



Written Testimony of

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Before the

U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Hearing on

“Building an AI Ready America: Strengthening Employer Led Training”

March 4, 2026

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Rayburn House Office Building | Room 2175

Chair Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to discuss building an AI ready workforce and strengthening employer led training. My name is Scott Ralls, and I serve as President of Wake Technical Community College, the largest community college in North Carolina. We serve approximately 75,000 degree and non-degree students across the Raleigh metropolitan region.

Even artificial intelligence recognizes our focus. ChatGPT notes that Wake Tech emphasizes workforce alignment with regional employers and describes us not just as an educational institution, but as a regional workforce engine that brings together education, industry, and economic development. Today, we are also one of the most robust apprenticeship colleges in the United States, with more than 170 registered apprenticeship employer partners.

I often say that Wake County runs on Wake Tech because we focus on the jobs that keep our community operating, including technicians and the skilled trades. Over the past two years, we have seen a significant increase in student interest in these programs, reversing prior periods when we experienced student “interest gaps” in certain technical fields.

One contributor to this renewed interest is the emergence of artificial intelligence. For some students, AI is raising questions about traditional higher education pathways. At the same time, it is accelerating demand in energy related fields and programs such as electrical systems, heating and air conditioning, and building automation. These areas are expanding rapidly as AI, electrification, and smart technologies reshape infrastructure and industry.

Wake Tech is responding by expanding capacity in these high demand programs. We are proud to serve as the lead college in a recently announced North Carolina pilot that is part of a national effort funded by the Siemens Foundation to expand the pipeline of skilled electricians called “Careers Electric.”

Our approach to artificial intelligence is not to isolate it within a narrow set of degree programs. Instead, we are intentionally threading AI into programs across the college to strengthen student competitiveness in every field. This semester alone, 50 HVAC students, 27 automotive students, and 89 architectural design students are participating in applied trades courses with AI integration, led by faculty involved in our AI Communities of Practice. Across the college, 4,600 students are enrolled in 210 courses spanning 33 academic disciplines taught by faculty actively engaged in AI integration.

To further support student readiness, Wake Tech now offers AI digital badges that students can earn alongside their academic credentials. These badges document demonstrated AI literacy and applied skills and can be added directly to transcripts and professional portfolios. They signal employers that Wake Tech graduates are prepared not only in their technical field, but also in the responsible and effective use of artificial intelligence.

As the leading public safety education provider in North Carolina and the primary healthcare higher education provider in our state's largest county, we also focus on the careers that keep our communities safe and healthy. With almost \$700 million in recent county bond support and strong employer partnerships, we are a national leader in workforce education simulation centers. We partnered with public safety agencies to create one of the country's most advanced Public Safety Simulation Centers, which is now used by local, state, and Federal agencies. We also partnered with WakeMed and our county to establish a new Health and Education District and are constructing a 100-million-dollar Simulation Hospital to expand our Health Sciences Campus.

Simulation is an area where artificial intelligence has significant potential to enhance workforce training, with future nurses able to experience realistic patient heart attack simulations and law enforcement agents able to realistically experience the stress of a mass shooting scene. To encourage innovation across multiple program areas at our college, we established an AI Innovation Grant Program that supports faculty in embedding AI based tools and methods into instruction across disciplines.

We are also applying AI at scale in student services. Wake Tech supports students through a sector-based CARE Team model. Fourteen CARE Teams serve students across thirteen career fields, including healthcare, public safety, and advanced manufacturing. Each team includes academic advisors, success coaches, and career coaches, and we also operate a dedicated Veterans CARE Team. This model has contributed to the strongest student retention rates in our college's history. We are now implementing AI agents within these teams to enhance responsiveness, scale support, and allow our advisors and coaches to focus more deeply on personal engagement.

Wake Tech also supports one of the most dynamic technology employment hubs in the nation. Cybersecurity is our largest academic program, with more than 1,000 students enrolled this year. Our nationally recognized biotechnology program supports one of the country's leading biopharmaceutical manufacturing hubs. This past summer, we were honored to host United States Secretary of Education Linda McMahon at our Research Triangle Park Campus, where she met with four of our biotechnology apprenticeship employer partners: Amgen, CSL Seqirus, Fujifilm Biotechnologies, and Eli Lilly.

For Wake Tech to remain an engine of economic opportunity, our students must be competitive in their knowledge and application of artificial intelligence. That means preparing them to use AI as a powerful tool, not as a shortcut. At Wake Tech, we describe this goal as developing AI enabled critical thinkers.

Achieving this requires Wake Tech to be an AI-enabled workplace. We have developed 17 skill focused AI literacy modules for faculty and staff that culminate in a Teaching with AI micro credential digital badge. To date, more than 1,500 professional learning credentials have been awarded. These efforts are now extending into embedded student modules and micro credentials, ensuring that AI skills are directly integrated into workforce preparation rather than treated as a stand-alone initiative.

Over the past several years, our faculty have emphasized strengthening student problem solving skills. Today, that work includes advancing both AI literacy and the development of graduates who can think critically about when and how to use AI effectively.

As I conclude, I would emphasize that community colleges must align closely with employer skill targets. The future workforce will require the ability to use artificial intelligence across industries and occupations. At Wake Tech, we are committed to ensuring that students are prepared to meet that future with both technical excellence and informed judgment, surfing the coming AI wave and not bowled over.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.