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IU South Bend Professor Wins SBC Fellows Award

December 23, 2003

Professor James Wolfer is among 14 recipients of an Indiana University SBC Fellows Award for his work in computing curriculum and robot assembly programming. The SBC awards are given for innovation in the application of information technology to teaching and learning. The fifth round of awards totals \$176,000 for the 14 projects.

Wolfer shares the honor with four professors from IU Bloomington, three from IU East, one from IU Kokomo, one from IU Northwest and four from IUPUI. Other research involves work in finance, music, microbiology and dentistry among others.

Wolfer is an associate professor of computer science and has been a member of the IU South Bend faculty since 2001.

The grant will provide hands-on, real world experience early by introducing sophomores and juniors to assembly language programmers. Assembly language is a programming language requiring great attention to small details. Observing the action of robots executing such programs can generate valuable feedback and illustrate real-world consequence. For example, a robot hitting a wall makes students instantly aware of program errors.

Come next fall, a series of laboratory exercises will culminate with student programmed robots traveling through a maze resulting in increased student skills. "We will build experience earlier to increase interest and expertise," Wolfer said. This familiarity with equipment and program will be used as a foundation in future classes.

Wolfer explained that the robots are about the size of a can of tuna and each robot costs about \$1,700.

He said he has received a great deal of support for the project from Professor Hossein Hakimzadeh, the chair of the department; Terri Demmon, of UCET, and Erika Zynda, of the Office of Research.

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