



From Academy Student to Instructor, Wisconsin/Minnesota

Student Impact Story: University of Wisconsin-Stout

“I love inspiring students the way other teachers inspired me. Most of my students are following their passion, which is the most important part of pursuing a career that you love.” -Instructor, Inver Hills Community College



Two “freshmen” were destined to meet in 1998 at Edina High School in Minnesota: student Ben Franske and the pilot Cisco® Networking Academy® program. High school guidance counselors visited the Valley View Middle School to tell incoming students about the new academy courses, and encourage them to sign up.

A senior at Valley View Middle School, Ben was interested in what the counselors had to say. But when they told him that it was a two-year program, he hesitated. “In high school, we can only take one elective each year. If I signed up for the Cisco Networking Academy course, I’d miss out

on choosing other electives for 9th and 10th grade.”

At the time, it seemed like a tough decision for a 15 year-old boy with his high school adventure ahead of him. Now 28 and an instructor for Cisco Networking Academy, Ben smiles when he thinks of his earlier self.

“I’m glad I showed that much sense at 15. Going through the Cisco Networking Academy classes, I discovered things about myself that I never knew. In the process, I found a passion and a career that I love.”

It would take awhile for Ben to actually start setting up and tearing down equipment. “When we started the classes, there was no lab yet. Our instructor printed out versions of the online curriculum and we had a paper-based lab.”

The second semester, the school received a donation from the state and equipment from Cisco. The best part for the students enrolled in the academy was that they actually had the opportunity to help build their own Cisco lab.

Ben worked hard to complete his Networking Academy courses, and he felt that he had a clear aptitude for the technology. He attempted his first CCNA® (Cisco Certified



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Networking Associate) certification exam in the summer of 2000, right after completing his CCNA 1-4 classes. He did not pass. “It was a tough exam, and I didn’t have enough hands-on practice. Failing the exam was a blow, I admit it.”

“Degrees and certifications can help differentiate you, but experience is just as important. Get that experience on your resume—even volunteering for a nonprofit to help them with IT problems. Be willing to start with a basic job straight out of high school, like a help desk position. Eventually, if you’re good and have the education and certifications to be competitive, you can move up the ladder into a position you find more desirable.”

It was to be a valuable early lesson for the young student. Although only 17, he recognized that even professionals already working in the industry struggled to pass the test. He knew he would have more hands-on lab time in college. He decided to be patient and continue to work toward his goal.

He had another obstacle, though. “It was tough to find a four-year college that had a program that would not duplicate what I had already learned in high school in the Cisco Networking Academy courses.”

At the **University of Wisconsin - Stout**, in the Telecommunications Systems program (now

the IT Management program), Ben found a good mix of career-focused programs in technical areas – and more Cisco Networking Academy courses. The university was willing to give him credit for his previous CCNA course, and offered the CCNP® (Cisco Certified Networking Professional) course that he wanted to take next.

Making sure to do lots of labs and hands-on work, Ben retook the CCNA exam in December 2001, after a semester of additional practice, and passed. Within two years, he had taken more courses and received his CCNP certification, and his CCDA® (Cisco Certified Design Associate) and CCDP® (Cisco Certified Design Professional) certifications. The faculty encouraged him to earn a CCAI (Cisco Certified Academy Instructor) certification as well.

Ben was not just amassing proficiency and degrees. He also had ample opportunity to observe the teachers, and appreciate the profound effect that a good teacher has on motivating students. “It planted a seed for the possibility of becoming a teacher myself.” He added an undergraduate specialization in training and human resource development, which included a training internship that actually allowed him to help teach some of the networking design courses, create lesson plans, and provide informal mentoring to students.

Ben graduated a semester early, which saved him time and money. He had planned to go right out into the job market, but instead “started thinking more about sharing the joy of networking with students.” Once again he began looking at schools, trying to find a graduate program that had a master’s degree in networking, and that didn’t duplicate the considerable knowledge he had acquired in the Cisco Networking Academy programs at his previous schools.

He decided to enroll at the University of Minnesota for a Master of Education degree (M.Ed) in technology education. With the financial assistance of a grant from the National Science Foundation, he went on to earn a Ph.D. in technology and engineering education.

Ben found a position as an instructor at **Inver Hills Community College**, the regional Networking Academy that supports the University of Wisconsin’s advanced academy courses.

“I love coming to work everyday. I love inspiring students the way other teachers inspired me. I always tell my students: be a lifetime learner. If you don’t enjoy staying up-to-date on technology, you’ll feel like you’re working all the time. Most of my students are following their passions, which is the most important part of pursuing a career that you love.”

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