



FORT LEWIS COLLEGE AI INSTITUTE

**ANNUAL REPORT
2024-2025**

AI INSITUTE AT FORT LEWIS COLLEGE

Who We Are

We are an incubator and hub for innovative AI exploration, building community, and driving progress at Fort Lewis College and in the Four Corners region.

As a hub for artificial intelligence in the Four Corners region, we are dedicated to fostering innovation, collaboration, and progress. We incubate cutting-edge AI applications by developing strategies, building infrastructure, and supporting regional partnerships. We aim to empower our community to explore and apply AI solutions to real-world challenges.

- VISION:** To serve as an AI hub for the Four Corners region
- MISSION:** To incubate innovative AI applications
- GOALS:** Develop strategies for AI innovation and exploration
- Build AI-focused infrastructure and support systems
- Foster regional partnerships around AI applications

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In August 2024, we launched the AI Institute to establish a premier AI resource hub for our region—an organization designed to catalyze innovation and foster collaboration. Within just four months, we attracted more than 400 leaders across government, business, education, and nonprofit sectors to Fort Lewis College to explore real-world applications of AI at our Four Corners AI Conference. Since then, we have secured \$50,000 to fund 15 incubator projects across the region and campus, hosted AI meetups, convened a collaborative AI session with Durango School District 9-R, engaged directly with AI investors, and developed a learning framework to facilitate the integration of AI into FLC courses.

In 2025-26, we are poised to expand our partnership with campus and community members in a spirit of mutual learning and knowledge sharing. While expanding our applied AI initiatives, we are also advancing our goals in education. In response to growing employer demand for AI-ready graduates, we are assessing how the Institute can contribute to credentialing pathways for AI competency. Our plan for these credentials will offer scalable

professional development opportunities for AI novices, emerging experts, students, faculty, and community partners. We are also engaging with campus and community partners to take steps to build plans for responsible and strategic AI integration.

As AI adoption accelerates worldwide, the Institute remains committed to responsible innovation—raising awareness about data privacy, ethical guardrails, and the responsible limits of AI technology. The Institute’s role in education must address these critical areas, as we balance the enthusiasm for adoption with thoughtful and careful application.

As we look toward the future, the Institute’s activities will evolve to meet emerging needs, but our core vision remains steadfast: to serve as the region’s trusted AI resource hub and catalyst for innovation. We invite you to join us in shaping the future of AI in our region—sharing your insights, concerns, ambitions, and expertise to accelerate our collective impact.

-Mario and Tom



Mario Martinez
AI Institute Founder, Provost & Vice President Academic Affairs



Tom Miasiewicz
Marketing and Katz Endowed Professor, AI Institute Director

INNOVATION WITH INTENTION

Change often arrives unexpectedly, reshaping how we live, work, and learn. The launch of the AI Institute was both a response to the fast-moving shift driven by AI and a reflection of our values. By expanding access to tools, training, and real-world learning, we are working to ensure innovation is within reach for everyone.

Artificial intelligence is already transforming how the world operates. It is changing how jobs are created, how decisions are made, and how communities access knowledge and resources. As the fastest-adopted technology in recorded history, AI is influencing sectors from healthcare and education to agriculture and small business.

This influence brings complexity. AI holds the potential to expand access, but it can also deepen existing divides. It can empower individuals or reinforce harmful patterns of exclusion. The AI Institute at Fort Lewis College was created to thoughtfully engage with these realities. We are working to promote access and ensure that AI serves the public good, especially for individuals and communities historically excluded from technological advancement.

In our first year, we emphasized mutual learning and knowledge-sharing to strengthen regional capacity. Our approach was centered on listening, exploring, and collaborating across disciplines and communities. We've built relationships with local businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies to explore values-driven applications of AI, and supported faculty-led projects to promote equity in the classroom. This work is ongoing and rooted in our commitment to access, inclusion, and community stewardship.

As we enter our second year, we do so with a deeper understanding of both the promise and the unpredictability of this moment. The landscape of AI continues to evolve quickly, and with it, the challenges and opportunities we face. At the AI Institute, we are committed to staying agile, grounded in our mission, and open to discovery. We will continue learning with our campus and community partners—building pathways where technology serves the public good and our region's needs.

We are proud of what we have started and committed to what comes next. We hope you will continue this journey with us.

CONNECTING CONVERSATIONS, EMPOWERING PEOPLE: A YEAR OF AI ENGAGEMENT

This year, the AI Institute launched a diverse slate of events designed to engage educators, entrepreneurs, and community members. From hands-on workshops to a regional conference and monthly meetups, we've built momentum by fostering shared learning across sectors. The numbers below reflect just the beginning of a growing ecosystem focused on thoughtful, inclusive AI engagement.



