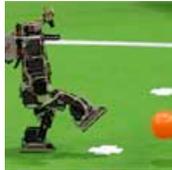# Tin Teachers Aid Tech Students

by Eydie Cubarrubia on 12 July 2006, 00:00

Categories: Computers
Topics: microsoft , education , college , computing , robots , georgia , teacher , bryn mawr

Forget Pimpbot, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*'s 1950s sci-fi-style robot with a 1970s street vocabulary and feathered hat. Microsoft and Georgia Tech are planning robots that pimp knowledge, the two organizations said Wednesday.

Late Night with Conan O'Brien

Specifically, the automatons will be part of the Institute for Personal Robots in Education (IPRE), created by the College of Computing at Georgia Tech, Microsoft, and BrynMawrCollege.

The goal is to make personal-use robots that will teach computer science courses to university undergrad students at academic institutions everywhere.

The move could boost student interest in science (see Talent Shortage Slows Oil Tech). It could also take advantage of the market for medical, personal welfare, and daily living assistance robots, which the Japan Robot Association says will reach $7.9 billion by 2010 (see Business Plans For Robots); that is, if the personal robots themselves "graduate" from school to broader use.

Business Plans For Robots

Officials from the software developer and the institutions said IPRE's initial focus will be to help increase the number of IT experts in the world.

"We believe that we'll greatly increase [computer science classes'] appeal—especially to students who may not have considered majoring in this field," Craig Mundie, Microsoft's chief research and strategy officer, said in a statement.

The robots will also pique the interest of students who are more tech-savvy than ever.

"We are committed to expanding the horizons of our students by incorporating cutting-edge and engaging courses—such as robotics—as core components of the curriculum," Georgia Tech College of Computing dean Richard A. DeMillo said in a statement.

No Robot-speak

Bryn Mawr's computing department chair Deepak Kumar noted that these days, those who study computer engineering are "a very different set of students from the traditional engineering types that have worked on [artificial intelligence and robotics] problems over the past 50 years."

To be sure, it's not like the classroom will be headed by a large mechanical being drawing on whiteboards and lecturing in a monotone voice.

Instead, students will get small, mobile machines shrink-wrapped with the textbooks they buy at university bookstores. The student will use his or her desktop to develop and run programs that control the tiny automatons.

But it's a start. Microsoft already has unveiled its Robotics Studio, a Windows-based software environment that offers a common development platform for all developers to create robotic applications (see Microsoft Makes Robotic Friends). Robotics Studio will be used in the IPRE machines.

Microsoft Makes Robotic Friends

And Microsoft will front $1 million over the next three years for the IPRE project, while the schools will contribute a combined additional $1 million.

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