MIT Merges Technology Labs

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has announced plans to merge two high-profile labs into what will be one of the largest research labs in the world. The Laboratory for Computer Science and the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory will be combined to form the New Laboratory for Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence (NLCSAI), which will comprise 750 faculty, staff, and students. According to a statement from MIT, the NLCSAI “will aspire to germinate and cultivate the most far-reaching new ideas and carry out the world’s best research in information and intelligence technology and science.” Rodney Brooks, who will be co-director of the NLCSAI, offered this comment on the kinds of research the new lab might do: “Imagine instead of growing a tree, cutting it down, and building a table, you just grow a table [and] digitally instruct the organism how to grow.” (Wired News, <http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,59137,00.html>)

Report Shows Steep Rise in Distance Education

According to a new report from the Department of Education, enrollment in for-credit, distance-education courses at U.S. institutions more than doubled from the 1997–98 academic year to the 2000–01 academic year. The report, based on a survey of about 1,500 institutions, showed a similar rise in the number of distance-education courses offered and indicated that the percentage of institutions offering such courses rose from 44 percent to 56 percent. The survey highlighted the prevalence of Internet technologies for distance education, as well as videoconferencing and one- and two-way audio. John Bailey, of the Department of Education’s Office of Educational Technology, said that distance education is not replacing traditional education but has become an important alternative for many students “who otherwise would not be able to participate.” (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/07/20030721021.htm> [registration required])

NORTHERNWESTERN GOES FOR MULTICASTING

Northwestern University will provide live, round-the-clock C-Span and C-Span2 connection broadcasts to anyone with an Internet2 connection through a technique called multicasting. Multicasting effectively addresses the bandwidth challenge of simultaneously broadcasting digital-video signals to many viewers in scattered locations. Whereas traditional video broadcasting over data networks requires creating multiple broadcast copies at the source and sending a copy to each recipient’s computer, multicasting creates only one copy at the source and sends it over the network to be copied by the network router closest to each viewer’s computer. Multicasting requires that certain software be installed on campus routers and Internet-backbone routers, along with state-of-the-art hardware. Some believe that such requirements will make the technology inaccessible to many campuses. (Chronicle of Higher Education, <http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/05/2003053001t.htm> [registration required])

SUPREME COURT SAYS LIBRARY FILTERS STAY

In a 6-3 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the provisions of the Children’s Internet Protection Act that require public libraries to install Web filters or lose federal funds. The decision overturns a lower-court ruling that stated the restrictions violated constitutional free-speech rights. The high court’s decision said that concerns about filters blocking too much or not enough material were exaggerated and that library patrons could easily have the filters disabled on request. The justices also noted that protecting minors from objectionable material was in the government’s interest and that an acceptable alternative to filters had not been presented. (CNET, <http://news.com.com/2100-1028_3-1019952.html>)

MentorNet is a national nonprofit organization whose goal is to provide support in the form of e-mail mentoring for women studying science and engineering. The program matches female students with working professionals who give advice and encouragement. Many women feel uncomfortable in a field dominated by male students and faculty. Participants in the program—both students and mentors—say that e-mail mentoring is effective, despite the perception that it is impersonal. E-mail allows students and mentors in different time zones to communicate at their convenience. One mentor said, “You don’t have to drop what you are doing . . . and I can take time to think about my answer.” MentorNet was started by Carol Muller, who, as associate engineering dean at Dartmouth College, was disturbed to see that women left science and engineering programs at twice the rate of men. (San Jose Mercury News, <http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/news/local/6053553.htm>)

Information Technology in the News
The next day. The premise of the system, and return e-mail lists of filtered results engine that sends requests by e-mail to gap, researchers are developing a search slow, are in a very different boat: little many Internet connections are extremely phone lines can be hard to come by and Users in poor countries, they say, where...