Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute Launches Nation's First Undergraduate Web Science Degree

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has launched the nation's first undergraduate degree program devoted to the emerging interdisciplinary field of Web Science. The new academic major expands the current Information Technology degree program to create both a bachelor's degree, and a master's concentration, in "Information Technology and Web Science." The students in the interdisciplinary degree program will investigate issues on the Web related to security, trust, privacy, content value, and the development of the Web of the future.

"With these new degree programs, students and researchers here at Rensselaer will help to usher in a new era of understanding and study of the Web from its social and economic impacts to the evolution of data and the development of new Web-based artificial intelligence," said Rensselaer President Shirley Ann Jackson. "Led by professors within our Tetherless World Research Constellation, including one of the inventors of the Semantic Web, James Hendler, as well as a team of interdisciplinary scientists and engineers from across our campus, this new program in Web Science will allow Rensselaer students to once again lead the way in an emerging area of scientific discovery."

The new programs will have a strong foundation in information technology with course work and research in computer science and programming as well as information management. However, they will also extend well beyond most traditional information technology curriculums and their traditional focus solely on the technical details in building Web applications, according to Hendler, who also serves as the assistant dean in charge of the Information Technology and Web Science program.

"The World Wide Web has drastically changed the way we live our lives, process data, and even make scientific discoveries. Despite this, we know very little about the overall structure and evolution of the Web," Hendler said. "Through interdisciplinary study, students at Rensselaer will be among the first in the world to specifically explore the interactions between the complex technical, engineering, and social aspects of the Web. This will be bringing new and important perspectives on the most transformative technology in their world to their research and careers following graduation."

"Rensselaer has been a strong proponent of this emerging interdisciplinary field of Web Science, and I congratulate them on creating this program," said Massachusetts Institute of Technology Professor Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web and head of the United Kingdom's recently announced $45 million Web Science Institute.

"We congratulate Rensselaer on creating an undergraduate Web Science program," said Professor Dame Wendy Hall of Southampton University, president of the Association for Computing Machinery and trustee of the new Web Science Trust in the United Kingdom. "Rensselaer has been a strong contributor to the Web Science Trust's curriculum efforts and is world-leading in this area. We look forward to the possibility of creating joint international programs between Rensselaer and the University of Southampton's Doctoral Training Center in Web Science."

The degree programs will include faculty from computer science, management, cognitive science, and the humanities, as well as faculty from the Tetherless World Research Constellation. The constellation comprises faculty who mentor up-and-coming faculty and graduate and undergraduate students in fields ranging from computer science to informatics. Their collective research and teaching efforts center on new ways to understand and harness the inner workings of the Web.

Students graduating on May 29, 2010, will be the first students to receive the new degrees.

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