

# Academia Meets Industry

*To the Editor:*

Reading Venkat Gudivada's article ("The Computing Profession at a Crossroads," May 2003, pp. 92, 90-91) reminded me how my BS in computer science failed to prepare me for the real world. When I completed my undergraduate studies, I was ready to take on the world like no new hire had done before. But less than a year after receiving my degree, I realized that I needed to take graduate courses to fulfill what I should have learned in my undergraduate studies.

My undergraduate courses trained me to think and approach problems scientifically, but I only knew how to use a computer for programming. In the real world, your boss puts you in front of a Unix workstation on your first day on the job and tells you to be ready to start your assignments at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow. The expectation is that you learned how to install your computer on the corporate LAN in your four-year undergraduate program. If these programs cut out the "well-rounded" course work, they could easily fit vital business-related courses into their curriculum.

Gudivada states, "Generally, academia doesn't value industry experience. Worse, industry simply ignores academic experience." This really depends on the college or university. The college where I received my BS was conservative and slow to adapt to industry change, whereas the university I attended for my master's degree was more progressive, adapting the curriculum to accommodate shifts in industry.

Today, in addition to understanding how to gain the most out of technology, succeeding in any business organi-



zation requires having knowledge about finances and other business-related topics. Whether in the scientific community or in the business world, the "almighty dollar" rules projects. If you can't produce positive returns on your technological investments, you can't expect to advance much further in your field.

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## STOPPING SPAM

*To the Editor:*

In "Group Considers Drastic Measures to Stop Spam" (News Briefs, July 2003, pp. 20-22), Linda Dailey Paulson reports that the Internet Research Task Force has joined the growing effort to stop spam by forming the Anti-Spam Research Group to take a long-term, multitiered approach to understanding, evaluating, and suggesting solutions to the problem. According to this report, blocking spam may require changing the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol to require authentication of header information.

However, contrary to the title of this news brief, making such a change in the SMTP is not a "drastic measure." This long overdue change is, however, contrary to the interests of many who

exploit the Internet at the expense of the rest of us.

We do not need more studies. We do not need more legislation. We do not need more sophisticated software to sort and delete spam. We need authentication of e-mail header information.

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## A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

*To the Editor:*

Bob Colwell's "Engineering Decisions" (Aug. 2003, pp. 9-11) was a breath of fresh air. Certainly, technical articles are the core content in a technical journal, but a computer society is about the people that make up that society and their relationships both with one another and with people outside their society.

I laughed out loud as I read about the insightful and helpful experiences that Colwell shared. Reading about experiences similar to my own is a real source of encouragement.

Decision making can be tough for highly analytical researchers because we get mired down in the details. We want the numbers to make the decision for us. For us, real decision making only happens when the numbers come out even.

It's refreshing to hear someone say that sometimes it's best to set aside the numbers and make (not discover) a decision even though we may not have all the information. Colwell's stories and practical tips and guidelines offer the hope of real change, better decision making, and improved communication with nonengineering people.

I would like to see more articles like this that deal with human issues related to computers and the people who make them to enrich our lives.

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