

Connect.AI prepares students to help small businesses with AI

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A new artificial intelligence-based program at the University of Connecticut called “Connect.AI,” which is focused on helping small businesses, gathered over 20 accepted students for a new member social on April 16.

Founder of Connect.AI, Eliyahu Cohen, said the program will start in the 2026-27 academic year and will be split between two semesters. The fall semester will be focused on teaching the basics of AI implementation; in the spring semester, a selected group of students will advance towards leading two projects for small businesses.

“It’s really unbelievable to get like 20 people in this room all committed to this program,” Cohen said. He added that out of around 80 applicants, Connect.AI only chose the members of the roughly 20-person audience to proceed.

That number will wither down to the “best of the best” in the spring semester as the program works towards direct relationships with their business clients, Cohen said. He said the fall semester will help prepare students for that responsibility.

“You’re going to sit down and bang your head on the wall a million times because something is not working,” Cohen said about learning to use AI. “You’re going to get frustrated and that’s why we chose you guys, because we believe that you’re not going to just struggle in silence.”

Subscriptions students in the program will get include AI toolkits and code-developing systems like Anthropic’s Claude, Google’s Anti-Gravity, Netlify and Supabase, Cohen said.

“This isn’t something you throw in your business and then put into some corner and forget about,” Cohen said. “We are integrating [AI] into their lives.”

Cohen presented alongside a team of people who will be involved in operating Connect.AI next semester. The team includes operational executive Alperen Kuru, marketing director Juliana Algeri, recruitment lead Gianna Rivera and consulting leads Joshua Kuteesa and Jaden Singer.

The new member social at the end of the spring raised awareness about the expecta-

tations for students to begin working on the Connect.AI program over their summer break. Rivera said this includes two onboarding sessions to help familiarize students with the program.

“We’re just getting familiar so you’re not coming into the fall semester knowing absolutely nothing,” Rivera said about the offboarding sessions.

Cohen said Connect.AI was originally thinking about extending the program into three semesters but ultimately decided against it because of structural changes that would’ve been required to extend the program.

Students were separated into groups and asked to discuss questions relating to their confidence in using AI and whether they felt their career was safe from being replaced by AI after the presentation was given. Students gave mixed reactions, with some groups discussing how the threat is mitigated when people are trained to use it and others raising concerns about the limit in how many jobs it could replace.

“I love the diversity in this room,” Cohen said referring to the mixed reactions. Despite the open discussion prompting some concern, most spoke positively about the role of Connect.AI in granting them access to AI programs and helping them understand its use.

Kishan Desai, a sixth-semester economics and philosophy student, said he works as an AI consultant for a Farmington-based investment firm called Corbin Advisors. He said that while his work uses a different kind of AI technology, Connect.AI will still be useful in his career goals.

“I’m reviewing how I personally approach my own business,” Desai said about his decision to join the program.

Soham Shah, a second-semester accounting major, said he is already using AI to help him create an app called MelodyMind that helps students’ study by turning notes into music. He said Connect.AI will help him continue to work on the app.

“AI is the future in everything,” Shah said, mentioning how in an interview for a summer internship one of the first questions asked involved his experience with AI systems. “AI helps businesses do what they want to do.”



Two students stand in front of a poster board advertising new organization Connect.AI at the Spring 2026 UConn Involvement Fair. The program is aimed at helping small businesses use AI.

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