In partnership with the Economic Development Alliance, we hosted **over 400 attendees at the Four Corners AI Conference.**



Our AI Learning Continuum workshop, in partnership with Durango 9-R, examined how AI can **link education to careers and enhance student learning.**



Featuring **8 breakout sessions**, the conference spanned intro-level AI experiences to expert-led training on developing and deploying AI applications.



The event brought together **20 educators, technology specialists, and academic leaders** from Durango 9-R and Fort Lewis College.



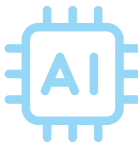
Building on the conference momentum, **we launched monthly AI Community Meetups**, hosting six so far on topics from AI's environmental impact to AI companionship.



Our dedication to community engagement in AI is evident in the regular free workshops we offer, with **12 hosted so far and over 300 attendees overall.**



The meet ups consistently draw **8-15 engaged participants**, striking a balance between growing interest and authentic, small-group exchange.



Over 10 workshops have been offered with topics ranging from AI for Data Analysis & Research to Creating Videos with AI.

“Local First is thrilled to receive funding through the Elevate AI program... We appreciate the opportunity to partner on this project to share our mutual learning on how to effectively use AI in practical ways.”

–Doug McCarthy
CEO, Local First

ELEVATE AI

Incubator Program

In its inaugural year, the Elevate AI incubator program has sparked a wave of innovation across the Durango community. This donor-funded program, with some supplemental support from the Provost’s Innovation Funds, supports projects that apply AI to address local needs and improve institutional practices.

The program offers three funding tracks: Full Project, Teaching with AI, and Subscription Only. With strong interest across all tracks, Elevate AI has enabled initiatives in education, mental health, marketing, and workforce development.

The Full Project track of the Elevate AI program supports local organizations in using AI to address real-world challenges in thoughtful and community-driven ways. These initiatives are not simply adopting new tools; they are using AI to deepen their impact and expand their reach. At the Sexual Assault Services Organization (SASO), staff are exploring how AI can improve outreach and streamline operations to better support survivors. Local First has worked to transform its well-known Be Local Coupon Book into a digital platform, using AI to make local savings more accessible while supporting small businesses. At Fort Lewis College, the Marketing and Communications team is

using AI to enhance storytelling and increase the department’s capacity to connect with campus audiences. Each of these projects reflects a shared commitment to using AI in ways that align with community values, promote equity, and build long-term resilience throughout the region.

Teaching with AI recipients are reimagining the classroom experience across disciplines including psychology, economics, art and design, music, mathematics and health sciences. With support from the AI Institute and the FLC Center for Teaching & Learning, faculty are embedding AI tools into assignments, research, and instructional design. These efforts follow the AI Learning Framework, developed by the AI Institute as a structured model to help instructors assess and deepen AI integration—from foundational

concepts to fully personalized learning. Projects include promoting writing equity, using generative design in web development, customizing tutoring in macroeconomics, and planning nutrition with AI tools. Whether advancing innovation or focusing on equity, these efforts show a shared commitment to making AI accessible, meaningful, and responsive to student needs.

By supporting projects that reflect community values and priorities, Elevate AI is laying the foundation for a lasting culture of innovation. The program is helping ensure that AI strengthens local resilience and deepens regional collaboration.

Learn more at
ai.fortlewis.edu/programs-at-the-ai-institute

ELEVATE AI PROJECTS FUNDED:

4 AI for Innovation Teaching proposals

5 AI for Equity Teaching proposals

7 Subscription-only proposals

9 Full project proposals

- **3 at FLC, including:** Marketing & Communications, Reed Library, and Psychology faculty
- **6 external, including:** Durango Tango, SASO, Local First, Local NEWS Network, InnerFrame, and the Durango Chamber of Commerce

PLANNING WITH PEOPLE & AI

The Provost's Office at Fort Lewis College is advancing its commitment to innovate with AI by piloting new approaches to academic planning. As part of a multi-month collaboration with the FLC AI Institute and a national higher education consultant, the Provost's Office explored how AI tools can supplement expert insight to shape academic structures that serve students, faculty, and regional partners.

Although this initiative, known as Elevating Strengths, introduced new tools to the conversation, the idea of academic realignment is not new to FLC.

