AI for ImpaCT looking to develop AI minor, major



David Bergman, associate Dean for Faculty and Research Professor at UConn, posing for a headshot in a classroom. Bergman was appointed the Interim Associate Dean for Faculty and Research at the School of Business about a year ago.

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Amit Savkar, Special Advisor to the Provost on Continuing, Professional, and Workforce Education at UConn, posing with a student in a selfie. The picture was taken during the CAPS C3 (Conquering Calculus and Chemistry) preparation program.

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AI for ImpaCT, an initiative started last spring to help UConn navigate the new artificial intelligence age, is developing an AI minor and eventually a potential undergraduate AI major, according to the initiative's website.

Announced last June, AI for ImpaCT was created at the behest of Pamir Alpay, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs, and is led by David Bergman, associate dean for faculty and research. There is a consulting body called the AI Council, chaired by Bergaman, that is made up of university faculty, staff and students. The council "will help set priorities, identify opportunities and challenges, and support university-wide coordination as AI continues to evolve," according to the initiative's announcement.

The initiative is made up of four different domains: Humanities Institute for Responsible AI Risk and Community Trust led by Professor in English and Humanities Institute Director Anna Mae Duane, Educational Programs and Workforce Development led by math Professor in Residence Amit Savkar, Research Innovation and Scholarship lead by Associate Professor of Computing Derek Aguiar, and Computational Infrastructure led by Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Arash Zaghi.

The goal of the initiative is to understand how UConn can advance itself in the world of AI, Bergman said.

"We have our own mindset that is open, meaning we can then ask others to give this open mindset," Sakar said.

Sakar also said "listening louder" is sometimes more important than speaking to learn more from each other.

An AI minor is in development with consultation from the AI Council. Aguiar is currently working on developing three courses for this minor. These courses consist of one focused on generative AI, one on understanding and using AI and a debate course. These courses would be offered through the computer science department.

The AI minor would be applied, according to Aguiar. This means that these three courses would make up only some of the course work, with the rest relating to the student's discipline of interest.

Final decisions on the applied AI minor would not be made by the AI Council; However, this body is able to help inform decisions that go into creating a new minor.

"The general approach to AI at UConn is to be able to take on different perspectives and change directions based on others," Duane said.

"You have to be able to weigh perspectives, meaning you need to hear from people that don't agree and readjust from there."

For students that are looking to do an AI major now, Bergman noted that the Individualized Major may be a good fit. According to AI for ImpaCT's announcement, an AI major could be available in fall 2027.

"This is a program for agility, a vehicle for quickly evolving workforce needs, with students being able to customize their journeys," Bergman said. "Intellectual quotient was in front of mind, then emotional quotient, now the agility quotient is most valued. Students have to be able to be agile in learning. UConn cares a lot about seeing what works and what doesn't to benefit students."

AI for ImpaCT announced Tuesday through a university-wide email that it is holding a forum with Bridge UConn for open dialogue about AI. The event is scheduled for Nov. 5 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in the Rome Commons Ballroom on the Storrs campus. Students should RSVP by Oct. 26.

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