

College kids will be able to
MAJOR IN AI AT CARNEGIE MELLON
It's the first artificial intelligence degree for undergraduates,
the Pittsburgh university says

By Stephen Shankland

— MAY 10, 2018 —

Carnegie Mellon, a university renowned for its robotics and computer science program, will offer college students a degree in artificial intelligence starting this fall.

AI, boosted by new machine learning and neural network technology, is racing across the computing industry. Its chief virtue is an ability to learn patterns from real-world data — a lot of photos labeled “cat,” for example, instead of some attempt to describe in programming terms that a cat has two round eyes, whiskers and pointy ears. AI is endowing computers, phones and online services with a new level of sophistication and human-friendly abilities.

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by employers,” said Andrew Moore, dean of the university’s School of Computer Science, in a statement Thursday. It’s the first AI undergraduate degree program in the country, the university said, open to 30 to 35 students a year.

It’s notable as a reflection of how hot AI is in the tech industry right now. But Carnegie Mellon’s embrace also indicates that it believes AI technology is within the grasp of an undergraduate. With lots of open-source tools like Google’s TensorFlow and Facebook’s new AI site, there’s plenty of material available for students who want to get started.

Some big uses of AI are recognizing images in photos or videos, understanding human speech, and giving voice to text in realistically human tones. For an illustration of how fast the state of the art has progressed, check the convincingly lifelike voices from Google’s Duplex project, unveiled this week at the company’s I/O conference.

It’s not just Google that’s spending big on AI, though. Facebook is blending AI into several of its operations, and Microsoft’s Azure service is getting fast new AI abilities



Andrew Moore moderates a panel discussing artificial intelligence as part of CMU’s 50th Anniversary celebration.

through its Project Brainwave. Forrester analyst Mike Gualtieri thinks AI is on its way to being a standard part of what computers do in just about any business.

Lots of people are worried about AI, either because the technology could be abused, manipulated or hacked, or be used to push humans out of the workforce.

Carnegie Mellon’s program, though, will address issues of ethics and social responsibility. “This will include independent study opportunities in using AI for social good, such as improving transportation, health care or education,” the university said.