

The AI4Impact Co-op Program represents a groundbreaking leap into the future of experiential learning. For six transformative months, students are immersed in the world of generative artificial intelligence (AI)¹, becoming architects of positive change. Their mission? To deliver cutting-edge projects that enhance lives in partnership with governmental, nonprofit, social impact and civic organizations and companies.

In this “product-based learning program,” student teams are guided by professional advisors to enable them to design and implement solutions to complex problems. They learn to use technology to become powerful agents of change with the skills to deliver transformative innovations in collaboration with the communities we are serving.

The fastest growing technology in history, these tools have an underused potential to advance positive change and help solve difficult public problems.

For example, this semester our Northeastern students are working to:

- Improve the ability of low-income families to apply for and receive federal broadband benefits. Partner: Stacey Abrams and Fair Count.
- Support families to negotiate their student’s Individualized Education Plan. Partner: Innovate Public Schools.
- Improve constituent communications with the United States Congress. Partner: PopVox Foundation.

Beginning in Spring 2024, we will formally launch the program:

- Twenty co-ops across colleges working on generative AI products for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Focusing on products that improve the lives of the most vulnerable
- Supervised by professional staff

¹ Generative AI tools such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT or Anthropic’s Claude are skilled at understanding language in context. The chatbot, Pi, short for Personal Intelligence, not only types, but it can also talk. The power of these tools lies not simply in the ability to generate text and computer science but to organize and analyze it. Midjourney and DALL-E interpret images in addition to creating them. Programs such as MusicLM or Amadeus Code write music, but they can also listen to and identify it.

- Accompanied by workshops in Northeastern’s humanics curriculum that blends technology, data, and social sciences with the Burnes Center’s skills-based learning in product and project management, human-centered, participatory design

In a true spirit of collaboration, teams will not only create, test, and maintain solutions but will also work with cross-sector partners to implement innovations, measuring their impact. This hands-on approach ensures that our solutions transcend theory and have real-world significance.

The program immerses students fully. They undergo intensive skill-building weeks complemented by related disciplinary programming that blends Northeastern’s signature “humanics” approach. Beyond problem definition, human-centered design, citizen engagement, data analysis, and generative AI fine-tuning, students develop their literacy in technology, data and social sciences during workshops throughout the co-op experience.

As we forge ahead, our vision encompasses:

- Expanding our network of partners, encompassing governments and nonprofits.
- Scaling the program to accommodate hundreds students involved in myriad projects.
- Diversifying the range of technologies and skills explored.

Our program's aims are designed to enhance student learning and real world impact::

- **Experiential AI:** Leveraging Northeastern's pioneering experiential learning model.
- **Product-Based Learning:** Training the next generation to bring about tangible change.
- **Empowering Students:** Providing co-op students with a platform for real-world AI projects.
- **Improving Services:** Elevating the quality of life through AI solutions, transcending sectors.
- **Fostering Innovation:** Nurturing a culture of creativity and emerging technologies.
- **Promoting Inclusion:** Championing diversity, including neurodiverse students.
- **Building Talent:** Cultivating the next wave of problem-solving professionals.

The AI4Impact Coop Program offers a unique blend of academic rigor, practical experience, and social impact. As we move forward, we remain committed to inclusivity, innovation, and making a meaningful difference across various sectors.



About the Burnes Center for Social Change

From Demanding Change to Making It.

The Burnes Center for Social Change designs and implements practical solutions to society’s hardest problems. We develop innovative, participatory, and equitable approaches to solving public problems using new technology.