Want CS Job Interview Tips? CS Grad Student Shares His Experience

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It's spring semester and not too late to start thinking about those summer internships if you are not a part of that glorious race known as “the Seniors”. While if you ARE a senior (hats off to you), you are probably in the middle of lining up your first, “real” job. Want to know how to ace those interviews and land the internship or job you want? One of our Ph.D. students, Ahmet Artu Yildirim, was recently offered a job with Amazon’s Elastic Block Store, so I interviewed him and asked for his insights on the interview process.

Ahmet currently works as a graduate research assistant at the Utah Water Research Laboratory (UWRL). Amazon just offered him a position at AWS (Amazon Web Services) on the Elastic Block Store team. The Amazon Elastic Block Store team specializes in cloud storage in the AWS cloud. He will be building scalable distributed multi-tenant storage systems and working on system-level programming at Amazon. While he was unable to share what Amazon’s interview process was like, he did offer some helpful tips on the general interview process in CS.

“Firstly, the whole process was quite challenging but it is also fun if you like solving and discussing algorithms and of course rewarding at the end.” he said. There are several levels to the job interview process. First, you submit your application to the HR department, which, by the way, can take awhile to process your application. Then, your application will pass through the scrutiny of the HR department and then they will schedule a phone interview with you. “…and, after you pass that, say “hi” to the on-site interview.”, he added.

The key to success in CS job interviews to prepare. When asked, Ahmet described his preparation process. “…in preparation I brushed up my computer science knowledge, such as algorithms, data structures and software design concepts, and never used an IDE software for coding…”. He suggested that one should prepare for interview questions from different areas of CS and get used to writing code on whiteboard. He also recommended visiting some websites like topcoder.com but advised not relying completely on them. Finally, he said to, “…never give up and [to] ask for more details until you understand the questions clearly… never make up an answer if you really don’t know.”