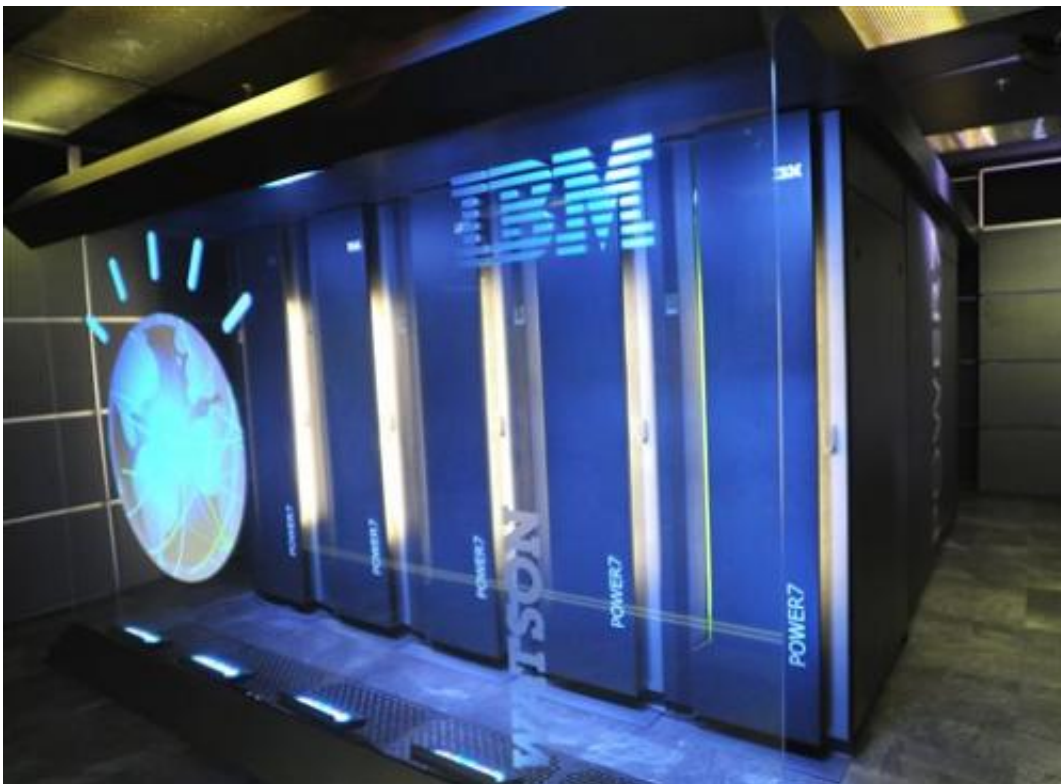# IBM partners with universities on Watson projects

May 6 2014, by Bree Fowler

A Jan. 13, 2011 file photo provided by IBM shows the IBM computer system known as Watson, at IBM's T.J. Watson research center in Yorktown Heights, N.Y. A partnership between IBM and seven of the country's top computer science universities, which was set to be announced Wednesday, May 7, 2014, will let students will use the "Jeopardy!" champion to develop new cognitive computing applications for a variety of industries ranging from health care to finance. (AP Photo/IBM, File)

Watson is going to college. Students at seven of the country's top computer science universities will get a chance to try out IBM's famous cognitive computing system as part of new classes set for next fall.

The partnership between Armonk, New York-based IBM and the universities, which was set to be announced Wednesday, will let students use the "Jeopardy!" champion to develop new cognitive computing applications for a variety of industries ranging from health care to finance.

"If they're interested in these kinds of technologies, when they graduate they're going to have a natural proclivity to designing them," says Michael Rhodin, IBM's senior vice president overseeing Watson.

"The logic here is that the next generation of entrepreneurs is in universities today."

The move follows IBM Corp.'s January announcement that it was investing more than $1 billion in Watson, including about $100 million in startup companies working on Watson projects. The investment also includes a shiny new headquarters for the division on the edge of New York City's East Village close to New York University, one of the schools taking part in the project.

The partnership will provide a unique opportunity for the students, who will mostly be seniors and graduate students, because Watson isn't programed like traditional computers.

Instead of relying only on the information that's put into it, Watson learns by "reading" vast amounts of information and combining it with the results of previous work to find answers to problems, making it ideal for data-heavy industries.

As part of the Watson classes, students will be given access to a Watson system that IBM will provide through a cloud. They'll then break into teams and use those resources to build and test their own applications, which will be geared toward a particular industry.

Participating students at the University of Michigan will likely develop their apps in collaboration with the University of Michigan Health Center and specifically its C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, says Eric Michielssen a professor of engineering and [computer science](link), who also serves as associate vice president for advanced research.

It's also possible that the university's business school could get involved to help gauge the commercial potential of the apps, he says.

"Yes, we have a fantastic artificial intelligence group here, but Watson's technologies are very unique," Michielssen says. "This is a fantastic opportunity for our students to use the extraordinary capabilities of Watson."

Student response to the new class has been phenomenal, Michielssen says. The 75 spots for the fall semester filled up within two days and there are currently about 50 students on the waitlist, which is expected to grow.

Besides NYU and Michigan, the schools currently signed up for the program include Carnegie Mellon University, Ohio State University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, University of Texas at Austin and the University of California, Berkeley.