Problem-Solving Skills Amiss

I’ve just read the recent opinion piece in *IT Pro* about IT graduates (“Today’s IT Graduates Not Quite Measuring Up,” The Ivory Tower, July-Aug. 2006, pp. 63-64).

My experience across my last few jobs is that it’s not just a problem with the softer courses called “Information Systems” or “IT and Business”—it’s also a problem with many computer science and software engineering courses. However, the problems with the two groups tend to be subtly different.

The IS/IT graduates (as author Sorel Reisman points out) are missing a fundamental technical core of knowledge. This is replaced with seemingly random business and management options rather than rigorous problem solving, modeling, communication, or other courses that graduates will need. (The number of IS grads who can’t create simple syntactically correct UML models is horrifying).

Many computer science graduates, on the other hand, appear to have technical knowledge, but tend to have various irrelevant bits of technical knowledge about today’s “hot” technologies as perceived from academia (such as ASP.Net or Java web services). What they’re often missing is enough fundamental theoretical and problem-solving knowledge to allow them to adapt and grow over time as the technology environment changes.

I must stress that this situation isn’t the graduates’ fault, but it does cause me concern for the future. It would be ironic, having finally managed to move away from the “any degree will do, we’ll train you” situation, to one where we actually have relevant degrees, to then have to go back to that previous situation because of the transient value of the content of the degrees!

Eoin Woods
Technical architect
London
www.eoinwoods.info

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