These quotes are from AHIMA student members and professionals in the health information management (HIM) field. As many professionals can tell you, the HIM industry is a great choice to consider as you begin to look at colleges and career paths.
HIM is a combination of business, science, and information technology. It’s the process of acquiring, analyzing, and protecting digital and traditional medical information, which is vital to providing quality patient care.

Health information professionals care for patients by caring for their medical data. They ensure a patient’s health information and records are complete, accurate, and protected.

Some examples of records they complete and monitor are lab results, x-rays, clinical information and notes.
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HIM professionals work in a variety of settings and job titles. They often serve in bridge roles, connecting clinical, operational, and administrative functions. Looking at the chart, you can see they serve many different groups, including patients, physicians, administrators.

Within healthcare facilities, HIM professionals are in the middle of the action. They often act as the informational hub, working closely with doctors, insurance providers, and patients. Outside of the HIM department, they work closely with Billing and Finance, and the Admitting department.
Is HIM Right for Me?

It is, if you:
- Want to work in healthcare, but not directly with patients.
- See yourself in a career that offers diverse opportunities.
- Have an aptitude for science, but also like business, management, law, and technology.
- Enjoy working with professionals: physicians, nurses, lawyers, administrators, and executives.
- Want a career where you can choose to work on your own, with others, or a little of both.
A great way to learn about the field and job functions is to volunteer or intern in an HIM role or department. You’ll quickly learn all the field has to offer, and be able to try out potential settings and positions while you decide which path is best for you.

After you’ve decided that you want to pursue the HIM profession, the best way to get started is to decide if you want to complete a certificate program for coding, or an associate or bachelor’s degree program in HIM. Once you’ve decided on that path, you must research accredited institutions for the degree program, or coding certificate programs. When you have finished your degree program, you should take a certification exam, if you want to receive credentials. You also have the option to attend graduate school to take your degree level even further.

Finally, networking is a great way to find a job in HIM. By joining AHIMA, you are given access to AHIMA’s Engage Communities (AHIMA’s social networking site), mentor program, volunteer opportunities (including the Student Advisory Council), and your local component state association (CSA). CSAs provide great networking opportunities at a local level.
AHIMA developed a Career Map to provide people interested in HIM careers with the ability to see opportunities available, and to start planning for their futures. You can use this map as an example of what is possible and what your future can be.

A map was chosen because career ladders are too restrictive, and this layout shows that the landscape of health information is wide in scope, and continues to evolve.
This is an example of a path on the career map. The path is showing the promotional and transitional options for a HIM Clerk.

Looking at the key below, you can see that the red line shows a transitional path, and the black line shows a promotional path.

http://ahima.org/CareerMap/
This screen gives more detail about the starting position we’ve chosen, HIM Clerk. From here, you can read about the promotional and transitional pathways, and click the yellow button to get a full description of the position, job responsibilities, skills required, training and education, and required work experience.

You can visit AHIMA’s website [http://ahima.org/CareerMap/] for more information and to view the different each pathway to find something that interests you.
This is a listing of potential job settings for a health information professional. As you can see, there are many possibilities within this growing field.

In a clinic or physician practice or acute care hospital, the HIM professional is responsible for things such as managing day-to-day office operations, patient admission, insurance verification, record keeping, chart audits, or coding.

There are also options to work in government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control or Federal Drug Administration, or with law firms to provide expertise to areas within health law. HIM professionals can also be hired at insurance agencies, to work with providers to negotiate contracts and assist with claims. There are also opportunities in a research capacity, providing data management services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Settings</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Ambulatory Surgery Center</td>
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<td>• Behavioral/Mental Health</td>
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<td>• Consulting Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Educational Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Acute Care Hospital</td>
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<td>• Integrated Healthcare Delivery System</td>
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<td>• Long-term Care</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Clinic/Physician Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Non provider Setting (government, law firms, vendor, association)</td>
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<td>• Health Information Exchange (HIE)</td>
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<td>• Regional Extension Center (REC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Home Health/Hospice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Biopharmaceutical company</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Other Provider Setting (rehab, etc.)</td>
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Careers in HIM have competitive salaries. More than half of new graduates start with annual salaries between $30,000 to $50,000. By their fifth year of employment, that can increase to $50,000 to $75,000 annually.

It is important to note that because there are multiple job opportunities available to HIM graduates, the salaries can vary significantly depending on job responsibility and title. Geographic location can always play into the ranges, as you can see in the image above.
AHIMA has compiled a Salary Study which breaks down the salary information of nearly 11,000 HIM individuals. You can get a comprehensive overview on the salary information based on many different factors; including average salary by job title, average salary by job setting, and average salary by geographic location. This information is broken out into charts and graphs for ease of use and understanding.

ahima.org/salarystudy
One option in the health information field is to obtain a coding certificate. First, you must decide what your personal goals and learning preferences are, because that will make a difference in choosing which education path is best for you. It is always important to consider the program’s quality, and verify that they are an “approved coding program”.

