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Dr. A. Joseph Turner: Future International Direction, Professional Credentialing, Computer Science Programs, Past Lessons/Stories.

This is the next interview in the [continuing series](#) of Computing Canada's (CC) [Blogged Down](#) (BD) which is featured here "first" in the Canadian IT Managers (CIM) forum.



In this blog series, we continue our talk with Dr. A. Joseph Turner: internationally regarded computer science authority and educator; Professor Emeritus, Clemson. The blog series started on Friday November 3rd with Dr. Turner's profile.

Stephen: You are a representative to IFIP (International Federation for Information Processing) and IFIP Technical Committee 3 (Education), and a member of the IFIP Council. As the ACM representative for the IFIP General Assembly, you attended the session in August. What were the highlights from this session? What do you see as the future for?

Joe: The highlight of the August session was the adoption of a strategic direction for IFIP. The most immediate effect of this new direction will likely be IFIP's involvement in coordinating various programs for professional credentialing from IFIP member societies. IFIP is uniquely positioned to serve as the apolitical international body for such coordinating roles and in similar roles as a respected source of unbiased information for professionals, governments, and the public. The new directions will focus more on how to fulfill these international roles than in the past, where the emphasis has been on the international exchange of information, mostly by researchers. However, IFIP's Technical Committees will continue to serve as important conduits for computing researchers and other professionals in various countries to exchange information and to work together to solve current problems.

Stephen: You have served more than twenty times as a consultant and on evaluation teams for computer science programs at the undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels both for individual institutions and for state agencies. What surprised you? Can you share some of your most notable experiences?

Joe: Many of these experiences happened during the 1980s when many institutions were trying to develop computer science programs and wanted outside help in understanding what was needed regarding a curriculum, staffing, and facilities. In most cases institutions were starting computer science programs because CS programs were becoming very popular and enrolled lots of students. But PhD faculty in CS were very difficult to hire, so developing new programs was not easy. I don't know that it really was a surprise, but it was interesting how often an institution wanted to develop a good program without putting any resources into it. In some cases, administrators couldn't understand why faculty in areas of declining enrollment couldn't just teach computer science, but then there was not much appreciation then that computer science was more than learning to program.

Another interesting observation was that the same problems occurred in many different institutions. For example, the question as to where a Department of Computer Science should be administratively located often came up, and there was no common answer. In some cases, a college/school of engineering worked best, but in others the best place was in a college of science or arts and science and in some a college of business even worked well. It all had to do with the local environment, the history and culture of the institution, and the feelings of the faculty involved.

Stephen: You have a long history with the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) dating back to 1968 holding many senior positions within the ACM. Which ones are you most proud of and what lessons do you wish to share? What role do you think the ACM will play in the future?

Joe: I am most proud of my work with the ACM Education Board that led to the "Denning report" on Computing as a Discipline during the 1980s, and the follow-on work in a joint ACM/IEEE-CS task force that led to the first joint curriculum recommendations in 1991. This work collectively reshaped much of the thinking about the computing discipline(s) and established important collaboration between the ACM and the IEEE-CS that still continues and in fact has expanded to include the AIS as well. There was a lot of criticism for the 1991 curriculum report, but given the obstacles that it had to overcome and its objective to encourage innovative thinking about computing programs, I consider it a big success. The Denning report has continued to be very influential. The success of these efforts was primarily due to the excellent people who worked on the task forces, but I played a significant role in instigating and fostering the work.

Stephen: Throughout your long history of successes, what do you consider your most notable and memorable roles [and for what reasons]?

Joe: One of these was mentioned in my work with ACM in the previous question. I remember my discussions with influential members of the IEEE-CS that led to forming the cooperative curriculum efforts that continue today, and also much bridge building and cajoling behind the scenes during the initial joint task force to overcome problems and issues that seriously threatened to derail the cooperative effort.



John Osley Director Community Evangelism
Microsoft Canada



Archives

- December 2006 (2)
- November 2006 (18)
- October 2006 (16)
- September 2006 (23)
- August 2006 (28)
- July 2006 (26)
- June 2006 (38)
- May 2006 (28)
- April 2006 (30)
- March 2006 (38)
- February 2006 (41)
- January 2006 (28)
- December 2005 (28)
- November 2005 (8)
- October 2005 (8)
- September 2005 (2)
- August 2005 (7)

I also would have to include my role as the founding Head of the Department of Computer Science at Clemson to be a pivotal and memorable one. I began this position as an untenured Assistant Professor, something that I would strongly recommend against. But it all worked out and with the help of excellent faculty members and good administrative support we built a good department in the face of significant obstacles. The most satisfying part is that the department has continued to grow and improve since I stepped down as Department Head (but this might be a result of my departure rather than my tenure!).

My experience in developing computer science accreditation also is memorable. Again, the success of the effort was due to the many excellent and dedicated people who made it work. I am proud to have served as Chair of the Computer Science Accreditation Commission and as President of the Computing Sciences Accreditation Board during the early development of computing accreditation in the US.

Stephen: Please share some stories from your work?

Joe: One of my early experiences in Dubai was when I made the first assignment and returned the first set of graded work to the students. I was somewhat surprised when many of the students first tried to negotiate for a later due date after not completing the work on time, and then tried to negotiate for a higher grade. I had not been there long enough to realize that negotiation (bargaining) is a part of their culture, but fortunately did not react the way I might have had the same situation occurred with students in the US. Instead, I clearly explained the procedures and rules regarding due dates and grades, and had no problems after that. This also illustrated a part of their culture: acceptance of rules and decisions made after discussion with persons of authority.

Another interesting/amazing thing from Dubai was to observe the speed with which things could be done when decreed by the appropriate persons. This applied not only to physical structures such as buildings and roads, but also to such things as universities. Zayed University went from concept to conducting classes with its first cohort in less than two years. The early years often seemed like building an airplane as it was taking off and finishing while it was flying, but it was interesting to see what could be accomplished under the direction of officials who couldn't understand why things such as hiring faculty and staff and developing curricula and course syllabi couldn't be finished by tomorrow (or even today).

In the next blog, Joe will talk about the top software issues that need to be addressed; future trends to watch; top recommended resources; globalization and one size doesn't fit all; the shortage of IT skills—more input from business to academia; globalization and the harmonization of credentials.

I also encourage you to share your thoughts here on these interviews or send me an e-mail at sibaraki@cips.ca.

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Thank you,
Stephen Ibaraki, [FCIPS](#), I.S.P.

Posted: Thursday, November 09, 2006 4:41 PM by [cdnitmgr](#)
Filed under: [Stephen Ibaraki](#), [Interviews](#), [Guest Bloggers](#), [CC Blogged Down](#)

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