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Careers as Computer Programming Professor

If you were to ask my mom about the job I’ve wanted to do since I was a little kid, she’d say, “a teacher.” She’d tell you I loved the idea of avoiding an office job, enjoyed working with kids, and was drawn to the perks of a teacher’s schedule—like summer vacations. But if you asked her about my other interests, she’d highlight my passion for computers and technology. One of her favorite stories is about how, at just five years old, I managed to fix our broken VCR so I could keep watching my favorite movies. These two passions—teaching and technology—have inspired me to pursue a career as a computer programming teacher.

I’m lucky enough to already have some experience in this career field. After earning a certification in Web Development, I worked at an afterschool program where I taught kids the basics of computer programming through video games. That role eventually led to a position as a teacher at a charter school in Pleasant Grove, Utah. After some time in that role, I decided to return to school to complete my bachelor’s degree. These experiences confirmed my passion for teaching and solidified my desire to pursue it as a long-term career.

Another reason I decided to return to college was my curiosity about advancing my career as an educator. While working as a middle school teacher, I noticed limited opportunities for growth. The path to roles like vice principal or principal was highly competitive, with dozens of teachers vying for just one position. This realization sparked the idea of becoming a college professor to ensure my career could continue to grow beyond what I had already achieved in my early twenties. While I loved teaching middle school students, the prospect of advancing my career and taking on new challenges is absolutely appealing.

Becoming a college professor requires significant effort and qualifications. According to an article by Mark J. Drozdowski on BestColleges.com, the process typically involves earning a bachelor’s degree, completing graduate school, passing necessary exams, and writing a dissertation. Additionally, having experience in your field of specialization is crucial. Real-world skills not only enhance your teaching but also help prepare students more effectively for their future careers.

Becoming a college professor offers several advantages over being a teacher. It provides greater opportunities for professional growth, a significantly higher salary, and the chance to work with college students, which can often be less challenging than working with younger children.

According to Glassdoor.com, the median salary for a Computer Science Professor across the nation is $201,000 per year, compared to $113,000 per year for a Computer Science Teacher. While these figures represent national averages, salaries can vary significantly by state. In Utah, where I plan to build my career, these salaries tend to be $20,000 to $30,000 lower than the national average. Even so, the salary of a professor remains substantially higher than that of a teacher, making it an appealing career choice.

Being a professor comes with several additional benefits. According to the Indeed.com Editorial Team, professors often have the ability to create flexible schedules. While certain classes or meetings may need to be held at specific times, professors generally enjoy more free time compared to many other professions. Indeed also highlights that professors with tenure benefit from significant job security, allowing them to worry less about job stability than those in many other careers.

However, there are some drawbacks to being a professor. James Mathew Alston points out that “someone with the level of skill and experience that a professor has could almost certainly earn much more money in the private sector.” This is especially true in the field of Computer Science, where many high-paying opportunities exist. Transitioning to a professor role often requires taking a pay cut for those coming from lucrative positions as computer programmers. Additionally, the high level of competition for academic jobs is another significant challenge of pursuing a career as a professor.

Beyond the material benefits, being a professor offers deeply rewarding experiences. From my time as an educator, I can attest to the immense satisfaction of watching students grow and learn. I always enjoyed moments when students say things like, “Oh! That actually makes sense now!” or “Wait, I thought this would be way harder!” Seeing their excitement as they grasp new concepts and express themselves through their software projects is an incredibly fulfilling part of teaching.

While seeing students succeed is incredibly rewarding, there are also significant challenges when students fail to reach their potential or struggle to grasp the concepts being taught. In many cases, students may come to class distracted or disengaged, which can hinder their ability to learn. As an article on maketeachingeasy.com notes, “Students often come to you hungry, tired, angry, troubled, sad, and generally unprepared to learn.” These issues can be particularly challenging for educators, as they affect a student's readiness to engage with the material. Although such challenges are less common when teaching adults compared to children, they can still arise, especially in a college setting. Adult students, despite having more life experience, may face external pressures such as balancing work, family, and education, which can negatively impact their focus and motivation. These personal and emotional obstacles can make the teaching process more difficult and require professors to adapt their approach to meet the needs of students who may not be fully present in the classroom.

In addition to the challenges of being a professor, specializing in computer programming requires continuous self-education. Technology is constantly evolving, and with it, the skills needed to effectively use it. Staying current with new programming languages, libraries, and other technological tools is essential to properly preparing students for careers as computer programmers. It can also be beneficial to specialize in a specific area of computer programming, such as Web Development, Integrated Systems, or Large Language Models. Having specialized skills not only helps you stand out from the competition but also enhances your ability to prepare students more effectively.

Being a college professor can be both an extremely satisfying and a highly challenging career. Constantly learning new skills, managing uncooperative students, and earning a lower salary than in some other fields can be difficult. However, the rewards—such as seeing students succeed, enjoying a flexible schedule, and having career security—make it a fulfilling profession. Despite the challenges, the benefits make the prospect of becoming a Computer Science Professor particularly appealing to me. My experience as a teacher, combined with the advantages of teaching college students, makes the idea of working in postsecondary education exciting. I can see myself finding long-term satisfaction in the role of a college professor.

Works Cited

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