Coding certificate programs can be obtained online or at a brick and mortar school. If you want to work in a hospital, you will most likely want to obtain an associate’s degree in health information as well, because often employers want an employee with both. A physician’s office may only require a certificate though. One thing to consider is that with the advent of computer-assisted coding (CAC), it is likely traditional coding positions will develop into auditor roles. These coders would be mainly responsible for inspecting the information and ensuring it is correct and secure.

After you’ve received a coding certificate, you can earn the following credentials through AHIMA (read list on the slide).

It’s also important to know the difference between “holding a certificate” and “being certified” in coding. Being certified means you have taken and passed a certification examination. Employers generally wish to hire people who are certified, not just holding a coding certificate of program completion.
When choosing a degree program, it’s important to consider your long-term goals and learning styles. You’ll want to decide if you plan to complete an associate or baccalaureate program. You have the option to attend a brick and mortar school, or complete an online program. Hybrid programs, which are a combination of both online and campus classes are growing in popularity and might be a good choice for you. There are also options to be a full-time student, or part-time if you plan to work as well. Again, this option is up to you—the only thing to keep in mind is that if you do want to sit for your credentialing exam after graduation, you will need to make sure the school you attend is CAHIIM-accredited. You can find those programs on CAHIIM’s website at cahiim.org.

You also have the option to complete a master’s degree, if you want to take your education further.

Even after completing a degree program, it’s important to continue your training. You can do this by attending seminars, and conferences, and taking classes, quizzes to help you keep up with the ever-changing landscape of this industry. There are many opportunities to continue your education throughout your career, which not only keeps you up to speed, but also challenged and engaged.
You can obtain your Registered Health Information Technician (RHIT) credential after completing an associate’s in health information management (this is sometimes referred to as health information technology). Most RHITs work in hospitals, but you can find them in a variety of other healthcare settings as well, including home health agencies, mental health facilities, and public health agencies.

The Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) credential is obtained after completing a Bachelor’s in Health Information Management (or sometimes referred to as Health Informatics and Information Management). Graduates receiving their Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA) credential may look for career choices not only in acute-care settings, but in all types of alternative care settings, as well as in education, business, and legal settings.
Other AHIMA credentials listed above. All of these credentials require at least an associate’s degree, and work experience.
Accreditation is a mechanism for ensuring quality academics in higher education. CAHIIM accreditation is a voluntary peer-review process to evaluate the program of study against CAHIIM standards.

This process is necessary in order for HIM programs to be eligible for the AHIMA professional HIM Certification exams. This means a graduate must complete an accredited CAHIIM program if they want to take AHIMA certification exams and become certified. This is not a necessity, but it shows future employers that you have received the expected professional knowledge and skills, and have experienced a curriculum relevant to today’s changing environment.

As an HIM student, if getting your RHIT or RHIA credential upon graduation is a goal, you want to be sure that you graduate from a CAHIIM-accredited program.

By visiting the CAHIIM website, you can search for a listing of all these programs.
Knowing how you are going to finance your education is a major step before taking the next step in your education. The first thing that is recommended for all students is to complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form.

Another option is to look for scholarships. The AHIMA Foundation awards around $90,000 annually in HIM scholarships for associate, baccalaureate, and master’s degree students. To be eligible for these scholarship opportunities, you will need to be a student member of AHIMA with a 3.5 GPA, and actively enrolled in a CAHIIM-accredited degree program.

Also, as an AHIMA student member, you will qualify for state-level scholarships through your component state association.
According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for HIM professionals is expected to increase 20 percent by 2018.

Health Informatics/Information Management is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the US. With the population aging, more people will require more medical tests and procedures, which could lead to a growth in technicians who can keep medical records organized, as well as those who can process claims for reimbursement from insurance companies, per the US Department of Labor.

In a 2012 US News and World Report, health information management/informatics ranked number four among top college majors with a future. This report also states that in the next five to seven years, there will be a need for 50,000 workers in this field.

(US News and World Report article, Christopher Gearon, Sept 12, 2012)
A few of the top growing industries with an increased demand for health information professionals include: (read list)

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(From Florida Health Information Management Student Toolkit)
The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for $2 billion in funds to implement a variety of programs, including the development health professionals across the nation to support doctors, hospitals and other providers with specialized health IT tools and skills.

According to the US Department of Labor, Health Information Technology will grow to encompass new support positions, including the following (read list).

(From Florida Health Information Management Student Toolkit)
For more information on the HIM field, HIM education, or HIM’s future outlook, please visit our website at ahima.org. Also listed are other sites that may be of use to you while preparing to make a decision.

- For more information on HIM careers and education, go to AHIMA.org/careers, or visit your state’s website.
- For more information on accredited programs, visit CAHIIM.org
- For information on AHIMA’s scholarship opportunities, visit ahimafoundation.org
- To apply for Federal Student Aid, visit FAFSA.ed.gov
- For more information on AHIMA’s salary study, visit AHIMA.org/salarystudy
- To view the Career Map, go to AHIMA.org/CareerMap