# IBM Sends Watson to NY College to Boost its Skills

MICHAEL HILL, Associated Press

TROY, N.Y. (AP) — Watson, the supercomputer famous for beating the world's best human "Jeopardy!" champions, is going to college.

IBM is announcing Wednesday that it will provide a Watson system to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the first time the computer is being sent to a university. Just like the flesh-and-blood students who will work on it, Watson is leaving home to sharpen its skills. Course work will include English and math.

"It's a big step for us," said Michael Henesey, IBM's vice president of business development. "We consider it absolutely strategic technology for IBM in the future. And we want to evolve it, of course, thoughtfully, but also in collaboration with the best and brightest in academia."

Watson is a cognitive system that can process massive amounts of data, including natural language. To beat "Jeopardy!" champions in 2011, it was fed the contents of encyclopedias, dictionaries, books, news dispatches and movie scripts. For its medical work, it takes in medical textbooks and journals. After it takes in data, Watson can provide information like a "Jeopardy!" answer, a medical diagnosis or an estimate of financial risk.

IBM, which provided a grant to RPI to operate Watson for three years, sees it as a way to help it boost the computer's cognitive capabilities.

Artificial intelligence researchers at RPI want to do things like improve Watson's mathematical ability and help it quickly figure out the meaning of new or made-up words. They want to improve its ability to handle the torrent of images, videos and emails on the Web, the sort of unstructured information that is overwhelmingly fueling the data boom.

For Selmer Bringsjord, who heads RPI's department of cognitive science, getting a crack at Watson is like a car aficionado being tossed the keys to a souped-up Lamborghini. Bringsjord said he and his graduate students could potentially focus on providing Watson with a deeper understanding of the structure of sentences and how dialogues unfold.

"If I can make a tiny, tiny contribution in that direction, given how historic the system is, I'd be very happy and I think my graduate students would be as well," Bringsjord said.

The original Watson remains at IBM's Research Headquarters in Westchester County, about 100 miles south of the school. RPI has hardware fully dedicated to running the system's software at its supercomputing center in the Rensselaer Tech Park near the school. RPI's version of Watson has 15 terabytes of memory, enough to store a massive library. It will allow 20 users to access the system at once.

IBM has worked collaboratively with other outside institutions on Watson, such as Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, New York-based Citigroup Inc. and the Cleveland Clinic. But this is the first time hardware fully dedicated to running the Watson software is being installed at a college.

Officials with IBM and RPI say Watson's college tenure also will prepare RPI students for jobs in cognitive science and "big data," a field where demand is quickly outpacing supply. John Kolb, RPI's chief information officer, said he would like the next generation of the school's technology graduates "to help IBM take Watson to the next level."

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