



ACADEMIC Initiative Makes Strides

Program to train Power Systems professionals improves membership and courseware

At a time when professionals who grew up with RPG are mulling over whether they want to live near a golf course or a fishing stream when they retire, your organization may be wondering just how you'll find staffers to run your mission-critical computing platforms in the future.

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Universities around the globe are offering curriculum to educate and certify today's students on IBM i, AIX* and Linux*, courtesy of IBM's Power Systems* Academic Initiative (PSAI). At the start of the year, *IBM Systems Magazine* interviewed PSAI Program Manager Peter Glass about his plans to advance the project (www.ibmssystemsmag.com/power/businessstrategy/competitiveadvantage/academic_initiative). Six months later, Glass has boosted membership by 30 percent, adding new certification offerings and expanding partnerships.

The PSAI connects IBM with two- and four-year colleges to provide a comprehensive set of offerings with courseware, certification programs and hardware, plus a job board to bring together graduates and employers. Taken together, the PSAI offerings make it easy for busy faculty to produce the trained professionals that the industry demands. The program is international in scope. And it's effective.

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team and set four goals to push the project forward:

- 1 Clean up the list of member schools
- 2 Establish a Power Systems job board to pair companies needing staff with students seeking jobs or internships
- 3 Develop more comprehensive courseware and certification materials, in part by encouraging collaboration among educators and the business community
- 4 Teach the teachers so that even those without Power Systems experience can provide their students with a useful skill set.

Membership

When Glass took over the project in the spring of 2012, he was given a membership list that was old and needed to be refreshed. Within a few months, his team cleaned up the database, winnowing it down to an active roster of 135 schools. Next, the team launched outreach activities designed to bring in new members. Today, the PSAI has 175 participating universities and colleges worldwide—up 30 percent in just eight months.

Victoria Eisele, a faculty member at Front Range Community College in Fort Collins, Colo., reached out to IBM after receiving a PSAI brochure. “When I first saw [the mailing], I thought it could give our students a chance for another certification, something else on their resume for different jobs,” she says. Although many students today have visions of writing the next “Angry Birds,” in a tight job market they’re increasingly recognizing the importance of skills tied to real opportunities in industry, Eisele notes. “I think students will see

the value [of the program] very quickly.”

Job Board

Early in his tenure, Glass realized the project could not succeed in its mission without a way to

bring employers and skilled graduates together. At the beginning of 2013, the PSAI team launched a job board for internships and entry-level positions. To date, the board has posted more than 450 jobs. To further enhance services, as of June 1, the job board began carrying listings for experienced professionals as well.

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Courseware and Certifications

Technology changes constantly, making it essential to update and upgrade teaching materials. The PSAI is in the process of adding two new AIX courses: Introduction to AIX on Power* and Fundamentals of AIX Administration. These courses have been developed and tested by college faculty. Now, as part of the PSAI curriculum, they will be available at participating schools.

The program has also made progress in the area of certifications. For example, the new courses will be part of a path to a new AIX certification called IBM Associate Administrator. Meanwhile, work is underway on a comprehensive IBM i course that will lead to an Associate System Administrator (ASA) certification.

Part of the motivation behind producing standardized courseware and certification programs is to simplify the teaching process for universities and colleges. The other part is to ensure that companies hiring students from these programs will obtain the same level of knowledge and capabilities, independent of specific school. The ASA certification, for example, represents a skill set that students can—and do—take directly to employment. “I would say 98 to 99 percent of my students working got their jobs



By the Numbers

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30%
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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Help support the talent pool you'll draw from tomorrow:

- Get involved with your local university. Work on an advisory board to help colleges develop curricula that addresses your business needs.
- Encourage your staff to guest lecture at nearby schools. Topics can range from specific skills to overall perspectives to a discussion of their particular career path.
- Have your IT shop occasionally assist with technical support of the university systems. Students can learn a great deal, and professors who are operating outside of their primary skill set will appreciate the help.
- Offer internships. The tasks can be as simple as documenting software, which will benefit you and educate the student. At the same time, internships provide you with a chance to assess possible hires without commitment and offer feedback to the university.
- Post open positions on the IBM PSAI job board.

—K.L.

based on their system admin and their RPG skills,” says Jim Buck, IBM program instructor at Gateway Technical College in Kenosha, Wis., and a course developer and major participant in the program.

To help enhance the resources available to members, the PSAI has joined forces with COMMON, the 20,000-person-strong Power Systems user group. The certification programs for the two organizations are cross-linked, expanding the reach of the PSAI and providing program members with access to additional course material.

Finally, the team is working on a program called Business Enterprise Applications, which encompasses four training paths: business analytics and data mining, application server

and management, portal server concepts and implementations, and enterprise change management. The effort updates and combines existing IBM courseware into training paths that IT departments can easily plug into their curricula.

In a similar vein, Buck and collaborators recently applied for a U.S. Department of Labor grant to develop an Enterprise Systems Education Roadmap to simplify and standardize the process of educating students for real-world IT education. The roadmap is designed to allow schools to adapt their existing program and tune their offerings to fit with the needs of local corporations. An overarching certification program would ensure that graduates acquire a consistent, dependable skill set.

LEARN MORE

Academic Initiative

www.ibm.com/ibm/university/academic/pub/page/power_systems

North American Job Board

<http://powersystemsjobs.com>

List of participating schools for ...

AIX: www.ibm.com/ibm/university/academic/pub/page/pow_aix_schools

IBM i: www.ibm.com/ibm/university/academic/pub/page/pow_ibmi_schools

LINUX: www.ibm.com/ibm/university/academic/pub/page/pow_linux_schools



Teaching the Teachers

The fourth effort, still underway, is to develop materials to update the abilities of the faculty teaching the courses. As part of the partnership with COMMON, the program has identified 20 subject matter experts (SMEs) willing to lecture at colleges in their area. Additionally, Glass is reaching out to find SMEs within IBM who want to participate.

Buck can attest to the effectiveness of the program, having seen a 90 percent placement rate for his graduates, despite a recession of historic proportions. "I've seen articles out there that say you can't teach young kids RPG," he says. "I can give you a list of kids that love RPG. I teach them enough SEU and PDM that if they go into a shop they won't lose the job because they don't know it. After that, all they use is IBM Rational* Developer for Power, and that's worked well." It's a combined skill set that brings unexpected benefits. "What happens with a lot of these companies is that they pair the student with an old-timer. The old-timer helps the student learn the business. The kid helps the old-timer learn the new stuff."

The key to ensuring a steady supply of talent lies in the participation of industry, both in the form of guidance and in a commitment to providing internship and job opportunities to qualified candidates. "What really drives colleges is their students getting jobs," Buck says. "We need to get this connection with companies and colleges. Companies need to adopt a college in their area."

Generations Ahead

Glass, meanwhile, is not one to rest on his team's laurels. He's looking for options and partners

to add more Linux content to the program. He's also working to extend the program more fully into India, Africa and the Middle East.

And he wants to increase overall membership.

Ultimately, it comes down to a single message: Organizations can feel comfortable buying Power Systems products because IBM is making sure they will have trained professionals to run their machines this generation, next generation and the ones after. **P**

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Steve will discuss the trends he sees in IBM i companies needing and implementing mobile, as well as the role the IBM i OS infrastructure plays in enabling enterprise mobility. David will demonstrate how RPG and COBOL developers can use LongRange to build stunning native apps for Apple and Android devices without acquiring a whole new set of skills or technologies.

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Chief Architect for the
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