**Reflections Essay**

Through all of the different seminars there were a lot of interesting things said, and I appreciated being exposed to so many different companies and ideas about careers in computer science.  In the following essay I give some of my opinions and perceptions of the different seminars that were given during the past semester.

Of the seminars there were two major categories: those that were given by David McMahon, concerning the process of pursuing careers in industry, and those given by company representatives presenting their companies to students. In David’s seminars, there was a general theme of making sure to conduct yourself to make the best impressions on your potential employers and evaluating the careers that they offer.  Everything else was supporting this main point: how to present yourself in an interview, how to conduct yourself on company visits, how to evaluate benefit packages, etc.

Of the company presentations many of them had the same format: they would have someone describe the company, then they would describe their own personal experiences within the company, and finally they would discuss some of the things that students could expect during the interview process or as employees for the company. All of the companies seemed to like to harp on the idea that it was easy to change positions within the company and that life was flexible within the culture of the organizations. I was generally skeptical of this in general as it seems that they are only telling students what they would like to hear about their company. Not to say that it might not be true to some degree, but in my experience it seems that once a manager has an employee up to speed doing productive work on their project they are fairly reluctant to see that employee leave for another position after they have made the investment of their time. I suppose that most companies would not be opposed on the whole to have an employee move to another area, but I think that employee would probably have to push the issue to have it happen.

In this light, one of the more surprising things I heard in any of the seminars was how dynamic a career with Schlumberger could be. Indeed, their talk did fall into the same form as I described above. However, the presentation made me realize how diverse their niche is. On one side of things they have much computing and communications infrastructure that they must support, but on the other hand also they have a great deal of field work to be done, which also requires a considerable amount of technical knowledge. To some degree Schlumberger was one of the companies that had me more excited about their career opportunities, not because their work was the most technical or most glamorous, but because of the opportunity to work out of the country and out of the office. In the long run, the allure of research opportunities and interesting computational problems will probably pull me into a more academic setting.

As far as using the information learned in class in my future endeavors, most certainly I will keep all of it in the back of my mind while I pursue the next step in my career. Right now I’m interviewing with several different companies including Facebook and the National Security Agency. The information regarding technical interviews has definitely been helpful in the process of talking with Facebook. Having an idea about what kind of expectations interviewers have during a phone interview: that they interested in our thought process and our ability to think and communicate critically about issues has helped me effectively engage with the interviewers and be successful. Although, I do wish there was seminar regarding the interview process with the Department of Defense. I really don’t have any idea about what to expect from them as far as interviews go. As a direct result also of the salary negotiation seminar, I believe that I will be somewhat more critical of the offers that I receive and may engage in negotiations based upon the initial offers coming from potential employers.

The seminar that I enjoyed the most out of all of the ones that I attended had to be Raytheon’s. I have to shamefully admit that this is because it was extremely flashy. Their presentation did start with a very upbeat video that was fairly spectacular. Also one of their main presenters was very effective at engaging us even that early in the morning. While I enjoyed this presentation mostly for its entertainment value, the seminar I most enjoyed for actual content would have to have been “How to work for a Baby Boomer”. It was really interesting to see someone who had experience with all of the different generations give his opinion on all of the aspects of their ideologies and ethics. If nothing else it was an interesting discussion of the evolution of our culture as a whole over the recent past.

I believe that the speakers gain the benefit most importantly of publicizing their company. This could lead to many different boons for the organization. One of course would be attracting the attention of potential talent within the university. As a lot of us are looking to make choices about who we want to work for in the coming year, we are an excellent audience for this purpose. As one of the presenters also mentioned, regardless of who we end up working for, we will be making important decisions within our respective organizations and having the chance to plug to their services to us now might lead to business for them in the future through our influence. Also besides addressing students, the presenters get a chance to interact with faculty and possibly create a working relationship between their respective projects. I think that I would like the opportunity to come back as a graduate and present to the class. Hopefully, at that point I will have some good experience and will be able to give some good advice to undergraduates at that point. I imagine that it would also be fun to get away from the office for a little while to go talk to students.

Something that I thought that would be really interesting would have been to have had a speaker from another computer science department at another university, maybe someone from the MIT Media Lab or somewhere like that. I really think that it would be valuable to hear about graduate school opportunities from a professor from another university. Not only would it be valuable to hear about what kind of students they look for, but it would also be interesting to hear about some of their current work. Something like this might also be possible to do during the Graduate School Fair that goes on during the fall semester. I know that representatives come from different schools to inform students about the application process and such, and I think that it might be valuable to have one of them present to the class.

This class has made me think a lot about my future and has helped me make informed decisions about my career. In this way it has been invaluable. It has also been very helpful to learn about the process of looking for employment, and having the things to keep in mind while interviewing reiterated. Thanks for all of the great information and the opportunity to learn more about the profession of a computer scientist.