To the Editor:

Sorel Reisman’s Ivory Tower column (“Higher Education’s Role in Job Training,” IT Professional, Jan.-Feb. 2004) correctly pointed out that “The dot-com collapse has brought a glut of ‘IS/IT professionals’ most of whom are laid-off workers who took certification training moments before they applied for those high-paying IT jobs.” However, a lot of these so-called IS/IT professionals could not stay in the IT field anymore—most were among the first to be laid off when the dot-com bubble burst.

The invisible hand of the market is supply and demand. Several years ago, while IT was still booming, there was high demand for simple tasks, ranging from setting up computers or LANs, to installing databases. Despite the lack of significant systematic training in terms of computing logic and theory, people could easily land a job as a “systems engineer” or “database administrator” by having a specific vendor’s certification(s).

When I read the study guides for those certificate examinations, taking databases as an example, I found most of them explained relational databases in a few pages. Concepts like decomposition and synthesis, and dependency minimization and decomposition were never touched, not to mention how to design an effective database or how to optimize one. As technologies become more sophisticated, it is natural that people without a theoretical background will not easily troubleshoot complicated computing problems, a task in which induction is extremely important.

Universities might not be able to teach the most up-to-date technologies but, nevertheless,
they are places to build up our knowledge foundation as a result of

- thinking of the big picture,
- adapting to new technologies quickly, and
- (most important of all) an induction into ways to do the job effectively.

A university degree is the foundation. Professional qualifications and industrial certifications are part of our profession’s lifelong studies. In the ever-changing IT field, we must be creative and productive, updating our knowledge and skills constantly with support from what we have learned at the university. Just as industrialist Henry Ford said, “Before everything else, getting ready is the secret to success.”

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LEARNING HOW TO THINK
To the Editor:
Thank you for an excellent summary of the pressures facing higher education (“Higher Education’s Role in Job Training,” IT Professional, Jan.–Feb. 2004). I agree that a BS is about education and learning how to think—not how to use the latest and greatest IS/IT equipment.

If business really wants productivity, then they want IT people out of vocational colleges, such as ITT and Heald. The question to ask business is then, if what you want is available from vocational schools, why are you pressuring universities to do the job? Is there something missing in vocational-school graduates that you have from someone with a BS?

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LOOKING FOR AN ENGINEERING MINDSET
To the Editor:
The traditional school of thought that the primary qualification of new employees was their solid undergrad-

We welcome your letters. Send them to Letters, IT Professional, PO Box 3014, 10662 Los Vaqueros Cir., Los Alamitos, CA 90720-1314; fax (714) 821-4010; itpro@computer.org. Letters are subject to editing for style, clarity, and length.