior designed a website to help fellow students learn Mandarin.

When Goldie searched online for Chinese language study aids but did not find what he wanted, he designed one himself, calling it Hanyu Guru (<https://hanyu.guru/>). Hanyu means Mandarin, and guru (Sanskrit for "teacher") is a web domain name.

"I built Hanyu Guru after I realized how hard it was to study Mandarin vocabulary," Goldie explained. He said learning Mandarin requires students to study "hundreds of Chinese characters" each year. "I saw myself and others struggle to recall esoteric words that we had learned in years past, and decided to build a set of digital flashcards to help me maintain my knowledge," he said.

Goldie devoted at least 100 hours of his "spare time" beginning in early March to develop

the website which now contains 1,300 cards and follows the AHS Mandarin curriculum.

"Hanyu Guru is a full-stack website, built on the Node.js platform," Goldie explained, adding, "I used Express for the framework, and handled page templating with Jade."

Hanyu Guru is essentially a study guide built of giant flashcards and based on the honor system. The site's registered users can access it from their smartphone, tablet or desktop computer. Pages are divided into English, Pinyin (the pronunciation transcription), and Chinese characters.

Students view each section of the card consecutively and mark their answers right or wrong. The system hones in on incorrect answers and drills the users with frequent repetitions. The site was developed using free software where available; only the home page photo required a license fee.

Goldie recoups the site's nominal hosting fee by charging users \$15 per year. The site had its soft launch in mid-April.

"Will has computer coding skills not taught at school," Acalanes Digital Design teacher Susan Lane said proudly. "In 20 years of teaching I have not had a student with so much potential and skill; it's as if coding is a natural extension of his thoughts," she said.

Lane expected Goldie's project to gain additional recognition through its submission at Project LPIE, an alliance between Lafayette Partners in Education and Acalanes High School. Goldie placed third in his category. He and other Project LPIE winners were recognized May 16 at a presentation at Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Goldie first studied Mandarin when it was introduced as a foreign language elective for Stanley Middle School students; he is currently enrolled in a combination fourth/fifth year class at Acalanes taught by Ma-Chen Tu.

"Will really has the talent and he loves the language," she said. Tu explained that not a lot of students learn Mandarin, so this will be a "very, very useful" tool. She hopes to spend some time this summer helping Goldie fine-tune some of the Mandarin characters which Goldie says are still "a little off" in translation.

"I'm not a genius Mandarin student," Goldie said modestly, but those using Hanyu Guru might disagree, and reply in Mandarin: "Hen Hao (well done)!"

Goldie's computer-based Eagle Scout project was also featured in a recent edition of Lamorinda Weekly: <http://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue0801/The-13-New-Eagle-Scouts-of-Troop-204.html>.

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