

# Entrepreneur Paul English donates \$5 million to UMass Boston to launch AI Institute

English's alma mater aims to incorporate AI learning into various courses of study

By **Jon Chesto** Globe Staff, Updated May 17, 2023, 1 hour ago



UMass Boston's campus on Columbia Point in Dorchester DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Paul English sees artificial intelligence as the next big thing, something he wants to focus on for the next decade. That's why the entrepreneur and philanthropist has pledged \$5

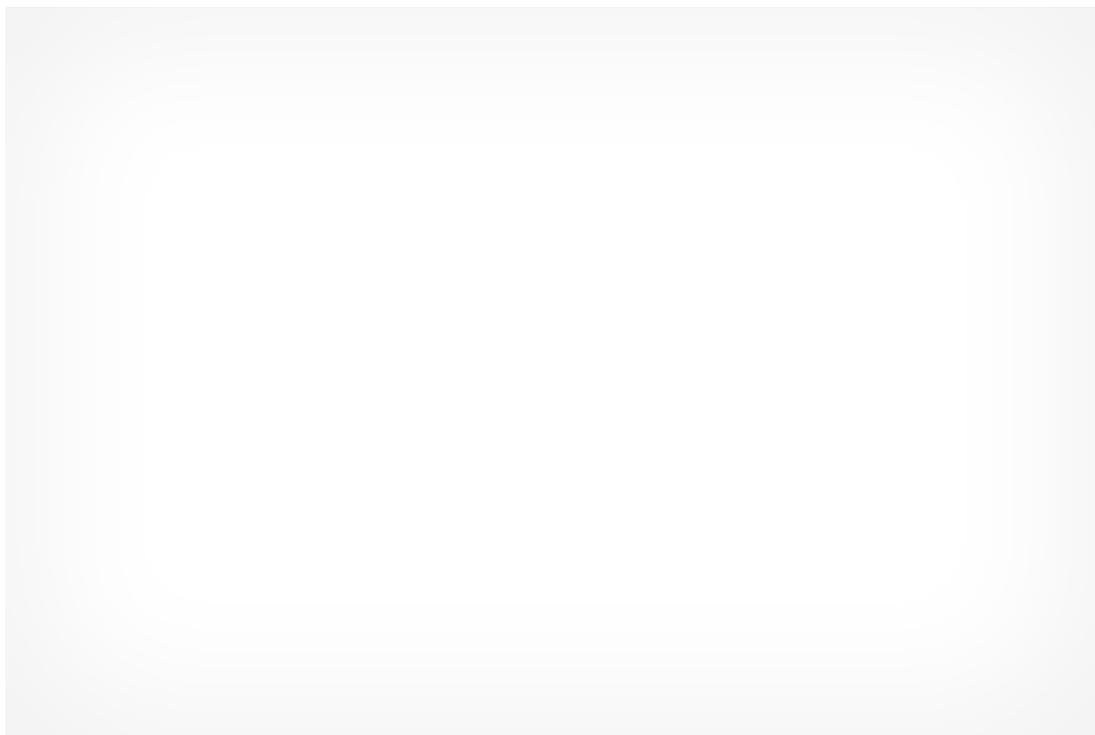
million to UMass Boston to establish a new AI-focused institute at the school, so students can be at the forefront of AI technology as it evolves.

The gift will be matched by \$2 million from the UMass Foundation, to establish the Paul English Applied Artificial Intelligence Institute. UMass Boston Chancellor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco hopes to draw additional donations to build on English's gift. Among other things, the money will establish an endowed chair position for the institute, as well as pay for a speaker series and scholarships.

The goal isn't to create a physical building or separate college to house AI research or classes on UMass Boston's Dorchester campus. Instead, the plan would incorporate AI-related classes into all major subject areas such as nursing or science and mathematics — to encourage students to study “applied AI,” as English calls it, or how AI can help a person with a particular job such as teaching, engineering, or nursing.

“What we're interested is not party tricks,” English said. “What we're interested in is how you become a better nurse.”

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English earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science from UMass Boston in 1987 and 1989, respectively, and has always been impressed with the school's diversity and how so many of its students work their way through college.

This \$5 million donation, English said, is his largest gift yet to any nonprofit. In comparison, he gave \$1 million in 2017 to start what would become Embrace Boston, a project to honor the legacy of Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King that recently unveiled a 22-foot tall memorial on Boston Common.



Paul English (right) and Embrace co-founder Demond Martin at the dedication of the new Martin Luther King statue on Boston Common in January. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

English made most of his money about a decade ago from the sale of Kayak, a travel-tech company he co-founded, to Priceline. Most recently, he has been focusing his efforts on a restaurant review app he created called Deets.

But English said he expects to spend much of the next decade on AI-related endeavors.

“I’m all in on AI,” English said. “I have all these ideas: AI for real estate, AI for travel, AI for medicine.”

The endowed chair position at English’s namesake institute will likely be overseen by the UMass Boston provost’s office, currently led by Joseph Berger. Some AI-specific classes will be offered in the fall, with courses rolled out through all UMass Boston disciplines by the spring 2024 semester. UMass Boston expects to appoint an interim chair for the English Institute, and then to conduct a global search to fill the spot on a more permanent basis.

About 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students attend UMass Boston in a typical year. Suárez-Orozco, the school’s chancellor, wants to ensure each of them can have access to AI training if they want it.

“Artificial intelligence will be not unlike the emergence of writing and reading,” Suárez-Orozco said. “These will be tools that will forever change the nature of our economy [and] of our society moving forward. ... I want our students to have all the tools they need to be able to engage thoughtfully, productively and democratically with these new tools.”

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