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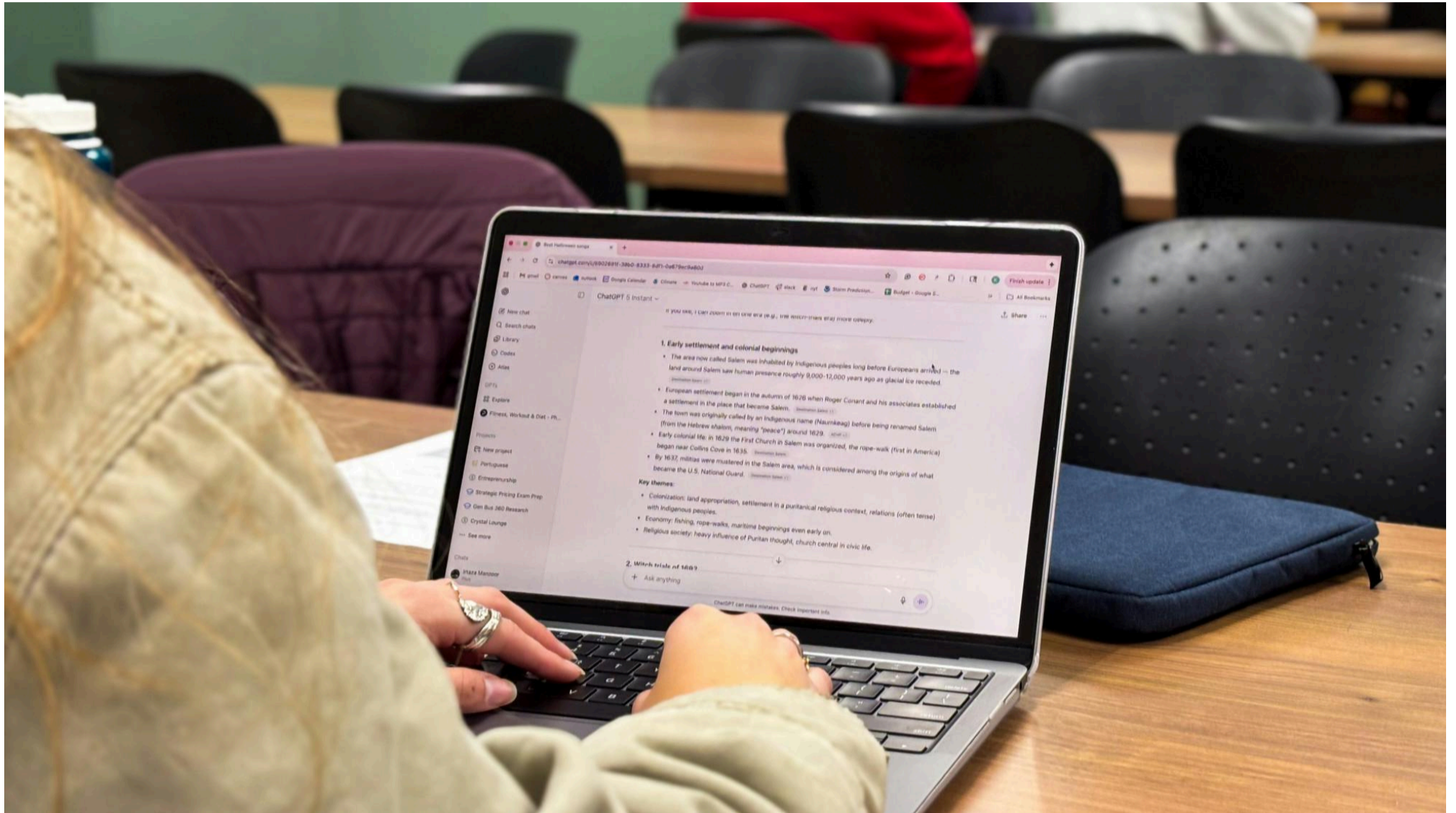


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## CAMPUS NEWS

# Major in AI? UW System launches new programs

*A growing number of University of Wisconsin System universities are adapting their curriculum to prepare students for an AI-driven workforce.*

By [Zoey Elwood](#)

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As artificial intelligence rapidly advances, University of Wisconsin System universities are launching new majors and certificates to prepare students for an increasingly AI-driven workforce.

