



JENNIFER SMITH
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Kids, step up. IT is calling.

“There are all kinds of myths around a career in IT... offshoring, the dot.com bust; everybody seems to know someone who got laid off, but if you look at figures, employment in IT is relatively stable and has even increased a bit,” reports Bob Horton, of the UW Whitewater Management Computer Systems Business Consortium. “If everybody thinks IT is about to take off, that’s where the concern comes in. We see projections of IT demand, 5 to 10% projected job increase in the IT field, and a decrease in supply. You don’t have to be much of an economist to see there will be real issues.”

Kate Kaiser, Marquette University management faculty and IT professor, agrees. “It’s a big problem to track and there aren’t reliable statistics,” she said. “All I know is, when I look into my classrooms, there are fewer students.” In 2001, for example, Kaiser had 48 students in her fall systems analysis course; in 2004, she had 12. “The numbers are down 50–75% in many places, but demand in the marketplace is up. It’s a vicious circle.”

Media attention magnifying the impact of offshoring, said Kaiser, may have something to do with this, but she points to the fact that only roughly 3% of IT has been outsourced over the past few years. “These numbers [the media show] don’t take into account that IT work is up everywhere.”

And while she acknowledges that IT jobs were down from 2001 to 2004, “This is the only period this happened,” she noted. “Therefore, kids are encouraged not to sign up as majors.” Because it takes at least a year and a half to complete the required courses, this means a lag in IT staffing levels, even if the message is being spread that the industry can support a workforce.

Jim Rice (IT Association of WI) sees the same problem – and is working with

Horton, Kaiser and others to craft alternative recruitment strategies. “Momentum is building, but still fragmented,” said Rice. “We’re still in the preliminary stages, but what we’re trying to do is think outside the box to attract students at the middle- and high school levels to the stem disciplines” [math, science and engineering].

“Young adults need to take responsibility for all the things they enjoy today: popping into a car, picking up a cell phone, turning on the TV or internet. It’s all deep technological infrastructure and they need to step up and go through the rigors of understanding it and finding it fun,” said Rice.

“There’s a whole bunch of us retiring in 10 years and who’s going to support it? How do we get kids excited about taking on the responsibility of the future?” Rice asked.

One effort to address the issue is a trade show for IT recruiting. Although IT career events have been happening for years, Rice and Horton believe talking at students for three hours about an IT career is not the best motivator. “As far as I know, this has never been done,” said Horton. “We bring in students, instructors, counselors and parents and have companies show the technology they deal with, how it works, what challenges they’re facing in the next few years.”

Although no date is set, Horton and Rice are working with the DoC, setting their sights on a possible show in Fall 2007. Meanwhile, Horton is working with Quad Graphics to schedule smaller test-run trade shows in the region. “The emphasis is giving information, not recruiting,” said Horton. “The focus of this is not talking *at*, just to show how exciting IT is in Wisconsin.”

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