

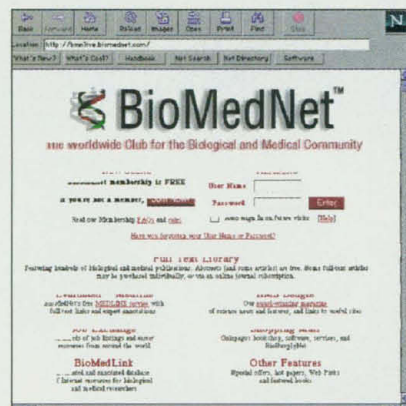
NETWATCH

edited by JOCELYN KAISER

Biology Central

Besides posting your favorite journals in cyberspace, what can scientific publishers add to the Web? Elsevier Science in London is trying hard to carve its own niche with BioMedNet, a site billed as "the worldwide club for the biological and medical community" that offers a wealth of free and fee-based resources—souped-up MEDLINE searching, journals, news, job listings, and more.

SITE VISIT



biomednet.com

The site's biggest draw, says press officer Ellen Spornagel, is its free version of MEDLINE, the National Library of Medicine database of citations for 3600 journals. Abstracts in "Evaluated MEDLINE" carry links to the full text of articles, which can be purchased by fax or mail from the British Library. BioMedNet also holds an online library of over 100 publications, such as *Current Biology* and *The Scientist*. (Prices for full-text articles average \$7.) Another feature is *HMS Beagle*, a free biweekly Webzine with daily research news capsules, op-eds, discussions, and more. BioMedNet relaunched this week with several additions, including a bookstore called Galapagos and a database of

nearly 4000 Web sites reviewed by outside scientists. The site also offers a mouse knockout and mutation database and Swiss-Prot, the protein database; both can be cross-searched with MEDLINE. More collaborations are in the works, including a patent news service and a macromolecular structures database. At over 200,000 registered users and 9000 unique users a day, BioMedNet describes itself as "the leading site for bio/medical research." The only challenge for Web surfers may be staying afloat in the flood of information.

UCLA Weds Classes and the Web

Last summer, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), began building a cyber-empire, setting up Web sites for each of some 3000 undergraduate courses the school offers. Although the strategy has encountered heated opposition on and off campus, now several science professors say the Web bonanza is improving education.

NEWS

University techies help faculty set up the sites, which range from bare-bones affairs offering only syllabi to pages packed with class notes, discussions, outside links, and videos. Some students have wondered whether a new student fee for this and other computer support is worth it, according to a recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. But perhaps the strongest criticism has come from historian David Noble of York University in Toronto, who caused a stir last winter by arguing in the online journal *First Monday* (firstmonday.dk) that UCLA's ulterior motive is to package courses so it can cut faculty, leading to a "commodification of instruction."

The university vehemently denies that charge. "We have

Orderly systematics. The various names bestowed on a particular species can create confusion for biologists studying or managing it. Offering a solution is the Integrated Taxonomic Information System, an inter-agency database with the most-accepted nomenclature for North American plants and critters. www.itis.usda.gov/itis/

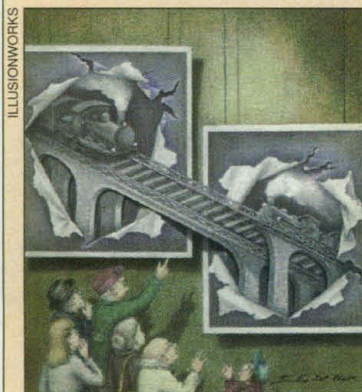
HOT PICKS

Calculated move. You can find a nucleic acid's molecular weight, make a date for the next meteor shower, and perform countless other computations thanks to a long list of scientific calculators at www.wolinskyweb.com/measure.htm

absolutely no commercial goal," says College of Letters and Sciences Provost Brian Copenhagen. Developmental neurobiologist Patricia Phelps adds that she's used her course sites to link to online tools she'd been developing, such as anatomy quizzes and animations of embryo development. For her, the sites are "one more added convenience."

For better or for worse, class Web pages are on the upswing. Hundreds of universities are snapping up software to make the sites, says Murray Goldberg of WebCT, one software provider.

Eye twisters. Your mind will try to convince you otherwise, but in the drawing below, the light square within the cylinder's shadow is in fact the same shade as the dark squares outside the shadow. The illusion by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Ted Adelson is among several hundred on a Web site created by California Institute of Technology cognitive neuroscientist Al Seckel, vice president of a company called IllusionWorks LLC that produces exhibits for museums (www.illusionworks.com). The site, hosted at Caltech, has page after page of mind-bending illustrations, from simple classics like "The Impossible Triangle" to interactive demos and works by artists, such as Switzerland's Sandro Del Prete, whose drawing "The Railway Bridge" is shown at left. Seckel supplies references and explains the cognitive science behind many illusions, which he calls "a very nice window into how the brain works."



NET PICS

Science Online

For specialists and other interested readers, *Science Online* offers additional data and other material for some papers appearing in print. This week, for example, to accompany the report on G protein $\beta\gamma$ subunits by C. Ford *et al.* (p. 1271), available online are notes on methods and figures showing the amino acids involved when $G\beta\gamma$ subunits interact with specific enzymes and ion channels. To access supplemental material for papers—an online subscription is not required—click on "special features" at www.sciencemag.org

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