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## IWU's Version of Star Wars' R2D2

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December 4, 1996

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## *IWU's Version of Star Wars' R2D2*

### **Robot Dubbed, Shelley, to be Unveiled, Dec. 6; Key Tool in Cognitive Science Teaching, Research**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--She plays the piano. She recites poetry. She solves puzzles. She's a robot named Shelley, designed and built by Illinois Wesleyan University students and faculty.

Shelley--IWU's version of R2D2, the cinematic robot of Star Wars' fame--will have her coming out party, Friday, Dec. 6, at 4 p.m. in the atrium of IWU's Center for Natural Sciences Learning and Research, 201 E. Beecher St., Bloomington.

"IWU students working on honors research projects started to build Shelley last summer," said Carl Gillett, assistant professor of philosophy and a member of the interdisciplinary team from IWU's philosophy, computer science, psychology, and math departments who are exploring new ways to teach cognitive science.

"Students designed and built Shelley's components," Gillett said, "including computer software, which is the heart of Shelley's intelligence."

Physically, Shelley has two "eyes" perched on stalks, two pincers a.k.a. "hands," and she runs around on a trolley.

However, Gillett points out that Shelley is much more than a gadget. The robot, according to Gillett, is a teaching device designed to introduce undergraduates to one of contemporary science's hottest fields--cognitive science, the study of the human mind, including perception, thinking, remembering, language, learning, and other mental phenomena.

"Cognitive science," Gillett explained, "is perhaps science's most exciting area today. It is an interdisciplinary field joining computer science, psychology, neurobiology, and philosophy."

Devices like Shelley are giving faculty and students the tools needed to help "solve questions that for centuries were thought to be unsolvable," Gillett said, "questions about how a human brain could be a mind or intelligence like ours."

IWU plans to use Shelley as a teaching and research tool in about 14 philosophy, computer science, psychology, and math courses.

Shelley's coming out party is sponsored by the IWINK Cognitive Psychology Group or the Illinois Wesleyan Intelligent Network on Knowledge, a long-term interdisciplinary student-faculty

(more)

## **A Robot Named Shelley/2**

research project whose key aim is to set up an undergraduate curriculum in cognitive science. Among IWINK's goals are: developing Shelley and other artificial intelligence and robotic capabilities; providing IWU students with challenging research opportunities in various fields of cognitive science; and creating an interactive, research-oriented World Wide Web site focusing on cognitive science.

Plans also are underway to create a World Wide Web site so others can tap into knowledge gained from Shelley's design, construction, and operation.

Another objective for Shelley is to demonstrate that an undergraduate cognitive science program can be established and that it can spur innovative instruction in many disciplines at all education levels.

Among IWINK faculty participants are Susan Anderson-Freed, professor and chairperson of computer science; Lon Shapiro, visiting assistant professor of computer science; Johnna Shapiro, assistant professor of psychology; Roger Schnaitter, associate provost and professor of psychology; Leonard Clapp, assistant professor of philosophy; Charlotte Brown, associate professor and chair of philosophy; Gillett; and Lawrence Stout, professor of mathematics.

IWU is part of a cognitive science consortium, formed last year, which includes Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. Among consortium partners are ISU's David Anderson and SIU's John Barker. ISU's PT-Project features its robot, Iris. SIU's Barker devised a key artificial intelligence computer software program, ProtoThinker.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next August. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.

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<p><b>Editor's Note:</b> The demonstration of Shelley's capabilities is open for news media coverage. To arrange for faculty-student interviews, call IWU Public Relations-News Services, 309/556-3181.</p>
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