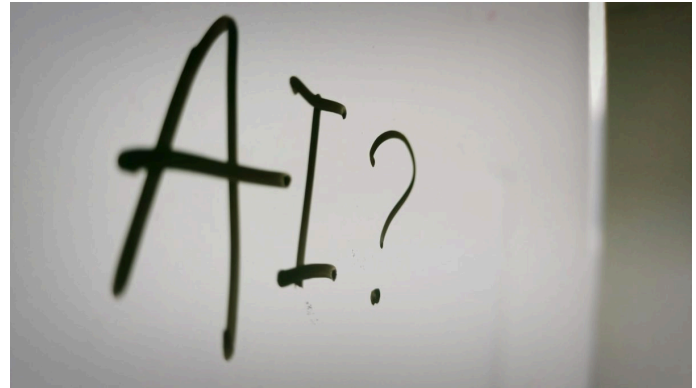


# The DENDRITIC Institute: FGCU's New Frontier on AI Research

**Violet Powell, Staff Writer**

FGCU's DENDRITIC Institute plans to offer students, faculty and staff opportunities to learn, research and collaborate on uses for artificial intelligence (AI) and data science (D.S.) on campus.

A major goal of the institute is to help students gain hands-on experience and gain professional experience through the use of AI and D.S. It's part of a new initiative from the Office of Service Learning & Civic Engagement and the Whitaker College of Engineering at FGCU.



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Leandro De Castro, program director of the center, believes that this institute will serve FGCU and the Southwest Florida community.

"We have this set of researchers who are doing research in different areas and applications, but we are also planning to do some consultancies and some service to the community," De Castro said. "The goal is to help solve local problems in different markets, for example, for real estate or the environment. So we are organizing ourselves at the moment so that we can provide this type of services as well."

There are opportunities available for every kind of student on campus. This includes Operations Support, Events Coordination, CRM and Stakeholder Management, Research Support and Marketing and Communications roles. These roles will help prepare any student for their future career as AI slowly finds its way into every aspect of the modern U.S. workforce.

"We will have to be working with the state of the art of these fields. The state of the art, not only in terms of research but also in terms of potential applications and services as well. So the Institute is expected to bring innovation and to serve the whole university," De Castro said.

Students involved with DENDRITIC will also gain hands-on experience with innovative programs such as digital badges that can further help prepare them for their career field.

"We are also going to have micro-certificates and badges that people will be able to take, not only students but also people from outside the university," De Castro said. "The first badge that we are going to release is a badge on prompt engineering, something involving generative models, which is the range that grows faster in terms of AI applications nowadays."

Just like the abilities of AI are constantly evolving, De Castro sees the institute changing beyond what it is being formed into today to better reflect how AI will be used in the future.

"The institute itself is a sort of startup because we are testing and validating different things. I am pretty much sure that some things, maybe many things, will change in the future. This is going to depend on how the field of AI moves because it's been moving very fast over the past few years," says De Castro.

The program is still in its planning stages and is still looking for volunteers. Students interested in becoming involved with DENDRITIC can call 239-590-1362 or email [dendritic@fgcu.edu](mailto:dendritic@fgcu.edu) for more information.