

Report on the IEEE-USA Employment & Career Strategies Forum
Ken Doniger 10oct2005

At the meeting of the ECSC in San Diego, I was asked to monitor the Careers Forum started by the ECSC. Scott Grayson can get usage statistics more easily than I, so I decided to concentrate on the tenor and quality of the communications. My goals are to find opportunities for the committee to improve the forum, and to learn from the forum how to improve the work of the committee.

The Careers Forum is very active with dozens of threads. I concentrated on two sub-areas: "Guidance" and "Employment". The monitoring period lasted six months: from February to August of 2005. During this time, I read the posts in my two chosen categories once per week, and kept a log. Rather than list the various threads in detail, I will just make general observations.

1. Members are extremely supportive of each other.

Most of the threads started with a hard luck story of some kind. The OP (original poster) had either been out of work for a long time, or had some physical infirmity. With very few exceptions, the replies were either messages of encouragement or practical advice. Usually, the OP replied with thanks. I was surprised at how quickly the replies came. Usually, it was a matter of several days.

2. There was not as much politics as I expected.

There was only one H1B thread, and it was very polite. The last few messages I saw concerned the IEEE congressional visit day, and bemoaned the lack of engineering participation.

3. Members are protective of the forum. Axes are not easily ground.

In July, Ron Ticker (morrisky) posted what looked like commercial spam. He was uniformly criticized. I believe that Scott Grayson investigated his background.

In March, Alex Witkowsky started a thread on the JLS. Apparently, the forum members didn't think it was worthwhile to post, because most of the thread consists of Alex writing to himself.

4. Several threads are full of good career-building material.

Threads started by dboggs0 and debskolmodin might be used as source material by the committee.

5. David Macchiarolo posted more often (in these two categories) than the rest of the committee combined.

The last week in April was especially noteworthy.

Recommendations:

1. The users support each other when they can communicate. This forum has enabled the communication.

Any

changes we make to the VC should be considered with an eye towards improving the communications.

2. Use the job-seeking advice that was given in the forum to improve the ECSC materials and to advertise the forum.

3. The users consider this to be their own space. We should try to foster this attitude. Can we develop some sort of special status for frequent posters?

4. Assign a "dispatcher" to monitor this forum closely and get the right people to answer questions quickly. This could develop into a way for the members to communicate effectively with the IEEE leadership. There is a current thread on "sticky" benefitss that was started at the behest of IEEE-USA president Alphonse. This is a good start.

Additional notes by David Macchiarolo 16 Oct 2005

Ken's observations are right on target. I myself tried to monitor the VC

on a weekly basis but was not able to do this consistently for a variety of reasons.

My strategy (right or wrong) was in general, to seek out questions by posters and when I recognized a need that we already had a solution for (via Career Navigator or other places) and point the poster to our material.

I recall a thread some months back started by a poster located in India... something along the lines of "I want to get a job in the US, how do I do it?" The last post in the thread was something like "Stay in India, please". Although there is some of this sentiment on the VC, the majority of the posts are constructive.

There have been several specific threads on H1B's and outsourcing, including some suggesting that IEEE-USA should be actively lobbying against H1B's (which they are!), or, more radically, that IEEE should look more like a union. However as Ken points out, the forum is self-correcting, with most "rogue" threads getting brought back into line by a relatively small core of frequently posting members.

I second Ken's idea that we need to provide indications of frequent posters. Several web forums that I have been a part of show the number of posts you have made as part of your username... I'm not sure if the VC allows that, but it might be something to consider.

Perhaps we should run a list of the top 100 posters, and send them a letter of personal thanks.

We should continue to monitor the VC, and as Ken suggested, update our material based on strategies and suggestions by the members.

DTM 16 Oct 2005