

Students find SAS certifications valuable on both sides of the table

SAS certifications are an important tool - both for those seeking employment and for employers making hiring decisions. For two SAS users, the advantages of becoming certified have been and continue to be innumerable.

Michael Tomb was first introduced to SAS in 1980. He was subcontracting for a company using proprietary FORTRAN routines to read a federal government tape containing more than 7 million records. The company had already put in two months of staff hours writing a FORTRAN program that ran into errors 3 million records into the tape. Debugging the problem was proving costly, and Tomb was asked to look into using SAS as an alternative. After an initial learning curve, he was able to write a 150-line program solution in a single afternoon. The company was so impressed that they hired Tomb as a regular employee.

"I guess you could say that SAS was responsible for my first professional job," he says now.

Although he wasn't certified at the time, Tomb went on to continue his SAS education. He took his first certification exam in 2000, when he found himself in the ironic position of hiring other SAS users for his consulting firm, Informatica ECS. "I was hoping to find that the SAS certification was a good screening tool to verify expertise. I was immediately impressed that this was true."

Paul Winters has been in a similar situation. While studying for his master's degree in applied statistics at Rochester Institute of Technology, Winters was advised by his department chair to learn SAS as a way to broaden his career opportunities. Winters purchased a student license and used SAS to complete coursework, eventually becoming certified in Base SAS.

"At the time, I had been working as a letter carrier for the United States Postal Service for 18 years," said Winters. "I knew that making a career change would be difficult without any professional experience."

Today, Winters is lead programmer/analyst for the University of Rochester Medical Center and teaches an advanced, graduate-level SAS course at the university - a degree requirement for a doctorate in epidemiology. Once a student, now the teacher, Winters said he finds value not only in learning and teaching SAS but also in gaining certification.

"It clearly gave me an advantage in obtaining my current position by giving me a professional credential without much experience," he said.

Tomb, a business owner with 20 years of experience and a SAS Certified Advanced Programmer himself, agrees. "I now believe that Base SAS certification should be a requirement for any job description that assumes SAS knowledge. I am also convinced that if an individual is one of 150 or so SAS Certified Advanced Programmers in the United States, that distinction should really interest potential employers."

Both Tomb and Winters plan to continue their training. Tomb is currently considering whether to seek server-side certification as a SAS webAF developer. Meanwhile, Winters hopes to sit for the SAS Certified Advanced Programmer certification in the near future.

"Base SAS was an important and incredibly useful tool in 1980, and this has continued until today," Tomb said. "Many other fashions, languages and platforms have come and gone, but SAS remains."