

Invited Editorial Academic Guarantees

Chester Delaney

Qualifying college and graduate students to pass certification exams in various technical specialties is a good idea. It would benefit the student, the school, and the business world.

- ◆ Prepping the student to pass the exams would serve the student superbly. We are, after all, talking about making sure people have some of the skills that the knowledge worker of today needs. Equipping graduates of our schools with these skills positions them well for the workplace. Preparing students to be certified as having the skills should provide them with a welcome level of confidence in taking the exams and in moving into the world of work in general.
- ◆ A school-backed guarantee that a student is certifiable (ahem!) will doubtless help that student land a job, probably sooner than otherwise would happen. Such a guarantee would give the student a leg up on competitors. Prompt entry into a real job gets a graduate productive and surely adds to the individual's feeling of competence. It even builds our economy a tiny bit each time it happens.
- ◆ Ensuring that graduates are prepared to pass certification processes provides the business world with better raw material. Talent coming into the organizational pipeline with certifiable technical skills is a genuine plus for those doing the organization's recruiting and hiring. Needless to say, the typical company does not want all its recruits to be Certified Novell Engineers. But a certain number of these kinds of skills are needed and a guarantee of their presence a major benefit. Having a school's stamp of approval on an individual's readiness for certification will make the candidate selection process simpler.

- ◆ The benefits to a school are potentially great. Indeed, a school will be in an enviable position if it earns a reputation as an institution that delivers on its promises of certifiability. It will be sought out by recruiters. Its graduates will have an edge in the hiring marketplace. Its reputation will enhance its own appeal both to potential students looking for a school and to organizations looking for a reliable source of potential hires.

I for one am delighted with the prospect of a school guaranteeing the presence of certain skills in its graduates.

With this bit in our teeth, dare we hope that the same notion might be applied to issues far more important than network management? If we are going to be blessed with guarantees of knowledge acquisition, let's have the promises focus on issues that *really* matter. Not that Novell Administration doesn't. It may, after all, pay the mortgage and put food on the table. But let's expand the circle of guarantees so that the truly important—as opposed to the merely urgent—get included.

How about guaranteeing that a college graduate has plumbed enough:

1. History to know that bullies are best faced down, but that revenge is a pointless, bloodthirsty cycle, and that real courage means breaking the cycle.
2. Language and literature to appreciate the beauty of one's own and the value of others.

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3. Philosophy to realize that the search for truth is *the* human pursuit, that it leads to the achievement of meaning at its best, that truth itself is never complete, always contextual, and cannot be replaced with mere certainty.

These are high-flown topics, admittedly not suitable for fill-in-the-circle-with-No2 pencil tests. They would require time and discussion and faculty judgement. They most certainly represent the writer's personal worldview, that of a thankful liberal arts graduate.

How about two down and dirty, totally pragmatic academic guarantees?

- ◆ That graduation from college or high school means the graduate can read, write, do math, and think critically at a level of competence

appropriate for the school from which graduation has taken place?

- ◆ That graduates have the skill of touch-typing. Keyboarding is the more *au courant* term. Whatever we call it, fluent typing—as opposed to hunting and pecking—is definitely an enabling skill these days. Not glamorous, not sexy, but fundamentally important and growing more so all the time—*pace* voice actuation.

My experience in business says we should welcome with open arms the readiness of schools to guarantee that their students graduate with certain skills. Let's think big and bold about which skills we really want guaranteed.

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