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Notes from CS50

Stanford University's Computer Science Department celebrated its 50th anniversary a few days ago with a reception and a full day of presentations and panels in front of 200 alumni and such luminaries as Don Knuth and Vint Cerf. Here are some of the key points made during the event:

- Contrary to some national trends, Stanford has been successful in raising the interest of freshmen in computer science, with 1600 of them enrolling in its "Introduction to Computing" course each year.
- Coursera, the massive open online courses (MOOC) platform launched by Stanford in 2011, now has 12 million learners. While only 2 million enrollments led to completed courses, this last number is still impressive, especially since the platform reaches people around the world with no other access to higher education of this caliber. 119 institutions are now contributing courses.
- The gender imbalance is still significant (computer science enrollees at Stanford are 72% men, 28% women) but less so that the US average.
- Stanford's "CS+X" curriculum model consists of associating the CS department with another one to give students a cross-disciplinary experience. "X" might be Human Biology, Chemistry, or a humanities discipline like Art or Music. A key issue is that in order to confine a bachelor's degree to four years with a reasonable course load, the core disciplines of CS have to be reduced. Will this hurt the depth of understanding of computing and produce people who understand the application of computing to other disciplines, but no longer possess the same fundamental knowledge of systems, algorithms, etc.? This is related to the fundamental question of whether CS is science or engineering in the first place.

CSCC Releases v2.0 of Guide to Service Agreements

The Cloud Standards Customer Council (CSCC has released the updated Guide to Cloud Service Agreements, and presented it during an April 30 webinar. The Guide, parts of which were written or edited by Claude Baudoin, is now available on the CSCC Web site. The webinar recording will also be available there in a few days.

The new version distinguishes between the Cloud Service Agreement (CSA) and the Service Level Agreement (SLA), which is only one part of the CSA. It takes into account the evolution of standards and best practices since the initial version, and it points to complementary papers published by the CSCC in the mean time.

BrightTalk will host another webinar on "Evaluating Cloud Service Agreements," based on the CSCC paper, on June 11. The presenters will be John Meegan and Mike Edwards from IBM and Claude Baudoin.

Scrumwise: Agile Project Management Made Simple?

A promotional e-mail that landed in our mailbox seems worth more than a quick press of the Delete key. Scrumwise offers a visual "point and drag" tool to document advances in an agile project. While the name refers to one specific agile method (Scrum), the demo hints at the tool's applicability to a wider range of projects. The demo loop on the Web page is eye-catching with the intuitive look-and-feel of the tool.

SharePoint Angst

This week, the Web site of the Association for Information and Image Management (AIIM) featured this infographic about the reasons why deploying Microsoft's SharePoint content management system is such a headache for many organizations. The chart points out key issues such as lack of management commitment, lack of planning, and insufficient user training. The inherent complexity of the product is not mentioned, but should certainly be factored in too.

Seen Recently...

"Artificial Intelligence suffers from a definition problem: when something cannot be done by a computer, it is called AI. As soon as a computer can do it, we say it's not AI anymore."

- Google's Vint Cerf, channeling Douglas Hofstader and paraphrasing Larry Tesler's theorem, "AI is whatever hasn't been done yet."

"The real reason I open [the KIT] up every time I get it is for the 'Seen Recently' section - it's like having the Far Side in the paper."

- Long-time colleague and reader Dane Granicher