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# Tech job outlook promising

**By Jay Loomis**  
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## WHITE PLAINS

Studies have raised alarms about the United States failing to graduate enough information technology workers, scientists and engineers to compete in the global economy.

Such trends worry Susan Merritt, who has been on the front lines of training computer students for 24 years at Pace University. Pace's computer science program has an enrollment of 1,400 and a faculty of 49 full-time professors at campuses in Pleasantville, White Plains and New York City.

"In my opinion, there is about to be a critical shortage of workers," said Merritt, the dean of Pace's Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems. "In 2001, there was a peak of students studying computing. Since then it has gone down. ... There is a greater need for tech workers but there are fewer graduates."

Merritt speculated the reasons for the lower enrollment may include high schools failing to adequately emphasize computing in their curriculums. In addition, there are frequent headlines about U.S. tech companies expanding in India, China or other developing countries. The impression that U.S. jobs are rushing offshore may have discouraged American students from pursuing tech careers, according to Merritt.

But the idea that jobs going offshore is destroying opportunities for U.S. students really is "a myth," she said.

"If one is educated in computer science, information systems, telecommunications networks or computer security, there are all sorts of opportunities in this country and will continue to be," Merritt said. "If Americans get a good education in these fields, they will be very valuable."

Increasing job opportunities in the tech field locally also are shown by a quarterly job index that debuted in November. The index weighs demand for information technology specialists based on data from Fortune 500 companies in Westchester County and New York City. The index, developed by Pace and SkillProof Inc., a New York-based vendor of employment data, totaled 104.2 in Westchester in the fourth quarter, up from 87.69 a year earlier.

Pace students graduating with a bachelor's degree in computer science are earning an average salary of \$57,000.

The index "shows periodic ups and downs, but the overall thrust over the last year or more is absolutely upward in just about all the areas of computing," Merritt said. "That has surprised some people. There had been a sense that things were slowing down, but they are not."

Merritt recently discussed the index and the outlook for tech jobs in an interview with The Journal News.

**Q:** The index shows a strong demand for tech jobs in the region. What is driving that demand?

**A:** My experience is that a lot of companies are spending on technology that they might have put on hold for a while ... and they need to hire more workers as part of those investments. ... The investments are coming not only from big companies but also startups. Other industries, including health care and education, also need more computing people.

## **Susan Merritt**

Dean of Pace University's Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems.

**Age:** 60

**Home:** Pleasantville

**Education:** Doctorate and master's degree, computer science, New York University; bachelor's degree, mathematics, Catholic University

**Q:** Why is there a shortage of students in the tech and computing fields?

**A:** I think families are sometimes scared by the outsourcing conversation, or offshoring. There isn't a consistent computing curriculum in high schools. ... Students don't have the consistent experience in computing as they do in something else like English or biology. Computing is relatively young and hasn't been established in the K-12 schools in the same way that a lot of other things have, which is a shame.

**Q:** Are guidance counselors doing enough to get high school students interested in these careers?

**A:** I think guidance counselors probably need more opportunities themselves to learn about it.

**Q:** What long-term impact will a continued shortage of tech workers have on the U.S. economy?

**A:** It will have a very negative effect. Information technology is driving the world economy. We see that in the applications that people use. They use Google. They use Amazon. ... Somebody is building that stuff and it is either going to be us in this country or others. Frankly, there is enough work to go around. But workers in the United States need to be participating in that and developing innovation.

**Q:** How does a U.S. worker making \$60,000 a year compete with the low wages in India and other developing countries?

**A:** (American) students are ready and able to try something different and think something through and make a creative change. Allegedly the students abroad are not as able to do that because of the kind of educational system that they have ... that doesn't encourage students to take a risk and do something different.

**Q:** What types of jobs are most in demand?

**A:** Hiring of IT managers is very much a rising trend, and a particularly important one in Westchester. Software engineers are definitely a rising trend. That was up this quarter. ... Network systems and network administrators also are in demand.

**Q:** What do you hope that the index accomplishes?

**A:** I hope that it renews interest and confidence in the computing environment. I hope it engages students to do more computing in K to 12. I hope it encourages students to at least explore computing as a professional career.

**Q:** What are you seeing at Pace as far as companies hiring your students after graduation?

**A:** Our experience has been that our students get scooped up and hired. There are lots of organizations that are always interacting with us and wanting interns.

**Q:** Has the salary outlook improved in recent years?

**A:** In 2001, our students were getting signing bonuses. That stopped. Obviously, the regional economy was affected by 9/11. But this last year, we actually had a student who got a very generous signing bonus. It seemed to indicate a real rebound.

**Q:** What are the differences between the Westchester and Manhattan markets when it comes to tech jobs?

**A:** New York City is characterized by finance and media. Westchester is certainly Fortune 500 companies, including IBM. ... There are also startups, emerging media and high-tech areas like Web site development.

**Q:** How does the market for tech jobs in this area compare to other parts of the country?

**A:** Demand is higher here than in many parts of the country, although I don't think it is as high as on the West Coast.

**Q:** What attracted you to the computing field?

**A:** I was a math major in college when I discovered computing. I really loved it ... It is a wonderfully creative field. You can build things. You can use computing for different kinds of communications. You can use it for different kinds of media. You can use it for community. You can have groups and teams. You can work with people who are next door or across the world.