

Outlook for my professional development

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Since I began supporting ColdFusion customers for Allaire many years ago I've taken a wide range of computer and web development courses in local universities and vendors, as well as many internal training classes on Macromedia products. Except for a few vendor certifications though, I have no advanced degree or similar milestone to demonstrate my aptitude and achievements in computer or web technology.

I'd like to be able point a tangible and definitive milestone to demonstrate my technical level to others, as well as to satisfy myself when reflecting on the subject. To address this need, I've committed to a 6 month **Master's Certificate in Java and J2EE** from Boston University. I think a Certificate from an accredited university carries much more weight than most vendor "*certificates*", so much so that I wish the naming convention was different because you can't compare a 60 minute multiple choice test with a 6 month program. At any rate, the BU Master of Java & J2EE Certificate includes the following sequence of courses which could be broken down into two sub-areas:

Master's Certificate in Java and J2EE

- **Java Developer**
 - Introduction to Java
 - Intermediate Java Programming
 - Advanced Java Programming

- **J2EE Enterprise Developer**
 - JavaServer Pages
 - Java Servlets
 - Jakarta Struts
 - XML Programming Using Java
 - Developing Java Web Services

This program runs in the evenings, 2 nights a week for each class. Although I've had several courses from Sun for the Intro and JSP/Servlet material, as well as XML for J2EE at Harvard, I feel a repeat of the material would help reinforce my understanding since I don't develop in Java on a regular basis and some details are fading. The consecutive courses over 6 months will definitely help it all sink in since I will be writing Java code and applications on a regular basis. I already spend a fair amount of time reading Java source, but reading program flow is quite different from writing and building.

To continue adding some tangible milestones, I'm going to take the 6 hour **performance based RHCE exam** for Red Hat Linux later this year (again). Last fall I took the RH300 4 day class with the exam on the fifth day, but I didn't make the cut for the RHCE. I think this is one vendor certificate that is definitely worth the effort. If

you don't know, the RHCE exam has two 3 hour sections. In the first you are presented with a variety of scenarios where something is broken and you must fix it, such as making Apache Virtual Hosting work, or setting up hard disk quotas for a set of users, or correcting a machine in Kernel Panic and won't boot. The second half of the exam requires you to set up a machine with a suite of services (DNS, SMTP, NFS, etc) configured to certain specification as well as disk and user administration tasks. I earned the RHCT mid-level, but will try again for RHCE.

Another vendor certificate that marks a personal goal is the **Adobe ACE certification** for Photoshop CS2. This might actually be some low hanging fruit now that I've completed about 30 hours of Photoshop CS2 training via the **TotalTraining** video DVD training courses. I highly recommend it. In fact I just ordered their new Flash 8 course which includes 25 hours of training in high definition.

Within ColdFusion, my immediate goals include mastering application architecture by approaching the **Model-Glue** framework more seriously and practicing other time saving techniques including the use of **Reactor** and/or ARF!. While I think I understand these projects -- how they can be used, and how they work -- I'm not in the practice of building full applications so I've never applied them. I'd say more than half of what I do when supporting ColdFusion is diagnosing and correcting server hangs or crashes, with only about 25% coding related problems in the remainder, but even then that's usually debugging someone else's code or building small models of code to reproduce a problem. To that end, I think I need to focus on a project idea and actually build something useful in order to shape and build my skill set. With the release of Flex 2, I look forward to thinking up a Flex project that integrates with ColdFusion, but that's on the backburner for now.

Collectively, I think this will be a very productive year professionally, and even personally since I consider web technologies to be a favorite hobby and not just a job.