DEPARTMENT OF SOFTWARE ENGINEERING

FRESHMAN SEMINAR 4010-101

WEEK 10

INTERVIEW PAPER

1. Pre-Interview Thoughts

To say that I don't know what to expect is a bit of an understatement. During these first 10 weeks I've been making sure that this is the major that I want, I mean I'm making a decision that will determine what I do for at least the next fifteen years of my life, that's equivalent to the part of my life I remember, so I'd like to not mess up now.

This started by just getting to know some of the upperclassmen, and hear their thoughts, and I've heard some mixed reviews. Most people seem very enthusiastic, but there is defiantly a bit of bitterness deep down.

So to hear from someone that is not only in the field, but has been there for a few years would be best indication of if this was the field for me or not.

2. Interview

The first thing I noticed was the incredibly quick and kind response I got from ▇▇▇▇, here I was a complete stranger to him, and he was willing to take time out of his day to be interviewed, a good sign.

▇▇▇▇ said that he works for IBM in Massachusetts, and has been there for a little bit longer than a year an a half, even though he lives more than forty minutes away by car. I was a little impressed at that kind of dedication to his company, which in turn makes me think that they take good care of him, another definite plus.

He went into describing his work, which turned out to be very different than what I thought it would be. ▇▇▇▇ started by saying that he works within the Lotus software group, which has about 12 people employed in America, and around 15 in Ireland. He specifically has programmed for several of the projects that the Lotus group is in charge of, things like file sharing, security, and user management. Specifically he is working with security right now, trying to make a more secure way of identifying users with only using common standards. But as far as I can tell his specific job keeps him bouncing around so many projects that while he does leave impacts on them, he is not a major programmer for any of them.

This was a major revolution to me, the idea that he wasn't bound to any one project for long periods of time is wonderful. At this point I was more or less positive that this was the perfect major for me, as I love to program, but the constant change would keep things interesting.

▇▇▇▇ continued by saying that his work in security was his favorite for a multitude of reasons. First because he has spent more time on it, he has left the biggest impact on it. And secondly because since this is so close to the cutting edge

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many other companies are researching the technologies that he is creating, companies like Google and Microsoft.

This seems very exciting to me, being able to push the edge of technology, and to have others researching the ground I've already covered. Maybe this is just me but that seems so much cooler than just revamping older systems, or creating entertainment, this is making history!

At this point I inquired what kind of programming languages ███ used, to see what was really being used, and if I was learning anything about it. To my surprise I had very little knowledge about what to expect in the real world.

███ said he does a lot of work with Java, which I have a rudimentary knowledge of, as well as PHP, Formula, and LotusScript. Now I've at least heard of PHP and LotusScript, the former from the internet, and the latter mostly from the SSE, but Formula is foreign to me. So I will be looking into it in the very near future, if for no other reason than curiosity.

Something else of note was that he did not make any mention of Python. While this was not overwhelming surprising, I was slightly disappointed that I have to spend 2 quarters of schooling learning something that is not practiced in the field. Maybe it's used somewhere else, I've heard that it happens every now and then, but this was still a bit of a slap in the face.

After my realization, ███ continued talking a bit about Formula saying that it was his favorite language for no other reason than that it was different, and Java gets old after a while.

So I see the bitterness in him to, there's not a lot, but it is there. Any single language gets old and boring after a while, well that tells me a lot. Like that I'm probably going to constantly be trying got learn new languages just to change things up. This in turn means that potentially there will always be something new to do, but I would have to seek it out, it won't come to me. This is not something I am opposed to, whilst I might complain about doing it at the time, I will enjoy it in the long run, so I won't call this a bonus or a penalty.

But even after saying that Java can get boring ███ says that on the whole he's not burnt out on coding, like many SE's. He even likes going through other people code, because he learns from it in ways many would not think of. For he not only learns good techniques, but also what to avoid while coding.

This is the best news yet, sure he even says that he's not always around code, but this is at least some hope that it's not as bad as some people make it out to be.

