

Student Programming and Your Career Future

By Andy Masters

Some students may fall in love with programming events, and decide they want to do it for a living someday. Others may be surprised at how programming experience can help their career, even if they enter a completely unrelated field. Either way, there is a lasting and tangible value from student programming experience that can be eye-opening to employers.

Considering Doing This For a Living?

There are plenty of resources available if you wish to pursue a career in event planning. However, don't wait until the 2nd semester of your senior year to begin thinking about it. Try to develop a road map with your career sooner than later—so do your homework now! There are many resources available online, in the library, and especially through the career center, that are often underutilized by students.

Resources for future event planners include books, magazines, websites, and associations. Brief examples include:

Become an Event Planner by Jan L. Riddell, Carol Palmatier, and Peter Gallanis. This book provides great advice on how to get a job in the field, move up the ladder, or even own your own event planning company someday.

Opportunities in Event Planning Careers by Blythe Camenson. This book lists over 100 specific positions in the field among many different industries, and offers advice from seasoned professionals.

Besides powerhouse employment sites such as Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com, there are more specific sites with event-related job listings, such as www.mpiweb.org and www.mobilemarketingjoblist.com. There are professional associations that may be key to join, such as MPI (Meeting Planners International) and ISMP (International Society of Meeting Planners). There are also professional certifications you can earn, such as a CMP (Certification in Meeting Planning).

Of course, there is always the option of staying involved in the college programming market, and making a living at it. There was a great article in a recent issue of the *Student Activities Journal* titled "Trading Places." The article highlighted several ex-programming board members who then became speakers, entertainers, agents, or even Student Activities Directors. Examples included:

Adam Ace

From Programmer to Professional Comedian

Wheeler Bryan

From Programming to Promotional Items

Tony Kingsolver

From Programmer to Student Activities Director

Always consider internships or part-time jobs in this arena first. It is critical for you to best understand the day-to-day pressures and responsibilities of that occupation. What are you really getting yourself into? For instance, lawyers aren't arguing a high-profile murder trial every week, nor are event planners always organizing extravaganzas like the Super Bowl halftime show. Event planning can be stressful, require long hours, and often be not-so-glamorous.

Be sure to TALK with people in the industry who do this for a living. A great question to ask them is “*So, what advice would you give yourself if you could go back in time to my point in college?*” They will certainly have plenty of material, and can also give advice on what areas of specialization may be good to get involved with that will be booming in the future.

Most importantly, the earlier you find out that field is something you DON'T want to do, the better...so you are not spinning your wheels. But you have to get as much exposure as you can first to be sure this will be a livelihood you will enjoy.

Ok, so maybe this is just a hobby for you while in college...

Let's say you are studying to prepare for your “real career” in a totally unrelated field. You'd be surprised how much your experience may help you in getting a job, and even be successful once you have that job. Why?

Many employers would rather hire a 3.0 student with extra-curricular activities than a 3.5 student with none. In today's work environment, you need to have a combination of “booksmarts” plus “streetsmarts.” “Streetsmarts” include how to really get things done in the world through being resourceful. Students who participate in programming boards gain event planning, leadership, organization, budgeting, decision-making, and social skills. These are important skills for all companies to have.

Student programming experience also shows the ability to work with people as part of a team. A recent study by Harvard University showed that for every firing due to job performance, there are two firings due to communication and interpersonal conflicts. Possessing social, professional, and teamwork skills are more important than ever before, and failure to display these skills can cause irreparable damage to careers.

Extra-curricular involvement also translates directly into the real world after graduation. Such participation shouldn't just stop after college. Getting involved in networking clubs, professional organizations, alumni groups, online communities, and volunteer organizations can all help lead to career success.

There are over 100,000 associations to choose from in the United States. Along with industry-related and event-planning organizations, there are also development associations, such as the worldwide public speaking club ToastMasters International. No other club is more prevalent in advancing presentation, speaking, and social skills to professionals in any line of work.

Many companies have internal committees and volunteer groups to help organize company events. This is a great way to make a good impression and network with those in other departments. This type of interaction puts you in position to move up the ladder more quickly, and hopefully allows you to get involved (again) in an extra-curricular activity you enjoy.

College development for any career is more than just what you learn in textbooks. There are literally millions of recent graduates who have a degree. Now, what other skills or credentials do you have that will set you apart? Often, you may need that “winning combination” of a degree + event planning skills to get a job. For instance, companies within the industry you are studying, such as biology, computers, etc., all need to promote their products through trade shows and events, as well.

Companies are always looking for candidates who have specific industry knowledge (i.e.—degree), but who can also work with people, help run events, or even give training or presentations at events about their product. Those are the types of jobs that are *really* in demand. So, always consider your 1-2 punch, or winning combination, of your degree AND event planning experience. Who knows, you could land a job doing something you love to do, and get paid to do it!

Andy Masters has presented hundreds of college success, leadership, and career preparation programs across North America. He earned an M.A.-Human Resources Development and M.A.-Marketing from Webster University, and is author of the books *Life After College: What to Expect and How to Succeed in Your Career* and *37 Keys to College Success: Balancing Student Life and Academics*. Andy earned “Greek Man of the Year” honors while serving as SGA President at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. To check speaking availability, call (314)368-2250, email andy@highschool2college.com, or visit: www.andy-masters.com.