

Remarks of Dr. Joe Sutherland, Center Director

Center for AI Learning Ribbon Cutting

September 19, 2023

Thank you all for being here. We are here to celebrate the opening of the Center for AI Learning. AI is going to change everything that we do, and it's going to change it for the better. But the key is that we do it the right way. The purpose of the Center for AI learning is to ensure that each and every one of us has the skills to succeed in this brave new world---and to advocate for the ethical and effective use of AI technologies in our lives.

When Ravi, Cliff, and Lance asked me a few months ago to create a Center for AI, I don't think any of us realized that we were going to have it launched within 100 days. But here we are, and I believe that is a testament to the fact that the spirit of dynamism and innovation at Emory University is alive and well. There are so many people who have made this novel Center possible. Ravi Bellamkonda, whom you'll hear from in a second, was key to making this happen, as were Lanny Liebeskind and Susan Bonifield. The venerated AI.Humanity faculty advisory committee; Paul Welty; Vicki Hertzberg; and many others were critical to gathering the support we needed to launch the Center. But there are a few people

deserve special distinction: our faculty directors, Cliff Carrubba and Lance Waller. Without them, none of this would have been possible. Please join me in thanking Cliff and Lance (APPLAUSE).

I think it's fitting that the Center is opening its doors here in Woodruff Library. The Library is a special place. When I was a kid, I would go to the public library for entertainment, where they had a small selection of books, and importantly, a desktop computer. At that library I checked out two books that changed my life: a book on how to program computers in BASIC, and a copy of Ripley's Believe It or Not. I learned from the book how to program BASIC on the library computer. I used that skill to build a trivia game based on surprising facts from the edition of Ripley's Believe It or Not. Then, I had everyone in the library come and play the game. It would even write the scores to the disk, which enabled me to run rudimentary analytics on who was most successful and which questions really stumped people. That moment opened my eyes to the fact that because of technology, data, and analytics. I had created something that could bring others joy for as long as it ran, without me needing to be there.

If not for that moment, I never would've embarked on a career as a technology executive. I never would have started AI companies. I never would've pursued a job at the White House. And I never would've pursued a PhD, which

enabled me to be here with you today. A whole lifetime of happiness and success, and I can chalk it up to one thing: **having access to the right tools at the right time, right there in the public library.**

For the past few months, I've been gathering feedback from our faculty, students, and staff on what they want out of the Center and AI.Humanity more broadly, through what I call "listening tours" at each of the schools. I still remember talking to Yana Bromberg, one of the first faculty I met here at Emory back in July. She said, "I was so excited to take this faculty position and come and meet the rest of our AI.H. humanity community. But I've been here for a few months now, and I have one question: Where is everybody?" (LAUGH)

Well, here they are! The Center will focus on convening our AI community and resources to create new research collaborations, and to create touchstone experiences where people can experience the magic of AI together, first-hand. Yana now serves as a Principal Fellow for our Center and is organizing the AI.Humanity Seminar Series, a program which I hope will bring our community together to foster innovation and collaboration.

I've also had the opportunity to speak with students from the classes I've taught in the department of Quantitative Theory and Methods, where I am a professor, and from other schools, most recently Goizueta Business School. One of

my students, Zaim, said, “when I got to Emory I had no idea that I would ever have access to resources like this.” And when I speak with community leaders and employers around the Atlanta metropolitan area, they are pleasantly surprised to know that our students are being equipped with the tools they need to lead in this new AI era. In fact, I can’t keep them away.

So, I’d like to share a little about what you’ll see today at our open house. First and foremost, you will get to meet our newly hired student helpdesk representatives. We’re already working on a number of projects. One uses AI to automate tedious wet lab tasks to save **5 full-time weeks** of research time per person per year. Another, in partnership with Valeda Dent, our Vice Provost of Libraries and Museums, and Geoff Goodman, uses AI to expand the scope and pace of research on children’s learning and development by a factor of 20. We’ve hung posters produced by the student staff on these projects in the common space. I could imagine us doing something like this at a grander scale next summer. You can request to have us look at your own project by visiting our website, [ailearning.emory.edu](http://ailearning.emory.edu) and submitting a help desk ticket.

Outside, you will also get to see some experiential learning projects outside of the help desk. You’ll meet student representatives from a living community, focused on artificial intelligence and its ethical applications thereof, advised by

Anandhi Bharadwaj. And you will hear from students who completed a summer experiential learning project in the quantitative theory and methods department, focusing on the development of a large database to support machine learning and AI applications.

If you go all the way around to our teaching theater, there is an opportunity to be a part of Emory history. You can use generative AI technologies to create a mascot for the center. Your submissions will be entered into a competition that students will vote on before we finalize our mascot. Thanks Minnie and Ashley for the idea.

And finally, we have published a schedule of our upcoming programs and offerings, which you'll see on the screens around the Center. Last Tuesday we held our first talk on whether generative AI is hype or not, and the room at Convocation Hall was at full capacity (Tommy said our catering has been laughing at us for not ordering enough food, so I hope we got you enough out there.)

Tomorrow, we inaugurate our AI.Humanity Seminar Series at Rollins, where Yana Bromberg will be delivering her talk, "Teaching Machines the Language of Life." It's sure to be great. On Thursday, we are co-sponsoring a panel on AI in the workplace with the department of quantitative theory and methods. And our next deep-dive workshop, which will focus on methodologies for use case

development, is coming on October 11 and has limited seating available, so get your tickets today.

With that, it is my pleasure to introduce you to Ravi Bellamkonda, our Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs.