

# Letter from the Editor

## More on Certification and College Degrees

**Robert G. Brookshire**

I recently received this note in my e-mail inbox. I have edited it only slightly, and provide my response below.

Dear Dr. Brookshire,

Hello, I am currently a student enrolled at [a community college], and enrolled in the general studies curriculum. I plan on going into a networking related job, and my main goal would be to work as a networking consultant for Cisco Systems. I recently had a casual meeting with one of their consultants, and he informed me that a college degree is not required for most networking related jobs today. He recommended that I just work towards getting certifications related to this field, but I have heard from other people that a B.S. is required for jobs in this field. I have also searched on a few popular job search engines, and all of the results require that I at least have a B.S. degree. From all of this information, I am really not sure which path would be best for me. Any insight to my predicament would be greatly appreciated. I am anxiously awaiting your reply. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
[Ambitious Student]

Dear Ambitious,

To me, the question is not so much what training and qualifications you need to get a job with Cisco Systems, the question is, what training and qualifications do you need to build a rewarding career? You should be thinking not just what you would like your first job to be, but about what you would like to be doing five, ten, or more years in the future. If your five-to-ten year plans include being a manager or junior executive, certifications are not enough. You will need the training in

writing, analysis, communications, general problem solving, and human interaction that a bachelor's degree from a four-year college provides.

It can be very frustrating for a student who is interested in technology, who has good skills, and who, perhaps, is not very intrigued by the English, history, political science, or other general studies courses he or she is required to take. You want to be out there earning a living in a dynamic and rewarding field instead of being stuck in a classroom. Some of your friends from high school may be receiving good wages for positions in firms that do not require college degrees.

It's hard to believe, but I promise that things will look very different to you in a few short years. Your friends will have the same, or similar, positions, while you will be on track to greater and greater achievement. Those with only high school diplomas will find that the technical skills they have acquired are suddenly in less demand as technology changes or businesses alter their strategies. Front-line, entry-level positions are often the first ones cut as companies downsize or the economy falters. Workers who have both bachelor's degrees and good technical skills are retained longer, and given greater responsibilities, because they are more flexible and adaptable.

You will also benefit from the additional maturity you acquire along with your additional years of study. Recently, our university explored creating a program in which students could earn bachelor's degrees in only three years. Our business advisory council was unanimously opposed to this idea. Council members told us that they did not want younger graduates, even if they had the same general education and

*Robert G. Brookshire is Professor and Director of the Computer Information Systems and Operations Management Program in the College of Business at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.*

technical skills. They wanted students who had good judgment developed through maturity and the experience of an additional year of schooling.

Even firms who administer certification exams acknowledge that college degrees are more important than certifications. A recent web poll by CompTIA, who gives the A+ certification exam, showed that about half the respondents considered certifications less valuable than a college degree, while only about 18% said certification was more valuable, and 32% said they were as valuable.

Yes, it is possible to get a position with a technical firm based on certifications of your technical skills. But you will be a more valuable employee, have a brighter future, and be a better person, if you take the extra time to earn a bachelor's degree. Technical certifications equip you for a job, but a bachelor's degree equips you for life.

### **About This Issue**

Frequent contributor Sheila Smith presents us with a complex model of educational performance derived from social cognitive career theory. Her model shows the relationships among past academic performance, computer self-efficacy beliefs, student expectations about the course, and their academic goals, all acting as direct or indirect predictors of current academic performance. Her analysis suggests that instructors who measure student self-efficacy, expectations, and goals can use this information to provide a more rewarding academic experience.

Kenneth Bandy and Jon Young describe the results of a study comparing the effects of group support systems, chat software, and oral communication on the communication style and learning of problem-solving teams. Group support systems users had more complex communications than chat system users. Group members provided with a priming agent to direct their thinking showed a shift in learning style. This suggests that well-designed support documents may improve performance in computer supported collaborative work groups.

In the "Making a Difference" section, Ken Williamson, Newell Wright, and I describe the interdisciplinary program in e-commerce that we developed at James Madison University. Although the current economic woes of the Commonwealth of Virginia have prevented us from implementing this program, we have been able to create an e-commerce concentration in the marketing program which reflects many of the ideas expressed in our article. We hope that this curriculum will stimulate as much discussion and innovation at other schools as it has at ours.

Marilyn Chalupa reviews the much-anticipated second edition of *End-User Information Systems: Implementing Individual and Work Group Technologies*, by Betty Regan and Bridget O'Connor. Marilyn describes it as "cutting edge, 21st-century, dynamic, conceptual, and practical." She recommends it for several courses in the OEIS curriculum, and also as a comprehensive reference work.

### GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, formerly known as the *Office System Research Journal*, publishes articles related to the field of organizational and end-user information systems (OEIS). Submissions may present the results of research in the discipline, deal with research methodologies and data treatment techniques, or describe research or experiences related to instruction in the discipline. For the “Making a Difference” section, manuscripts that discuss our theoretical bases or describe an innovative policy, procedure, method, technique, or practice that has potential benefit for systems professionals and/or educators and technology trainers are encouraged. We also accept reviews of current books—both academic and popular presses—related to OEIS. All submissions are submitted to a blind review process.

Authors should follow the style described for manuscripts and bibliographies in the Fifth Edition (2001) of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; however, tables should be single-spaced. Tables and figures should be attached at the end of the manuscript, one table or figure per page. Authors should not be identified anywhere in the manuscript. Submit four copies of the manuscript. On the original copy, include a cover page with author name, title, organizational affiliation, telephone number, and email address. A 100-150 word abstract of the manuscript should be included with the manuscript.

Manuscripts should be submitted exclusively to the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. Previously published manuscripts are not acceptable. Manuscripts are selected through a blind review process involving the editors and referees selected from the Review Board. The Journal is indexed in the *Business Education Index*, the *Current Index to Journals in Education*, and the *Computer Literature Index*.

Upon acceptance, a digital copy in Microsoft Word format will be required. Send four copies of your manuscript to Robert G. Brookshire, Editor, *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, James Madison University, Computer Information Systems & Management Program, MSC 0202, Harrisonburg, VA 22807.

Material published as part of this journal, either on-line or in print, is copyrighted by the Organizational Systems Research Association. Permission to make digital or paper copy of part or all of these works for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that the copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage AND that copies 1) bear this notice in full and 2) give the full citation. It is permissible to abstract these works so long as credit is given. To copy in all other cases or to republish or to post on a server or to redistribute to lists requires specific permission and payment of a fee. Contact Donna Everett, [d.everett@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:d.everett@moreheadstate.edu) to request redistribution permission.