

A Discussion: Professionalism in CS

Professionals are the women and men accredited to practice learned occupations such as medical care and education; providing what are considered to be essential services for the public. However, due to their nature the provision of these services also creates public vulnerability. The professionalization of the field of computer science would require the generalized belief that the services rendered are essential to the public's wellbeing, as well as a strong demand for legislated regulation based on abuses of knowledge and power by those providing services in the field of computer science.

Professional fields have four characteristics in common; they are associated with a great body of specialized knowledge; accreditation requires training in the application of said knowledge; their standards are enforced at a high level by some regulatory body; and accredited members must recognize their ethical responsibilities to the public [1]. There exist many learned occupations which require training and the application of specialized knowledge however, professionals are obligated to put the wellbeing of the public above all else. Empowered through legislation, regulatory bodies set forth contingencies to control the behavior of professionals imposing ethical guidelines, best-work practices, and restrictions, securing compliance or enforcing the professional and/or legal consequences of noncompliance [2].

Culturally, ethical guidelines refer to behaviors that have evolved as essential factors in maintaining a culture's health and encouraging prosperity [3]. The professional fields have provided humankind with knowledge and services that are invaluable, such as wide-spread literacy, and the near doubling of human life expectancy in the last century, however, to quote Bill Parker, "With great power, comes great responsibility" [4]. From an ethical viewpoint, the history of the professional fields paints a severely contrasting story, depicting many accomplishments and interventions promoting the good of humankind alongside many bleak and disheartening acts of ignorance, negligence, and outright abuses of power. Professionals such as Doctors and Lawyers have a significant, specified knowledge and responsibilities that equate to vast disparities of power between them and those who are to receive their services. In the doctor-patient relationship for example, there exists a severe imbalance of power. As sick or injured individual, you must divulge personal, private information to a medical professional, as well as trusting their judgment and abilities in performing medical procedures; entering a situation of extreme vulnerability or receive no medical care at all. Professionals are those who

have agreed to protect and empower the public by practicing their occupation within a set of strict rules and regulations [5].

The field of computer science is agreeably a learned occupation requiring the application of specialized knowledge; however, computer scientists have no best-work practices, or ethical code; no enforcement of specialized legislation upon us by some organization regulated for the best interests of the public. As the professionalization of certain fields appears to be a natural social development occurring in order to the safeguard public's wellbeing [3], the professionalization of computer science would require both the general belief that those practicing the field provide a service that is essential for the good of the public, as well as a significant breadth of evidence outlining the vulnerability of and damage to the public's wellbeing if individuals are allowed to continue practicing without regulation. The establishment of a code of ethics, formal schools, examinations, and licensing, as well as some regulatory body would be necessary in order for the field to be formally professionalized [1].

In conclusion, rules and regulations are imposed upon certain fields if and when required for the health, safety, and prosperity of the public. Those we deem professionals have agreed to place their responsibilities to the public interest, over and above their own.

Works Cited

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