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EDUCATION

Stark State College to create an artificial intelligence training program

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Artificial intelligence training is coming to Stark State College.

The Jackson Township-based college with satellite locations in Akron and Canton is one of 15 community colleges nationwide — and the only Ohio college — to be awarded a $40,000 grant to create an AI incubator to give students the technical skills they need to use artificial intelligence in the workforce.

AI is the technology that can emulate aspects of human learning, such as a chatbot that can respond to a user's question like a human would.

"We were really surprised and really excited about the opportunity to start looking into this," said Rene Eneix, assistant dean of the Business, Engineering and Information Technologies division at Stark State who was part of the grant application process.

More about Stark State College: Let's prepare residents for unprecedented career opportunities

Intel, Dell Technologies and the American Association of Community Colleges offered the grants to community and technical colleges as part of its efforts to make AI training accessible to novice learners. Intel, which recently announced plans to invest more than $20 billion to build two computer chip factories in Licking County, created the AI for Workforce program last year.

Intel and Dell officials, in a statement announcing the grants, emphasized the importance of preparing workers for jobs in the digital economy. The companies have cited a 2021 EdScoop survey that found 69% of the higher education officials and IT decision-makers surveyed sensed increasing demand for graduates with AI technical skills, but only 45% of the respondents said their institution offers any type of AI technical course, certification or degree program.

How will Stark State use the grant money?

Eneix, who has been with Stark State for 25 years, said the grant will allow the college of nearly 15,000 credit-seeking students to begin incorporating aspects of artificial intelligence training into its curriculum, particularly in its computer science and engineering programs where some courses already discuss the theory of AI.

She said the college plans to utilize Intel's free AI training curriculum and will offer access to AI resources through a virtual lab. She said two faculty members already have undergone training that focused on using Intel's AI curriculum and how to teach other trainers how to use it.

Eneix said Stark State has multiple meetings scheduled with officials from Intel and the American Association of Community Colleges over the next few weeks to finalize plans on how the college will structure its programming — whether artificial intelligence training will augment existing courses or be separated into its own course. She said the course material would not be ready for fall.

Stark State has until May to spend the grant money.

Other colleges receiving the grant were Austin Community College, Texas; BridgeValley Community and Technical College, West Virginia; Broward College, Florida; Edmonds College, Washington; Grand Rapids Community College, Michigan; Houston Community College/Houston Community College Foundation, Texas; Howard Community College, Maryland; Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Mississippi; Ocean County College, New Jersey; Rockland Community College, New York; Southeast Community College, Nebraska; Tulsa Community College, Oklahoma; Umpqua Community College, Oregon and Wayne Community College, North Carolina.

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