Debunking the Geek Stereotype with Software Engineering Education

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Abstract: Alas, the stereotypical software engineer is depicted as spending long hours working alone in a cubicle filled with empty pizza boxes and soda cans. This "work alone" stereotype can dissuade talented individuals from considering a career in the information technology industry. As educators, we often reinforce this "geek" stereotype early in the curriculum by giving students lengthy assignments and forcing them to work alone — collaborating is cheating! However in industry, software engineers actually spend a large part of their day collaborating with teammates — the "work alone" stereotype is largely unfounded. Research results indicate that through providing students with more collaborative experiences, we could retain more students without compromising their individual learning and these students would be better prepared to be collaborative team members.

Bio: Laurie Williams is an Assistant Professor at North Carolina State University. She received her undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering from Lehigh University. She also received an MBA from Duke University and a Ph.D. in Computer Science from the University of Utah. Prior to returning to academia to obtain her Ph.D., she worked in industry, for IBM, for nine years. Dr. Williams research interests include empirical studies of agile software development including the pair programming and test-driven development practices, software reliability, software testing, and software security.