

How "they" try to corrupt "us"

At my former university it was a firm principle of the informatics group that we would not teach our students how to use industrial products.

The main reasons at the time were

- the quality of industrial products was never up to academic standards, and
- the market being as fickle as it is, the industrial product was of volatile significance only.

Later I learned how much the purposes of the University and those of industry can diverge. Universities, believe it or not, are interested in education, but I learned of industries that were not interested in education at all, neither in an educated work force, nor in an educated customer base. On the contrary, they preferred a docile, brainwashed work force and undemanding customers hooked on their products.

Another remark is that it is the task of a "leading University" to lead. In particular this means for us that we should give society not what it asks for, but what it needs. This issue is particularly acute for CS because there society asks

for snake oil, for more of the same, though we all know that it hardly works.

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The above was triggered by a letter we received from one of our colleagues. I quote from it - "MS presumably stands for "Microsoft" - :

"We had a good meeting with MS representatives [...]. They were open to the possibility of giving us a *significant* number of graduate fellowships [...]. A key thing that MS wants in return is that our students have experience in programming in NT environments; they and other companies want such students. [...]"

Well, that was a revealing meeting! For the record I quote from the following paragraph of that letter:

"I believe a key to the MS support for our department will be clear evidence that we are using NT (or related software, e.g. CE). I need to collect information about your use of NT (or intended use of MS software) as part of our proposal."

Since I do not want MS to sue me, I won't tell you how much I appreciate their offer. You must guess. For more detail I refer to the communications of the Chairman of the Board of "Mathematics Inc.", as published in [0]. For dominance of the Universities, see EWD539 in particular.

[0] "Selected Writings on Computing: A Personal Perspective" by Edsger W. Dijkstra. Texts and Monographs in Computer Science, Springer-Verlag 1982 [ISBN: 0-387-90652-5]

Austin, 21 February 1999

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