BEN PORTAL—YOUR DOORWAY TO A BROADER RANGE OF TEACHING MATERIAL

Have you ever wished you could make your curriculum more integrative in nature? Would you like to show your students not only the physiological effects of an infectious disease but also provide a perspective on the microorganism responsible for it and the environment in which it might flourish? Would you like to have a single site where you could search for information on various aspects of the same topic from a variety of disciplines rather than having to surf the net?

APS is pleased to be a founding member of the BiosciEd Net (BEN) Collaborative, which is developing a revolutionary approach for transforming undergraduate, graduate, and professional biology teaching and learning. APS is one of 11 professional societies and coalitions for biology education involved in the BEN Collaborative, which is being spearheaded by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The other partnership societies include American Institute for Biological Sciences, American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, American Society for Microbiology (ASM), BioQuest Curriculum Consortium, Ecological Society of America (ESA), National Association of Biology Teachers, National Biological Information Infrastructure, National Health Museum - Access Excellence, Science's Signal Transduction Knowledge Environment (STKE), and Society of Toxicology.

Through a unique portal site, the BEN Collaborative is providing searchable and seamless access to the digital library collections of its partnering organizations. Each BEN partner uses the same set of descriptors (e.g., title, author, keywords, description, format, etc.) to classify items in its online archive of teaching resources. The search engine at the BEN portal uses this information to link the user with materials from all of the partnering organizations. The user can quickly identify and link to available materials on a specific topic, instructional level, particular format (PowerPoint, simulation, lecture outline), or pedagogy.

Material from the various societal digital libraries that is located through the BEN portal will provide educators with accurate and reliable undergraduate biology education resources. Resources for graduate and professional education will also be included on a partner-by-partner basis. All resources will be maintained by the individual societies. Educators who are searching via the BEN portal will be sent to the specific partner for access to the actual item. Some form of registration may be required, although this varies depending on the partner.

The BEN portal site began beta-testing in March 2002, with a launch date scheduled for April 2002. Two other societies (ASM and ESA), which also have their own teaching resources databases, together with APS and AAAS will form the initial basis for the portal site. STKE is uploading selected resources into the BEN portal, as are some of the other societies; these resources will be housed at AAAS until such time as those societies develop their own databases. Other societies or coalitions can be added as partners, provided that their databases conform to the requirements established by the original BEN partners. This ensures that any material contributed by a new society will be equally accessible through the BEN search mechanism.

Beta-testers were recruited from each partner society and from the scientific community as a whole and were selected to represent a wide range of backgrounds, institutions, and departments. They were asked to complete a number of assignments using the BEN portal to determine ease of use, accessibility, usefulness of features, etc. Initial feedback from beta-testers has been very favorable.

Once the BEN portal is live in April 2002, any interested educator (or anyone else, for that matter) will be able to access the BEN site and any material catalogued through that site at http://www.biosciednet.org. People who have material to submit and come...
into the BEN site will be directed to one of the societies that has that capability.

APS is pleased to have been a principal partner in the development of the BEN portal. Because of the collaboration with the other partnering societies, the material contained within the BEN portal and the APS Archive of Teaching Resources will be more cross-disciplinary in nature and consequently much richer for those educators seeking new material or methods for teaching their students about the exciting world of biology.

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The APS Archive of Teaching Resources is a fully searchable database of teaching resources and provides a forum for sharing and discussing teaching materials developed by physiology educators at all levels. The Archive is now accepting submissions of all educational resource types.

Questions?
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