Renowned computer scientist to join MSU College of Engineering in August 2016

Michigan State University has hired the first endowed chair in genetic programming in the United States.

Wolfgang Banzhaf, currently with Memorial University of Newfoundland, will be the first to hold the John R. Koza Endowed Chair in Genetic Programming. Banzhaf will join MSU in August 2016.

“Dr. Banzhaf is among the most renowned computer scientists in the world studying genetic programming,” said Erik Goodman, director of MSU’s BEACON Center for the Study of Evolution in Action. “We are quite pleased he accepted the position, and are fortunate to be able to fund the position because of a generous gift from John Koza, a pioneer of the field of genetic programming.”

Koza made the donation to BEACON, where many researchers develop computational tools inspired by natural evolution to generate solutions to real-world engineering problems, he added.

BEACON’s focus on teaching, research and practice in evolutionary computation helped attract Banzhaf to MSU. He joins about 20 other faculty members doing research in evolutionary computation, making BEACON one of the best places for such research in the country.

“We are tremendously grateful for the vision and investment of John Koza, which demonstrates a commitment to the great work that’s being done at MSU in genetic programming and evolutionary computation,” said MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon. “The Koza endowment and endowed chair position empowers us to expand and enhance that work in ways that will pay dividends for years to come.”

Genetic programming techniques evolve computer programs to solve problems, ranging from finding and fixing bugs in existing software to generating new programs that control robots or identify financial market trends. To further the field, Koza sponsors an annual evolutionary computation competition in which participants solve problems traditionally seen as requiring human intelligence to solve, such as generating new patentable designs, writing new computer programs or debugging human-written ones, or beating human competitors in games.

Banzhaf is one of the co-authors of “Genetic Programming: An Introduction,” a classic text in the field, as well as the sole author of “Linear Genetic Programming,” which provided a new basis to view genetic programming, extending the original work of Koza to new domains.

In addition, Banzhaf served as the founding editor of the journal Genetic Programming and Evolvable Machines. He currently chairs the Association for Computing Machinery’s Special Interest Group on Genetic and Evolutionary Computation.

At MSU, Banzhaf’s primary appointment will be in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, and through BEACON he will be interacting with many other researchers from many disciplines.

MSU is seeking to establish 100 new endowed chair positions in order to retain and attract great thinkers through the Empower Extraordinary campaign, a $1.5 billion capital campaign publicly launched in the Fall of 2014.

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