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Students Unite Across New England to Build AI for the Common Good

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WPI, Holy Cross, and partners host first multi-college innovation sprint blending liberal arts, engineering, and civic data to shape the future of responsible innovation

WORCESTER, Mass.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--In a world racing to automate, a group of New England students is slowing down to ask what it means to build technology for the common good.

Hack for Human Impact unites students, educators, and innovators across New England to build AI for the common good — proving that technology can serve people first.

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) and the College of the Holy Cross will co-host *Hack for Human Impact*, an interdisciplinary innovation sprint uniting liberal arts and engineering students from across the Northeast to design AI solutions that serve people, not just progress. This first-of-its-kind collaboration represents Massachusetts leadership in building technology that reflects human values and civic purpose.

The event marks a bold partnership among education, government, and industry. It is presented in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS), the Massachusetts AI Hub, the City of Worcester, Sundai Club, and Strategic Growth & Innovation (SG+I). Together,

these partners highlight how Massachusetts is pioneering a responsible, human-centered approach to artificial intelligence.

Bridging Disciplines in AI and Education

The event represents a living model of the Commonwealth's commitment to responsible and human-centered innovation, transforming open civic data into applied learning and impact. Students will have rare access to enterprise-grade data tools provided through the Commonwealth's technology partners, working side by side with mentors from government, academia, and industry to translate data into insight and collaboration into innovation.

The program unites WPI's applied data science and AI expertise with Holy Cross's liberal arts foundation in ethics and social understanding. Students from colleges and universities across Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York will join peers to explore civic datasets from the Massachusetts Data Commons, including topics such as water quality, environmental sustainability, and community preservation.

Teams will transform insights into data-driven prototypes that address local needs, emphasizing creativity, collaboration, and ethical innovation rather than competition. The event takes place on Saturday, November 15, 2025, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at WPI's Unity Hall.

Participants include undergraduate and graduate students studying computer science, data science, and sociology who see AI as both an opportunity and a responsibility.

Leaders Unite to Shape Responsible Innovation

Opening remarks will feature Senator Michael O. Moore, Secretary Jason Snyder, Commonwealth Chief Information Officer, City Manager Eric Batista, and Sabrina Mansur, Director of the Massachusetts AI Hub. Together, they represent the Commonwealth's commitment to innovation that serves the public good.

Academic and innovation leaders, including Daniel Klinghard (College of the Holy Cross), Elke Rundensteiner and Kelsey Briggs (Worcester Polytechnic Institute), and Shauna Conway (Strategic Growth & Innovation), will frame the event as part of a broader effort to connect learning, technology, and civic purpose.

"Massachusetts is leading by example to ensure that emerging technology serves the public good," said Jason Snyder, Secretary of Technology Services and Security and Commonwealth Chief Information Officer. "Today's event underscores the importance of this partnership that connects civic data, student creativity, and real community challenges. We're helping demonstrate what responsible AI looks like in action: collaboration that reflects our state's values."

"Worcester is proud to host *Hack for Human Impact* and to welcome students and faculty from across Massachusetts to our city," said Eric Batista, City Manager of Worcester. "Events like this showcase what is possible when education, government, and industry come together to drive innovation with purpose and integrity."

"Artificial intelligence is transforming the world around us," said Michael Hamel, Chief Information Officer for the City of Worcester. "It is exciting to see Worcester contributing the energy, talent, and leadership that can help guide this transformation toward a more thoughtful and inclusive future."

"The liberal arts prepare students to see the world comprehensively, with awareness of ethical as well as technical dimensions of the problems we face," said Daniel Klinghard, Dean of Education and Academic Experience at the College of the Holy Cross. "When you combine that breadth of perspective with the technical problem-solving of engineering, you empower students to use technology in ways that are not only powerful but purposeful, and most importantly, responsible."

From Data to Dialogue: Turning Learning into Leadership

"At WPI, we see AI as an enabling technology critical for the careers of our students," said Elke Rundensteiner, Head of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. "When students apply data science to real-world civic challenges, they not only sharpen their technical skills but also learn that they can be agents for change for addressing pressing societal challenges. *Hack for Human Impact* embodies that spirit of purpose-driven innovation."

"The future of engineering is not only technical, it is relational," said Kelsey Briggs, Director of Programs and Strategic Initiatives for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at WPI. "This event gives students a chance to translate data into dialogue, to practice collaboration, and to see how communication, empathy, and ethical awareness strengthen every technical solution."

“Human Edge is about redefining what innovation looks like,” said Shauna Conway ('04), Founder of Strategic Growth & Innovation (SG+I). “It is not just another hackathon; it is a working model for how liberal arts, engineering, and industry can move together with purpose. *Hack for Human Impact* shows that when we bring the human perspective back into technology, we do not just prepare students for the future, we shape it.”

About Strategic Growth & Innovation (SG+I)

Strategic Growth & Innovation (SG+I) helps organizations navigate the intersection of technology, leadership, and human impact. Through its Human Edge initiative, SG+I connects education, government, and industry to advance ethical and interdisciplinary AI learning. The firm’s work strengthens digital readiness and ensures AI adoption serves the common good.

Learn more at www.strategicgrowthandinnovation.com.

A Vision for the Future

Hack for Human Impact is more than an event. It signals how Massachusetts can model a new approach to innovation where ideas across disciplines, institutions, and communities come together to ensure technology serves people first. By connecting liberal arts and engineering, reflection and invention, the event points toward a future where AI is not only advanced but aligned with the values that make us human.

Hack for Human Impact marks the beginning of a continuing statewide dialogue that will expand in 2026 through additional partnerships, research collaborations, and policy roundtables focused on responsible innovation.

Visuals available: Students and mentors collaborating in real time on AI prototypes, data visualizations, and presentations using civic datasets. Photos and short video clips available upon request.

Media welcome: 9:00–10:00 a.m. (opening remarks and team kickoff) and 2:30–4:00 p.m. (team presentations and closing session).

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STRATEGIC GROWTH & INNOVATION

RELEASE SUMMARY

WPI and Holy Cross host innovation sprint Nov 15, uniting liberal arts and engineering students to design AI solutions that serve the common good.

RELEASE VERSIONS

English

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