The programs [aim](#) to teach students how to use the technology ethically, practically and responsibly as the technology becomes more integrated into everyday life.

The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire started [offering](#) majors, certificates and minors in Artificial Intelligence this fall, while the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater has offered an AI-related certificate since as early as spring of 2022. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, engineering students have been able to add a capstone certificate in AI since April.

Dr. Emily Hastings, an assistant professor at UW-Eau Claire, [cited](#) a Coursera report finding generative AI is 2025's fastest growing job skill, with an 866% year-on-year increase in demand for employees, students and job seekers.

She also [noted](#) that around 75% of employers are currently using generative AI and 62% expect their employees to be familiar with AI tools.

"We really wanted to try to prepare our students for the rapid changes in the workforce that are increasingly reliant on AI tools," Hastings told The Daily Cardinal. "We wanted to be able to give students some knowledge and experience in evaluating and using AI models that they might encounter in industry."

Hastings said faculty experiences helped shape and continue to evolve the curriculum, with feedback from departments such as computer science, math and data science helping identify relevant courses.

UW-Eau Claire students interested in an AI degree can [choose](#) between a STEM-focused 60-credit comprehensive major or a standard 36-credit major geared toward students pursuing careers in the social sciences, business, healthcare or humanities.

"We wanted to try to offer multiple paths for different students of different interests to get involved in AI," Hastings said.

Beyond building technical skills, Hastings said she hopes students learn how to use AI ethically and responsibly, and her course dedicates time to discussions on ethical concerns to ensure students understand how to use the tools responsibly.

"There are a lot of things to consider in terms of environmental impact, labor and intellectual property search concerns that I hope students are aware of, in addition to using the tools," Hastings said.

### **The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater**

UW-Whitewater approved its Digital Marketing and Artificial Intelligence graduate certificate in spring 2021, with courses available for enrollment the following spring, according to Dr. Andrew Dahl, an associate professor at UW-Whitewater.

Dahl said feedback from employers about skills future business leaders will need helped inspire the program's implementation. He added that the Department of Marketing's curriculum decisions are largely shaped by employer feedback on what they consider most critical.

After recognizing AI's growing impact and expanding career opportunities, Dahl said UW-Whitewater saw a need to extend this education to the undergraduate level.

"We like to focus on being, I'd like to say, ahead of the game — or cutting edge," Dahl told the Cardinal. "We're always trying to be forward-thinking and looking ahead in terms of what's next."

The university approved a Bachelor of Business Administration in Digital Marketing and Artificial Intelligence Emphasis, along with a minor in Digital Marketing and AI and an AI in Marketing certificate in fall 2024, with enrollment beginning the following year.

These programs not only focus on generative AI tools, but also predictive and analytical AI — systems that help companies make sales forecasts, identify target audiences for marketing campaigns or determine which customers to prioritize.

"We're focused on training students to help make better decisions by leveraging AI and the power that it has in terms of being able to quickly analyze a ton of data and recognize patterns that you know we can't quickly recognize," Dahl said. "We're also trying to show students how to use both analytical or predictive AI and then, now more than ever, generative AI to think about how to use it strategically."

Dahl said UW-Whitewater's marketing and AI programs expose students to a range of technological tools, including resources from Amazon Web Services — such as its sentiment analysis features, which help determine whether people on social media feel positively or negatively about a brand or product.

Students also learn about predictive and analytical AI to understand how design choices affect the development of neural networks. Additionally, it offers hands-on experience with generative AI systems like ChatGPT and Gemini, which students use to build chatbots.

