

Basic tech literacy is important



Elias Garcia

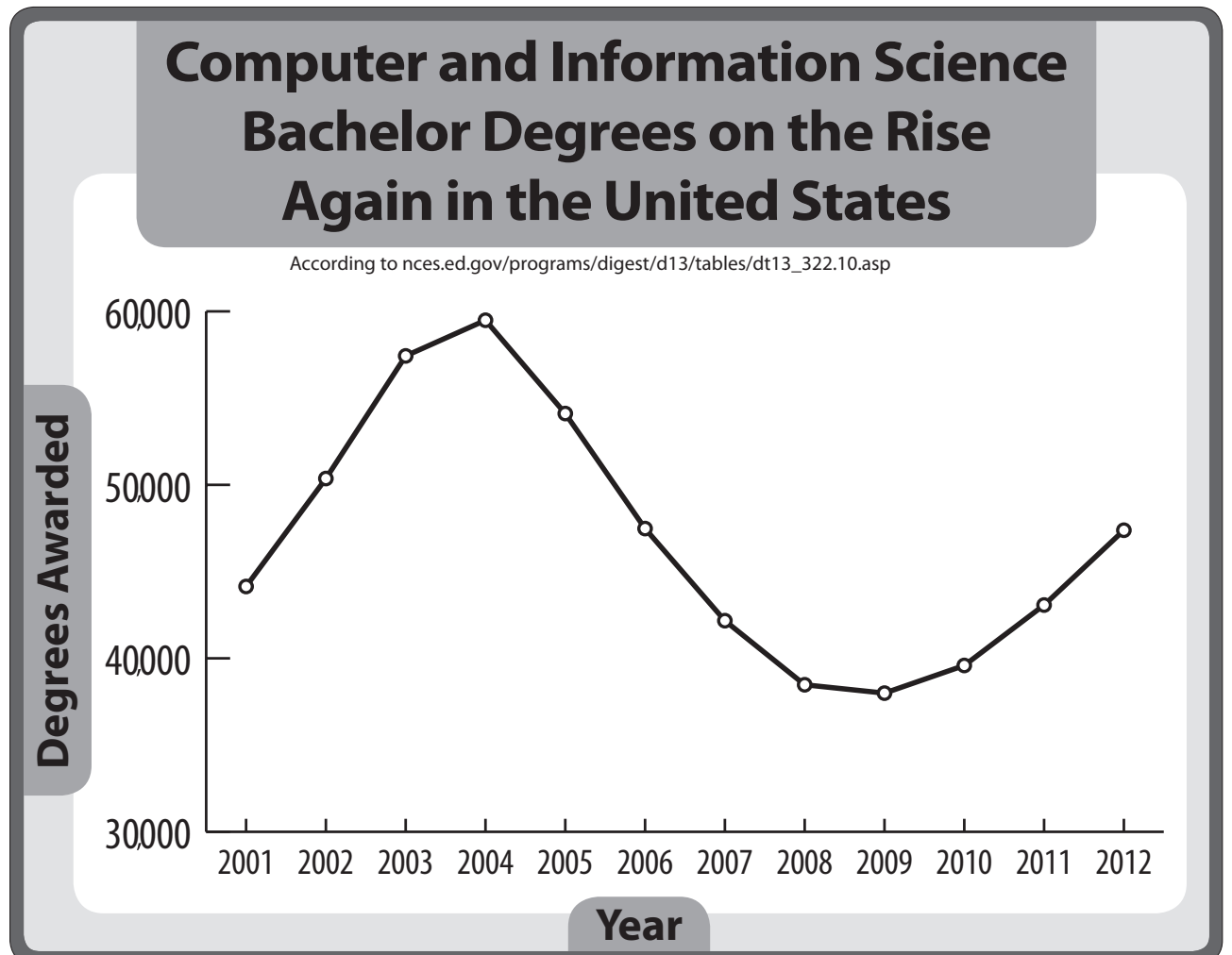
We live in an era of technological marvels. Everything from the cars we drive and the papers we write to the phones in our pockets are made possible by dozens of programs made up of thousands of lines of code. Modern life is possible only because of the computers that run behind the scenes and the programmers who control them.

With all of this technology surrounding us, it's startling to realize how little many of us know about how it all works. It's understandable to be intimidated by the idea of trying to understand such a complex subject. But if you don't want to devote too much of your time to this pursuit, you still can improve how hireable you are by taking a few computer science classes at Truman or using the Internet to take some free computer science lessons.

Despite the promising growth of technology-based jobs, fewer people are graduating with degrees in related fields, according to a Department of Labor report of December 2013. Furthermore, the number of AP computer science tests being administered from 2003–13 have plateaued compared to other options, according to statistics provided by the College Board, the people in charge of the Advanced Placement program. The world is becoming more high-tech — but with people who don't understand how it all works — and that is a serious problem.

Does this mean we should all rush to get computer science degrees? I say no, and Jeff Atwood, co-creator of StackOverflow.org, agrees. A pioneer of early programming, Atwood is familiar with the miracle of modern technology. He doesn't think people actively should become computer programmers, presenting his thoughts in a May 2012 article on his website CodingHorror.com titled "Please Don't Learn to Code." Atwood outlines the paradox of the current campaign among politicians and educators to get kids and young adults to learn computer programming. Our society needs more efficient programmers, rather than a bunch of programmers typing up thousands of potentially counter-intuitive lines of code.

