RIT | Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT's AI Institute: Executive Director Search

Dear Faculty and Staff,

Over the past several years, RIT has built significant strength in artificial intelligence research and industry engagement. Faculty and students across the university have developed nationally recognized expertise, established impactful partnerships, secured external funding, and advanced research addressing both technical and societal challenges in AI. Much of this progress has been driven by the work of faculty affiliated with RIT's Center for Human-aware Artificial Intelligence (CHAI), alongside initiatives such as the PRAiXIS AI industry consortium, AI Hub, the AWARE-AI NSF Research Traineeship Program, and many other faculty efforts across campus.

A University-Wide AI Institute

Today, we are pleased to share that RIT is moving forward with the launch of an AI Institute that will serve as a focal point for advancing interdisciplinary AI research, scholarship, external engagement, and innovation. The institute will unify and amplify RIT's existing strengths while creating new opportunities for collaboration, research growth, graduate education, industry partnerships, philanthropy, and national visibility.

The AI Institute is being designed as a university-wide entity that complements and strengthens the work already occurring across campus. It will not replace colleges, degree programs, or faculty academic homes. Instead, it will serve as a coordinating structure, analogous to RIT's ESL Global Cybersecurity Institute, that supports large-scale research initiatives and interdisciplinary collaboration, supports faculty and student research opportunities, and provides a unified external identity for RIT's AI activities.

National Search for an Executive Director

We were pleased to recently announce the $5-million philanthropic commitment from the Harris-Pratt family that will support the institute's launch by endowing its leadership position. This investment reflects confidence in RIT's leadership in AI and enables the launch of a world-class institute.

We now begin a national search for the inaugural Harris-Pratt Executive Director of the AI Institute. We seek a nationally recognized leader to further advance RIT's reputation in AI, cultivate partnerships across government, industry, and philanthropy, and work collaboratively

with faculty and university leadership to advance the institute's mission. The Executive Director will play a critical role in shaping the future of AI research and innovation at RIT.

To support the search, RIT has retained Isaacson, Miller an executive search firm with experience recruiting leaders for major academic research institutes. The firm will help identify and attract an accomplished and diverse pool of candidates from higher education, industry, government, and research organizations.

Search Advisory Committee

Recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of AI, we have asked Matt Huenerfauth, Dean of the Golisano College of Computing and Information Sciences, and Kelly Norris Martin, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, to serve as co-chairs of the search advisory committee. The committee membership includes:

- Shaun Foster, Professor, School of Design
- Cathy Hain, Associate Vice President, University Advancement
- Shal Khazanchi, Associate Dean, Saunders College of Business
- Xumin Liu, Professor, Department of Computer Science
- Cory Merkel, Associate Professor, Department of Computer Engineering
- Ryne Raffaelle, Vice President for Research
- Ersin Uzun, Executive Director, ESL Global Cybersecurity Institute
- Ke Xu, Assistant Professor, School of Physics and Astronomy

Campus Participation and Next Steps

We are grateful to many RIT community members who contributed guidance during the initial planning process, including through listening sessions held during the summer of 2026. We look forward to engaging a broader range of the campus community as we move into this next phase.

To help position both the Executive Director and the AI Institute for success, the search firm will conduct further listening sessions and outreach with members of the campus community. These conversations will help inform the Harris-Pratt Executive Director position profile and the continued development of the institute's vision and priorities. A session for RIT faculty and staff will be held on **September 23, 2026, from 4pm to 5pm**, organized as a Zoom-based online meeting. To RSVP for this session, please visit: Zoom Listening Session

If you require access services for this event, please submit your request at myaccess.rit.edu.

The AI Institute will formally launch upon the hiring of the Harris-Pratt Executive Director in 2027. Upon its launch, Dr. Cecilia Alm, current Director of CHAI, has agreed to serve as interim Research Director of the AI Institute for a one-year period to support the institute's launch and the transition from CHAI to the new institute. We are grateful for her leadership as the institute builds upon CHAI's strong foundation and expands RIT's AI research enterprise.

Thank you for your continued commitment to advancing RIT's mission and future.

Sincerely,

Prabu David, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Ryne Raffaelle, Vice President for Research

William H. Sanders, President

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