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Before a Hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Education and Workforce
"Building an AI-Ready America: Higher Education in the Age of AI"

June 3, 2026

Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important topic of building an AI-ready America. My name is Jonathan Fozard, and I serve as the Associate Vice President and Chief Information Officer at Florida State University.

I am honored to appear before you and grateful for the opportunity to share a higher education perspective on one of the most consequential issues facing our country.

Artificial intelligence is not simply another emerging technology. It is quickly becoming a defining capability that will shape economic competitiveness, national security, scientific discovery, education, health care, public service, and the future of work.

The United States is a global leader in artificial intelligence, and we must remain at the forefront. This is a pivotal moment. Institutions, organizations, companies, and nations have a choice. They can embrace AI responsibly or choose not to use it at all. That decision will increasingly differentiate who is leading and who is falling behind at an exponential rate.

That is why education must be central to America's AI strategy.

America's AI leadership will not be secured by technology companies alone. It will require a national education and research pipeline that begins in K-12, continues through higher education, expands into workforce training and lifelong learning, and is strengthened by meaningful partnerships among universities, government, and industry.

At Florida State University, we see this responsibility clearly. Higher education must prepare students not only to use AI, but to understand it, question it, improve it, secure it, and apply it in ways that serve people and strengthen our nation.

As a technology practitioner for more than 26 years, I have seen many waves of change. As a father of two children who will soon enter the workforce, this topic is also personal. I want my children and students across this country to inherit a nation that continues to lead, innovate, protect its values, and create opportunity for generations to come.

I believe that five priorities should guide the nation's approach as we move forward:

1. We must treat AI literacy as a national workforce priority.
2. We must support secure and responsible access to AI tools so students are prepared for the future.
3. We must invest in hands-on learning and workforce development programs.
4. We must strengthen the K-12 to higher education pipeline.
5. We must continue investing in research infrastructure.

At Florida State University, we stand ready to do our part.

We are preparing students, supporting faculty, enabling researchers, modernizing infrastructure, protecting data, and building partnerships that expand access to AI tools and training across disciplines.

We are doing this because AI readiness is not optional. It is central to our students' future, our workforce, our research enterprise, our national competitiveness, and our responsibility to the country.

The United States has the talent, institutions, innovation ecosystem, and values needed to lead the world in artificial intelligence. But leadership is not guaranteed. It must be built, protected, and renewed through sustained investment in education, research, infrastructure, security, and people.

This is a moment for urgency, but also for optimism. Higher education stands ready to help build the next generation of AI leadership and innovation. Working together, we can ensure that the United States remains at the forefront, not only for our own future, but for the future of our allies, our partners, and the democratic values we share.

Thank you for your time, your service to our country, and your commitment to building an AI-ready America. I look forward to your questions.

AI as a Force Multiplier for Education

In my view, AI will not replace faculty and instructors. If used responsibly, it becomes a force multiplier. We are already seeing that across teaching, research, and operations at Florida State University.

AI can help personalize learning, support faculty, accelerate research, improve services, and reduce time spent on repetitive work. But AI is not magic. It must have access to data to be effective. It does not replace human thought, critical thinking, ethical judgment, or interpersonal communication.

That distinction matters. If students use AI as a shortcut, we risk weakening the very skills education is meant to build. If students learn to use AI as a tool to reason better, analyze more

deeply, communicate more clearly, and solve problems more effectively, we strengthen both the student and the nation.

The goal should not be to avoid AI. The goal should be to teach students how to use it responsibly, securely, and productively.

Florida State University and AI Workforce Readiness

Florida State University is a major public research university with a mission that spans teaching, research, service, student success, and economic development. We are also an institution deeply focused on positive outcomes.

In 2026, FSU reported a record 99.2 percent fall-to-spring first-year retention rate, one of the highest in the country. Florida State also achieved a 97 percent first-to-second fall retention rate, ranking No. 4 nationally among public universities, and a record 78 percent four-year graduation rate, ranking FSU No. 9 nationally among public universities.