"This thinking assumes that coding is the goal," Atwood said. "Software developers tend to be



software addicts who think their job is to write code. But it's not. Their job is to solve problems. Don't celebrate the creation of code, celebrate the creation of solutions."

Atwood argues the less code, the better. He drew a comparison to cars and auto-mechanics in an NPR interview during January of this year. Everybody uses cars, but does that mean we should all become mechanics? To say yes would be a ridiculous jump in reasoning. But should you know how to change oil? Absolutely.

When faced with a technological world that is becoming more intricate, what should you do? Unless you're drawn to computer programming because you're legitimately interested in it, there are some easy options. Students should learn the basic fundamentals of programming, such as structure and format, and learn how the web works, according to a April 16 Huffington Post article written by Gregg Pollack, founder of CodeSchool.com. It will improve communication with those whose job it is to work on computer-based problems, increasing efficiency and saving time while enabling knowledge of how to perform tasks such as setting up a website for a writing portfolio. Not only do you become competitive among your peers by saving yourself the headache of trying to figure out the web, you save time for those whose job it is to program and make your life easier.

During this day and age, there is no real excuse not to become somewhat familiar with how computers work. For instance, CodeAcademy.com is a free online course that teaches you how to use

Python, a popular programming language, without having to install anything on your computer. Will you become a technology wizard overnight? No. Will you learn "computational thinking" and how to solve basic problems logically? Yes.

If you can learn to think and apply the theory behind computers, you can be very successful, even if you're not a computer programmer yourself, according to a June 16 Mother Jones Magazine article written by Tasneem Raja. In the article, she points out how the process behind computational thinking is what has solved several major problems throughout history, such as a bout of cholera in England during the late 1800s. Being able to reason through problems methodically and seeing the potential behind a series of tools such as programming constructs, is what allows for dynamic and efficient solutions to be created.

Luckily for our generation, we shouldn't have to worry too much about having to all become expert programmers. Just learning the basics has real benefits for everyone. With free lessons online for any skill level, there isn't much of an excuse not to learn a little bit about the amazing world inside our computers and phones.

Elias Garcia is a sophomore economics and computer science major from Independence, Mo.

There are reasons to abstain from voting



Sarah Muir

Election day was a big day. It was the day everybody kept asking me why I don't vote.

That's right, I'm a political science major that follows and writes about politics, but I do not vote. I do have reasons not to. Individual votes don't matter — even if they did, the elite control policy, not the average citizen. Not voting is a form of participation.

From an individual perspective, your vote simply is not likely to matter. Political scientist Phil Arena, assistant professor of political science at SUNY Buffalo, breaks down

the numbers, and he estimates the chance of an individual vote changing the outcome of an election is smaller than 1 out of 10,000, according to a Nov. 4 Vox article. My vote won't change the outcome.

The common response I get to this argument is "What if everyone thought that — wouldn't democracy die?" Maybe, but the chance of everyone doing that is unlikely, and until the numbers get small enough that my vote actually matters it's not worth the time to go out and vote.

Let's assume those numbers aren't true though. Maybe individual votes do matter. In this unlikely world, voting still would not be worth it. A Princeton study found the American government pays attention to the policy preferences of the elite, not the average American, according to an April 18 Talking Points Memo article. This means voting does little to persuade policymakers to follow the mandate they get from the voters. What matters more is what the elite of society want.

So let's say you voted for politicians because you thought they would lower taxes and those politicians get elected. They might lower taxes, but it's probably not because the average American supports lowering taxes. It's because there are members of the elite that want that particular policy. Your vote matters even less now. Right now, I might as well write my name on a piece of paper and throw it away for how much my vote matters during an election.

The final reason I don't bother to vote is because I rarely agree with the politicians running for office. My preferences are all over the place. I'm liberal about some issues, conservative about others and moderate about even more issues. I've never seen a candidate able to capture my interests because of the predominantly two-party system in America. As a result, I refuse to support the system by voting.

Not voting is another form of sending the government a message — a subtler message than a vote for one person over another, but a message

nonetheless. By not voting, I reject the broken political process where individuals don't matter and policymakers only listen to the elite. It turns out the politicians understand that message to a certain extent.

President Obama made this statement after the election, "To those of you who voted, I hear you. To those who didn't vote, I hear you too," according to a Nov. 5 CNN article.

I know that just as one vote is insignificant, so is my individual refusal to vote. But it's the only option I have that doesn't violate my political beliefs.

Maybe you truly support a candidate or an issue. Or maybe you feel like it is your civic responsibility to vote. In those cases, go ahead and vote. Just do so with the understanding of how much your vote actually means.

Sarah Muir is a sophomore political science major from Lee's Summit, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

Do you feel like your vote counts?

I don't think I'm firm enough in my political opinions to think my vote counts.

Geoffrey Winkleman
junior



Yes. If you want something to happen, you gotta do something about it.

Montana Carlson
freshman



Yes. Even the ones who didn't vote, their opinion still matters.

Breana Marble
freshman



If you don't vote, you let someone else's opinion matter more than yours.

Amy Allemang
senior

