

Making Our CSI Popular and Award-winning
A Meta-curricular Manifesto
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Google CSI. On the first screen you will find "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation ... is a popular, Emmy Award-winning CBS television series that ..." Some critics argue that the television series is popular because of gratuitous sex and violence. We need to make our CSI popular and award-winning for the right reasons.

How do we make CSI and every computing course add value to a student's overall education whether they intend to work in the computing field or not? How do we make every computing course interesting and exciting? I do not mean that every hour has to be exciting, but by the end of every course, students should appreciate the value of the course. They should not have to wait 2 years to appreciate it.

About a year ago, I was asked by a colleague at a nearby college, "How can you recommend a CS major to students when there may not be jobs for them when they graduate?" My response was, "Easy. I think CS is one of the best majors for anybody." That is, whether there are jobs in computing or not, a good CS major is wonderful preparation for any career and for life.

Because jobs used to be extremely plentiful, some of us fell into justifying a CS major as preparation for good jobs. We may even have designed our CSI course to prepare students for future courses or perceived future careers, without regard for the stand-alone value of CSI. We now have an opportunity to justify CS courses, majors, and minors as good preparation for life. We need to make sure we can deliver on that promise and we need to get the word out to the rest of the world.

It starts with CSI. I'll report on some things we are trying at Swarthmore (failures and successes) and some recent (2007) ideas of others for CSI. I'll also summarize some of what I have heard on this issue from the time I was a workshop participant (1997) at the National Academy workshop on Being Fluent with Information Technology (<http://books.nap.edu/html/beingfluent/>) through being a member of the organizing committee for the (2005) NSF Northeast Workshop on Integrative Computing Education and Research (ICER) http://www-net.cs.umass.edu/nsf_icer_ne/.

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