After the shining ray of hope, ███ elaborated on why he is not around code all that much. He said that he is more involved with the life cycle of the project as a whole more than just the individual parts. This involves more research and

meeting than coding. This in turn makes both communication, and multitasking skills very important to the job. Mainly to help coordinate the different teams that are all working on the same project.

This is fantastic news, I do some of my best work with other people, I was already considering a minor in communications to do just that, and here ▮▮▮▮ is telling me that what I want to do is very possible. And not only possible, but that companies employ people to do just that. This major is just looking up.

But the last thing ▮▮▮▮ told me was easily the best, when asked how his day is spent he leads with "First step is to decide whether to work from home or office."

To say that IBM is willing to let him just do work from home says a lot about how much they care about him, it's no wonder why he lives so far away from work now. I still find it incredible that IBM would care so much about any one employee, and I hope that all SE's are treated with the same care.

Te rest of ▮▮▮▮ day is more or less spent in meetings, planning what will get done, and what has been accomplished thus far.

Again working with people, not a negative.

3. Post Interview Thoughts

All in all, I've found that this interview has only confirmed that this is the major I should be in, and that I've made the right choice.

▮▮▮▮ showed me the negatives associated with the career, and there not all that bad. I was seriously worried about burning out, but I can see that is not as big a problem as I originally worried about. And I hadn't even considered that I might have to continually learn in order to change things up, but even that can be enjoyable.

On top of all that, the benefits vastly outweigh the negatives, especially the care companies give to SE's. That's huge in my book, and defiantly not something I would have expected.

To conclude this interview has only strengthened my resolve to become a Software Engineer, and to settle many of the fears I had.

4. Contact Information

5. Transcript of Interview

What is your name, email address, and what city do you live/work in?

What is the name of the company that you work for? What does the company do? and how long have you been employed there?
I have been working for IBM since my graduation in May 2008. As you may already know, IBM is a large international corporation that produces computer software, hardware, and other technology related services.

Describe your position and the types of projects that you work on.
I work within the Lotus Software Group at IBM on a project called LotusLive. LotusLive is a online collaboration solutions provided as a service. I have worked in software development on many parts of the project including specific components that allow project management, file sharing, security, and user management.

How large is your project team? Is that a typical team size?
The LotusLive development team is split into two groups, US and Ireland. In the US we have around 12 and in Ireland around 15. This does number does not count our numerous managers, operations, business, and test teams. My current position involves me communicating with numerous test, management, and components teams at one time so it's hard to estimate the number of people I work with on a single task.

If you can tell, what is the project your working on right now?
My current position is on the security team on which I perform work around a federated identity (single sign-on) solution using standards such as SAML, OAuth, and OpenID.

What has been your favorite project to work on, and why?
My work with the security team has made the most influence on me because of the exposure it has given me to management and external teams. This work is also at forefront of web technologies. Many companies such as Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, and IBM are doing research into technologies that I have been working on.

What types of languages, technologies and tools do you use?
Languages - Java (including JS), PHP, Formula, LotusScript
Standards - SAML , OAuth, OpenID, SPML, etc...
Lots of IBM products from Tivoli, Information Management, Rational, and Lotus and Eclipse for development

Of the languages you use, which is your favorite and why?
Formula...just because it's different. Java code can get boring.

Describe a typical work day.
First step is to decide whether to work from home or office. My commute is not fun and like to work from home 3 days a week. Get to work read and respond to emails. Once emails have been taken care of plan out tasks around meetings. At the end of the day our team does a Scrum where we state what we did that day and what problems we have if any.

What skills are important for your job?

Good communication skills and ability to multitask. Multitasking is very important because of the number of things I am concurrently working on can become overwhelming if things are put off for too long.

What do you like most about your job? like least about your job?
Ability to work from home is my favorite thing. The number of emails is the worst thing about my job I have 1000+ unread in my inbox.

I've heard that SE's tend to hate code after so long, how do you feel about code, in specifics other peoples code?
I'm not tired of coding yet. Luckily in my position I am less of a coder and spend a good amount of time on the project lifecycle which includes meetings and research. I think it's interesting to dig around in other peoples code, it allows you to pick up good techniques or recognize things you should not do yourself.