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MIT and University of Southampton launch World Wide Web research collaboration

Initiative will analyze and shape web's evolution

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MIT and the University of Southampton today announced the launch of a long-term research collaboration that aims to produce the fundamental scientific advances necessary to guide the future design and use of the World Wide Web.

The Web Science Research Initiative (WSRI) will generate a research agenda for understanding the scientific, technical and social challenges underlying the growth of the web. Of particular interest is the volume of information on the web that documents more and more aspects of human activity and knowledge. WSRI research projects will weigh such questions as: How do we access information and assess its reliability? By what means may we assure its use complies with social and legal rules? How will we preserve the web over time?

Commenting on the new initiative, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web and a founding director of WSRI, said, "As the web celebrates its first decade of widespread use, we still know surprisingly little about how it evolved, and we have only scratched the surface of what could be realized with deeper scientific investigation into its design, operation and impact on society.

"The Web Science Research Initiative will allow researchers to take the web seriously as an object of scientific inquiry, with the goal of helping to foster the web's growth and fulfill its great potential as a powerful tool for humanity."

The joint MIT-Southampton initiative will provide a global forum for scientists and scholars to collaborate on the first multidisciplinary scientific research effort specifically designed to study the Web at all scales of size and complexity, and to develop a new discipline of web science for future generations of researchers.

Professor Wendy Hall, head of school at Southampton University School of Electronics and Computer Science and also a founding director of WSRI, said: "As the web continues to evolve, it is becoming increasingly clear that a new type of graduate will be required to meet the needs of science and industry. Already we are seeing evidence of this, with major Internet companies and research institutions lamenting the fact that there are simply not enough people with the right mix of skills to meet current and future employment demands. In launching WSRI, one of our ultimate aims is to address this issue."

WSRI will be headquartered at the Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL) at MIT and at the School of Electronics and Computer Science (ECS) at the University of Southampton. Initial plans call for joint research projects, workshops and student/faculty exchanges between the two institutions.

The initiative will have four founding directors: Tim Berners-Lee, director of the World Wide Web Consortium, senior research scientist at MIT and professor at the University of Southampton; Wendy Hall, professor of computer science and head of the School of Electronics and Computer Science at the University of Southampton; Nigel Shadbolt, professor of artificial intelligence at the University of Southampton and director of the Advanced Knowledge Technologies Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration; and Daniel J. Weitzner, Technology and Society Domain leader of the World Wide Web Consortium and principal research scientist at MIT.

About MIT

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology -- a coeducational, privately endowed research university -- is dedicated to advancing knowledge and educating students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation and the world in the 21st century. The Institute has more than 900 faculty and 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. It is organized into five Schools -- Architecture and Urban Planning; Engineering; Humanities, Art