

CareerLine Q & A

by Jack Wilson



ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

Q: I'm graduating in June and am not meeting the people I should be. I have had two technical internships, been featured in a large business magazine, am president of a huge student organization, and have a letter of recommendation from the Dean of the school. My question is how do I get a hold of recruiters for the development areas I want to get into? I feel like I'm being ignored just because I go to a smaller / newer school.

A: Your basic question about getting hold of recruiters presumably refers to internal recruiters. Otherwise the external recruiters are listed in the Directory of Executive Recruiters (see "Working with Recruiters" on CareerLine page of ACM web site, <http://www.acm.org/membership/career/careerline.html>), and don't be put off by the word "Executive", as the ones who specialize in IT are so designated therein. You would want to look at those in the Contingency section.

Regarding the internal recruiters who are not coming to your school, don't let that dissuade you from approaching the targeted companies directly, preferably through their web site, almost all of which have an employment section. I think in your case that would be more efficient than writing them letters. And also don't be dissuaded by not finding your specific job listed there. There should be a way for you to communicate your qualifications and interests, irrespective of the specific job listings.

Q: I am really confused whether to get BS in Computer Science or Certificate in Computer Programming. I got BS in Mathematics (minored in CIS) a few years ago. I would like to get a job in the computer field, so I have been taking some classes at college to get BS in Computer Science.

However, I started to wonder if it's worth having two BS degrees. I found out that they also offer Certificate Programs in Programming, Database and Web Design. I am wondering if I should just seek a Certificate since I already have a BS in Mathematics.

When I try to look for a job (as a programmer, software engineer or data administrator), will it be better to have BS in Computer Science or a BS in Mathematics with a Certificate in

Programming?

A: My first reaction is that I think the specific degree, Math vs. CS, is less important than other qualifications in the overall scheme of things, especially the content of your part-time or summer jobs, internships, co-ops, or any other relevant work experience, however short or temporary. I do think there is a certain bias at the initial screening level, i.e., screening of resumes, in favor of the BSCS for the more technical IT jobs, but for the ones you described, I think the BS Math, with a minor in CIS, and a Certificate in Computer Programming would make you reasonably competitive at the entry level.

Q: In a recent interview, I was asked what certifications I had, and I was forced to say none. Where can I get some basic information about certification programs?

A: There is a web site (<http://gocertify.com>) that has a lot of helpful information on this subject, including a discussion board, a chat room, a swap shop on study materials, and a resource center with the various vendor courses of instruction. There is even a job search function with linkages to other sites.

Q. I'm currently planning to pursue a career in computing, but I would like to get some validation that I've made the right choice based on my personality and overall interests. Are there any web sites that I can access to test myself in this regard?

A. I'm aware of a couple, both hosted by universities, that enable a person to make a personal assessment of his/her career interests. One is "The Career Interests Game" (University of Missouri, www.missouri.edu), which organizes work into six general occupational themes. The other is "Career Search and the Internet Guide" (University of North Texas, www.unt.edu/coc), which contains a Personal Assessment linking you to 16 career sites. It also has more than 100 other links under Mega Career and Job Listing Sites.