

Schools step up with education as frontline in AI battle

By Claude Solnik

It looks like AI also stands for "all in" when it comes to many educational institutions' efforts to focus on this as a new field of study, as well as a skill in many sectors and source of careers. The SUNY Board of Trustees late last year updated SUNY's general education framework to include artificial intelligence as part of the literacy core competency as of Fall 2026. These days, fluency or at least familiarity with AI has become a part of so many disciplines with schools rolling out degrees, courses and modifying existing education. As schools focus on developing and expanding AI in their curriculum, the result is a kind of AI educational arms race spanning new courses and degrees and including it as an element of existing courses. AI has implications and applications including healthcare, such as drug design and development; robotics; virtual gaming; cybersecurity; machine learning; surgery and manufacturing. Gov. Kathy Hochul earlier this year created the Empire AI consortium as a kind of educational effort "to make New York a global leader in artificial intelligence" with Long Island's SUNY schools saying their actions conform to that. "Whoever is at the forefront of artificial intelligence will dominate the next chapter of human history," Hochul said in a statement. "AI will have a transformational effect on our economy and industries." We're still seeing early stages of educational institutions seeking to make AI a cornerstone of their curriculum by recruiting AI mavens to faculty. "As we look forward to the use of AI in all disciplines, we now have searches going for faculty with AI expertise across an array of disciplines," Farmingdale State College President Robert S. Prezant said. "On top of this, we have developed taskforces to explore usage, opportunities in workforce development, and boundaries of AI." Stony Brook University recently built on its AI infrastructure, recruiting Lav Varshney as the first director of its Artificial Intelligence Innovation Institute, after serving as a faculty member of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. Carl W. Lejuez, Stony Brook University's executive vice president and provost, said Varshney will help in "catalyzing core AI research, curriculum innovation, and societal change" at the AI Innovation Institute. Stony Brook said he will build on work begun by more than 40 faculty and staff who helped develop the initial plans for the institute. The goal isn't just to innovate, but build bridges to industry. Varshney is also a visiting scholar at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management with appointments at the RAND Corporation and Brookhaven National Lab. And he is the chief scientist at Ensaras, a company that uses AI to automate and improve wastewater systems, as well as CEO and co-founder of Kocree, an AI start-up focused on using AI for music. Other SUNY schools also are upping the ante in AI, announcing plans, initiatives and hires and inspiring faculty to do more with AI. SUNY Old Westbury President Timothy E. Sams earlier this month in a kind of "moonshot moment" speech announced a "campus-wide artificial intelligence initiative to provide AI instruction for every undergraduate student and integrate AI across its teaching, research and operations." "AI is here and we all must learn and adapt it as a tool of opportunity for everyone," Sams said in his call for a plan within 90 days. Sams cited a "growing demand for AI literacy from employers and students," leading the school to "integrate AI fluency" as part of education. Chancellor John B. King Jr. said "the campus is setting new expectations for educational excellence to benefit all students. Prezant said SUNY Farmingdale is working to help students "manage, understand, and appropriately use AI" by having AI embedded in courses. SUNY Farmingdale launched a Bachelor of Science in Artificial Intelligence, "blending business and computer science." And other schools are launching degrees in AI to keep current. And Long Island University is getting into the AI act, by offering a B.S. and M.S. in Artificial Intelligence, supported by a "cutting-edge learning and design center" they developed with Fortune 500 Engineering Company, Dassault Systems. "This center will provide students with the opportunity to develop research projects and prototypes with the same big data and artificial intelligence platforms used in cutting-edge industry applications," according to LIU, which also

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touts AI research, internships and jobs. LIU said its artificial intelligence degree is "one of the first degrees of its kind in the country. Students in the program, which begins with courses in computer programming and statistics, learn to design systems that exhibit "human-like intelligence." This initiative is about jobs as well as knowledge. LIU said graduates will have the "skill-set necessary to meet industry demand" for workers able to AI research and development in a wide range of industry sectors.

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