"The conversation around restructuring, especially in Arts and Sciences, started as far back as 2016, and was raised again last fall," said Provost Mario Martinez. "We engaged a national consultant to provide

an outside perspective but at the same time saw an opportunity to simultaneously explore AI-generated perspectives.

The consultant, bringing 55 years of higher education experience, conducted a comprehensive review. This included interviews with faculty, staff, students, and administrative leaders, as well as an analysis of labor market data from Colorado and New Mexico and a comparison to peer institutions. At the same time, the AI Institute developed three unique AI "consultants" that used different sets of data and logic models to generate recommendations.

Each AI model approached the task differently. One relied entirely on the consultant's input. Another incorporated internal data and public web sources. A

"We are working to explore AI in small and big ways."

–Mario Martinez, FLC Provost
& Vice President Academic Affairs

third operated without any consultant data, instead drawing on external research and information provided by the Provost's Office. The AI-generated options were consistent with the consultant's recommendations, each highlighting distinct organizing principles such as workforce alignment, thematic connections, or mission fit.

"The AI-generated solutions were comparable to the consultant," said Martinez, "but the consultant also brought in FLC and human perspectives from interviews and contextual knowledge of higher education that AI alone cannot capture."

This exploration demonstrated AI's potential to generate clear, adaptable options that respond quickly to new questions or priorities, such as adjusting school structures by mission or workforce trends.

It also sparked conversation across campus among administration and faculty.

"We are working to explore AI in small and big ways," said Martinez. "The impact of AI on education and in communities is well underway. We do know, however, that in many areas of higher education, AI will not be the solution while in other areas AI will be an important resource to complement human expertise and insights only people can create, as was the case with our higher education consultants."

While the Provost's Office is still evaluating the findings from this pilot, the project has underscored the value of exploring how we might pair emerging technology with human judgment.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF AI IN THE FOUR CORNERS

The future of the AI Institute at Fort Lewis College is full of promise. As we continue to grow as a hub for responsible AI innovation in the Four Corners region, we remain committed to practical learning, community partnership, and collaboration across campus and the community.

This past year reinforced that building AI capacity in our region brings both opportunity and complexity. The Institute functions much like a startup, responding to emerging needs, identifying new paths forward, and continually refining our systems to support individuals, campus and community partners. We are learning alongside those we serve, and that shared learning will continue to guide our work.

In the coming year, we will expand training opportunities, invest in infrastructure, and foster a strong network of partners. These efforts will support local innovators, enhance educational access, and offer pathways for

thoughtful AI implementation. We are also working closely with administrative offices on campus to explore practical uses of AI in daily operations and long-term planning.

Our team will also be expanding to hire students as Junior AI Analysts, to support institute projects, like Elevate AI, and gain hands-on experience.

As we chart our next steps, we will stay focused on action, inclusion, and impact. Whether through public events, faculty partnerships, or expanded access to AI tools, we are committed to supporting the people and ideas that will shape a more equitable, AI-informed future.

Join us on the road ahead

As the AI Institute grows, so do the opportunities to engage. In the coming year, we will host events and programs designed to spark innovation, build skills, and strengthen our regional AI ecosystem.

Here's a look at what is on the horizon:

AI Hackathon | October 9–11, 2025

In partnership with Techstars, this event will bring together startups and community members to explore AI-driven innovation.

AI Conference | December 16, 2025

Early planning is underway for a regional conference that will center applied and ethical AI, with a focus on collaboration across the Four Corners. Final details, including the theme, will be announced soon.

Regional AI Infrastructure

With guidance from our Council of Strategists, a group of industry leaders who provide practical and forward-looking advice on AI applications, we will explore options to expand infrastructure through API access, hardware support, and local language model hosting.

New Training & Workshops

Beginning summer 2025, we will pilot community-led sessions focused on

applied AI, from building tools to developing organizational strategies. These programs will complement ongoing “AI for Business” workshops. Additionally, we’re exploring live streaming and workshop recordings to expand access.

Continued Incubator Funding

We anticipate a new round of project funding in mid-fall to support early-stage AI campus and community concepts with practical applications.

Campus Integration Initiatives

The Institute will collaborate with internal groups such as the FLC AI Resource Group and the Center for Teaching & Learning to explore opportunities for those who want to integrate AI into classrooms and administrative units.

AI Credentialing & Recognition

New efforts are underway to explore the development of accessible credentials rooted in the unique needs and strengths of FLC and the Four Corners region.

Connect. Contribute. Collaborate.

Our work is fueled by the ideas, passion, and insights of our community. Whether you're a student, educator, researcher, entrepreneur, or curious citizen, your voice matters.



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