

THE BUFFALO NEWS

https://buffalonews.com/news/local/business/empire-ai-university-at-buffalo/article_2820e9a0-87f0-11ef-b5cf-5b892e008373.html

EDITOR'S PICK TOPICAL

Empire AI research getting head start at UB

Matt Glynn

Oct 11, 2024

The Empire AI Consortium, which includes the University at Buffalo, is getting a head start on its research.

The consortium will kick off research this fall, thanks in part to a philanthropic contribution by the Simons Foundation, said Gov. Kathy Hochul.

The consortium is being supported by \$275 million in state funding and \$125 million from university and philanthropic partners, including the Simons Foundation.



Gov. Kathy Hochul said Empire AI Consortium research is getting a head start.
Derek Gee, News file photo

“Getting us up and running so fast, it’s going to be great, not only for research, for jobs, for business opportunities and for progress,” said Marilyn Simons, who established the foundation with her late husband, Jim.

UB has been named the hub of the Empire AI Consortium, which consists of public and private universities. UB is planning to build **a \$250 million AI supercomputing center** at the university’s North Campus. Empire AI’s objective is to give New York researchers the same advanced AI tools developed and used by Big Tech in order to harness AI “for the public good.”

UB operates the Center for Computational Research on Ellicott Street in Buffalo. The new supercomputing center planned for the North Campus is expected to be 20 to 40 times more powerful.

Hochul mentioned a variety of problems and challenges that supercomputing power can help researchers tackle, from food insecurity and cancer treatments and therapies, to hurricane preparation and cybersecurity threats.

“This is what’s at risk out there, but I’m feeling very proud that these are the conversations that are going to be happening in this building and across the state using this power,” she said during an appearance in Buffalo on Friday. “We’re going to make a real difference for New Yorkers.”

Tom Secunda, chair of the newly established board for the Empire AI Consortium, said running a computer facility for economic and academic research is very different from a cloud service for a commercial enterprise.

“By starting now, a year and a half earlier than what we could possibly do if we had a finished building for our computer center, we’re going to learn that,” said Secunda, who is also co-founder of Bloomberg LP. “When they get up to speed and our computer center is finished and our equipment is populated, we will be a year and a half ahead and understanding how to run this.”

Venu Govindaraju, UB’s vice president for research and economic development, said getting started early on the research will pay dividends by time the new facility is ready.



Venu Govindaraju, UB's vice president for research and economic development, said getting started early on the research will pay dividends by time the new facility is ready.

Joshua Bessex, News file photo

“While that is being built, that (philanthropic) gift is allowing us to understand exactly how these research problems can be posed, how do we get faculty all together from all these consortium campuses,” Govindaraju said. “Framing of a research problem is also very important.”

Empire AI Consortium partners across the state will be able to tap into UB's supercomputing power without physically being in Buffalo, Govindaraju said.

“They can work from anywhere they are, and it will work out quite nicely,” he said. “But at same time, you know, sometimes when there are partnerships that are taking place, collaborations, it's nice to meet once in a while, if you're doing some joint work.”

Hochul announced an interim executive director for the Empire AI consortium: Robert J. Harrison, director of the Institute for Advanced Computational Science at SUNY Stony Brook University. A national search is being conducted for the consortium's inaugural permanent leader. The Empire AI consortium has been formally incorporated as a nonprofit.

By Matt Glynn
Reporter