These outcomes matter because AI readiness is ultimately about people. It is about whether students persist, graduate, and enter the workforce prepared to lead.

The country needs more than AI users. We need AI-literate teachers, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, researchers, cybersecurity professionals, public servants, skilled technical workers, and civic leaders. We need graduates who can think critically, act ethically, solve complex problems, and use new tools responsibly.

Under the leadership of President Richard McCullough and with the support of our Board of Trustees, Florida State University has made innovation, research excellence, student success, and emerging technology central to the university’s future. That institutional commitment enables us to move quickly, build meaningful partnerships, and align AI readiness with the university's broader mission.

At FSU, our technology strategy is organized around a framework we call RISE: Research and Instruction, Innovation and Modernization, Security and Compliance, and Engagement and Student Success. This framework reflects a simple belief: AI readiness cannot be isolated to one office, one discipline, one vendor, or one degree program. It must be embedded across the university.

Through this technology strategy, we are supporting the responsible integration of artificial intelligence into teaching, learning, research, and broader campus experience. This work provides students, faculty, and staff with access to AI tools, guidance, projects, training opportunities, and practical examples of how AI can be used across disciplines. It also builds on Florida State’s broader commitment to AI literacy, including hands-on training through industry partnerships and faculty and researcher development across campus.

Importantly, this work does not stop at the university level. Through FSU's InSPIRE program, which stands for the Institute for Strategic Partnerships, Innovation, Research, and Education, nearly 200 teachers across eight Florida counties participated in professional learning courses that included generative AI, prompt engineering, natural language processing, machine learning foundations, bias, ethical implications, and the integration of literacy and STEM best practices. These efforts connect AI literacy to both higher education and K-12 classrooms, helping students and educators build the skills needed for an AI-enabled future.

Partnering with American Industry to Build AI Readiness

Our goal is not simply to introduce students or educators to AI. It is to help them develop the judgment to know when to use it, when not to use it, how to question it, and how to apply it in service of a larger purpose. AI should strengthen critical thinking, not replace it. It should expand opportunity, not narrow it. And it should serve as a force multiplier for teaching, learning, research, and student success.

We are also expanding practical access through partnerships with leading American technology companies, including Microsoft, Google, and Amazon Web Services. These partnerships are not about promoting any one company. They are about access, training, applied learning, and giving students, faculty, staff, and researchers experience with the tools that are transforming the modern workplace.

By joining Google's AI for Education Accelerator and adopting Gemini for Education, the university now provides AI training for students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, a recent two-day AI Symposium hosted with Microsoft allowed researchers and faculty to explore practical applications for Azure, Copilot, and AI agents. FSU is also collaborating with AWS to broaden access to secure cloud and AI tools, directly supporting large-scale data analysis and advanced computing projects across campus. This is important because students should not graduate having only read about AI. They should leave feeling confident, having had hands-on experience with secure, modern tools that are already reshaping the workforce.

At the same time, we are focused on security and trust. AI readiness cannot come at the expense of privacy, cybersecurity, data protection, academic integrity, or institutional trust. Responsible governance is what allows innovation to scale. At Florida State University, our approach is to expand access while also strengthening trust, so our community can explore these tools in ways that are safe, responsible, and aligned with the mission of the university.

This balance is important for national competitiveness as well. AI gives great power to innovators, researchers, teachers, and students. It also gives new power to threat actors. The same tools that can accelerate learning and discovery can also be used for cyberattacks, disinformation, fraud, and intellectual property theft. That is why the United States cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. We must lead in AI, and we must lead responsibly.

Workforce Development and Student Success

One of the clearest examples of AI and technology workforce development at Florida State University is our Information Technology Services internship program. Today, FSU ITS supports more than 150 student interns each semester. These students gain hands-on experience in cybersecurity, enterprise systems, data, cloud platforms, automation, communications, user support, project management, and emerging AI tools.

This is workforce development in action.

Our students are not simply learning technology in theory, they are working inside a live university technology environment that supports tens of thousands of students, faculty, and staff. They learn how modern systems operate, how to solve problems, how to serve people, how to protect data, and how to communicate across teams. They learn that technology is ultimately about enabling people and advancing missions.

That experience prepares students to contribute on day one in the modern workforce.

Florida State University is also connecting AI readiness to student creativity and entrepreneurship. Earlier this year, Florida State students participated in a 24-hour design sprint with Amazon Web Services and the FSU Career Center. Working in small, interdisciplinary teams, students competed to build AI-powered tools that connect peers with internships and early career opportunities. The event brought together student teams, industry mentors, and generative AI to solve a real-world workforce challenge, culminating in a pitch competition for prizes and awards.

This is the future of AI education. It is interdisciplinary. It is practical. It is human-centered. And it is connected to real problems.

But AI readiness cannot begin after high school. For America to lead in AI, students need earlier exposure to computational thinking, digital literacy, data fluency, ethical reasoning, problem solving, and responsible technology use. Teachers need training and support. Schools need access to modern tools. This is where universities play a critical role, by connecting research and teacher preparation to classroom innovation and workforce pathways.

FSU addresses this need through its three laboratory schools, which serve as a bridge between higher education research and K-12 practice. These labs are designed to provide a world-class education to students while giving researchers an opportunity to advance the science of teaching and learning. This unique model allows FSU to approach AI readiness as an educational continuum rather than a single intervention. After all, the students who will lead America's AI future are already sitting in our elementary, middle, and high school classrooms today.

In my own household, I am already helping my children understand the need to build AI skills, learn how to ask better questions, and understand how these tools may be useful no matter what career path they choose. We need that same mindset at scale across the country.

Research and the Infrastructure of Tomorrow

Florida State University's commitment to AI readiness extends beyond today's software tools. The future of AI will depend on scientific infrastructure, advanced computing, data, energy, materials science, physics, quantum science, cybersecurity, and research capacity that can support discovery at scale.

Florida State University is home to the National High Magnetic Field Laboratory, the largest and highest-powered magnet laboratory in the world. The MagLab hosts more than a thousand visiting scientists each year and supports research in materials, new technology, energy, health, the environment, and fundamental science.

These capabilities matter because the next decade of AI progress will depend not only on better models, but on breakthroughs in the underlying science and infrastructure that make future computing possible.

Florida State University is also making major investments in quantum science and engineering under the leadership of President Richard McCullough. The university announced more than $20 million in quantum science and engineering investments, including support for faculty hiring, equipment, dedicated space, and a new program focused on this emerging field. More recently, Florida State opened a new $126 million laboratory space to support the next generation of quantum science and engineering.

These investments are important because AI leadership is not only about the tools we can see today. It is also about the discoveries that will make tomorrow's tools possible. If the United States wants to lead in AI over the next decade, we must invest now in the fields that will define that decade.

Conclusion

From my perspective, five priorities should guide the nation's approach.

1. We must treat AI literacy as a national workforce priority. AI will affect nearly every field. Students in computer science need AI skills, but so do students in education, health care, business, public administration, engineering, social sciences, the arts, and skilled technical fields.
2. We must support secure and responsible access to AI tools. Students cannot be prepared for the future if they are learning about AI only in theory. But access must be designed with appropriate attention to privacy, cybersecurity, data protection, academic integrity, intellectual property, and responsible use.
3. We must invest in hands-on learning. Internships, apprenticeships, design sprints, research experiences, applied projects, and industry partnerships help translate AI literacy into practical capability.

4. We must strengthen the K-12 to higher education pipeline. Universities can support teacher preparation, curriculum development, research-based learning models, and early exposure to AI concepts. If we wait until college to introduce students to AI, we will have waited too long.
5. We must continue investing in research infrastructure. AI leadership requires more than application adoption. It requires basic research, advanced computing, quantum science, scientific instrumentation, secure cloud infrastructure, cybersecurity, and the talent to use them.

No single university, company, agency, or state can build an AI-ready America alone. The United States will lead by connecting the strengths of research universities, community colleges, K-12 schools, industry partners, federal agencies, state governments, and local communities.