Through these programs, Dahl said he hopes students leave with the ability to manage teams that utilize AI and think critically about how to drive organizational change using this technology. He also wants students to recognize opportunities to apply their AI skills and integrate them into current or future work.

"Part of our goal here is to help students understand that there's more strategic applications of generative AI, and then also recognizing that, 'hey, it's not just generative AI,'" Dahl said.

He said many students who begin with the Digital Marketing and Artificial Intelligence graduate certificate go on to complete a Master of Science in Marketing or a Master of Business Administration.

Dahl added that some students pursue the certificate to broaden their skills and career opportunities, and that at the undergraduate level, the Digital Marketing and Artificial Intelligence emphasis has become one of the department's most popular concentrations.

## The University of Wisconsin-Madison

UW-Madison [introduced](#) a new capstone certificate in Artificial Intelligence for Engineering Data Analytics in April, aiming to help engineers integrate AI into their work.

The idea emerged after engineers began questioning how to effectively use AI in real-world applications, said Dr. Sinan Tas, a professor at UW-Madison involved in developing the program.

"This certificate bridges that gap by helping professionals turn data and models into real engineering value. It's built for working engineers who want to speak the language of AI, design intelligent systems and lead responsibly in an era of digital transformation," Tas said.

So far, Tas said interest in the program has "exceeded expectations." He said companies are sponsoring employees to enroll in the program, and students say the certificate helps them gain "immediate, tangible" value and return it to their teams.

He said the program emphasizes applied knowledge, training students to apply generative and agentic AI to real engineering challenges. Students learn how to design retrieval-augmented generation workflows — an AI framework that expands a large language model's access to external information, in addition to data it was trained on — build AI chatbots and incorporate AI into everyday processes.

The program also takes "a low or no-code approach," allowing engineers to focus on the application and impact of AI rather than programming.

Students will complete a capstone project applying what they've learned to real workplace challenges. They'll gain hands-on experience with Microsoft Azure AI Foundry, Prompt Flow, Copilot Studio, Cognitive Search, Power Automate and Azure OpenAI models to build end-to-end, AI-driven solutions.

"Graduates leave able to design, deploy and communicate about AI systems that make measurable impact," Tas said.

Tas said the program's curriculum evolves alongside the latest industry advancements. Instructors actively design and implement AI systems through their own research and consulting, bringing real-world expertise directly into the classroom and continuously updating content to reflect new tools and methods.

"We integrate emerging technologies such as connected agents, AI orchestration frameworks and new safety standards while maintaining strong conceptual foundations to ensure long-term relevance," Tas said.

The capstone certificate integrates seamlessly with UW-Madison's Master of Engineering in Data Analytics (MEDA) program, creating a pathway for deeper specialization in AI. Tas said students can begin by completing the certificate and, if they're wanting to continue their education, apply to the MEDA program.

"We're making our courses more modular, more applied, more responsive to industry change, which is something you want in every college course, but specifically engineering course education," Tas said. "As AI continues to reshape the design, the production and decision making, our goal is to make sure that UW Madison plans to stay at the forefront and helping the engineers not just keep up with AI, but lead with it."

Kaci Maack, a graduate student at UW-Madison, said the program has given her a deeper understanding of AI.

"I think AI is touted as very, you know, 'only smart people understand it. It's going to take over,' but being able to just talk colloquially about it, understand it, has been really nice," Maack said.

Maack added that the skills she gained from the program will be used in her career, aiming to use them to help others understand this new technology.

"I think UW-Madison is also taking a very approachable approach to it," Maack said. "I very much feel comfortable in this new age [of AI] that we're getting into because of this certificate."

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**Zoey Elwood**

*Zoey Elwood is the college news editor for The Daily Cardinal. She previously served as copy chief. As a staff writer, she's written in-depth on state and local budgets, protest coverage and Wisconsin politics. She has also written for state and city news. Follow her on X at @zoeyelwood.*

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608-262-8000 · 2142 Vilas Communication Hall  
821 University Avenue · Madison, Wis. 53706-1497

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