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By Mirtha Donastorg | Updated Dec 11, 2024

Georgia State University is partnering with financial literacy nonprofit Operation HOPE on a new artificial intelligence training program for students from underserved communities, primarily those in the south side of Atlanta, officials told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The new AI Literacy Pipeline to Prosperity Project is an initiative of the nonprofit's prominent [AI Ethics Council](#). That council boasts [civil rights leaders](#), presidents of historically Black colleges and universities and major tech leaders as its members. The council is cochaired by Operation HOPE founder John Hope Bryant and Sam Altman, who leads OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT.

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The goal of the literacy pipeline project is to start training people from kindergarten all the way through college on AI. Richard Phillips, dean of the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State, and Bryant formally announced the initiative Wednesday morning at the nonprofit's annual HOPE Global Forums alongside leaders from Mayor Andre Dickens' office, Clark Atlanta University, Atlanta Public Schools and the Atlanta Board of Education.



Credit: Mirtha Donastorg

Atlanta leaders sign an agreement to establish the AI Literacy Pipeline to Prosperity Project for students from underserved communities on Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024, in Atlanta. From left to right: John Hope Bryant, CEO of Operation HOPE; Richard Phillips, dean of Georgia State University's J. Mack Robinson College of Business; Erika Mitchell, chair of the Atlanta Board of Education; George French, president of Clark Atlanta University; Bryan Johnson, superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools; Lance Triggs, Operation HOPE President of Operations; and a representative from Mayor Andre Dickens' office.

Bryant sees the project as a way of creating an economic ladder for people who don't have access to the same opportunities as wealthy Americans.

"I think it's very dangerous to have an economy where big chunks are technology, finance, health care," Bryant said, "but there's no intentional development process. There's no laddering system." New research from the [Brookings Institution](#) has found women, Hispanics, multiracial and Black people in metro Atlanta remain underrepresented in computer, engineering and management jobs compared to their share of the population. Brookings also found that these workers are more concentrated in lower wage digital jobs.

But with AI, almost everyone is starting from scratch with the burgeoning technology, regardless of race, education or class, Bryant said, which means "no one has an advantage."

So, the literacy pipeline program is going to focus on bringing AI training to communities in Atlanta "that wouldn't naturally have those opportunities," Phillips from Georgia State said. "We're not fully taking advantage of the innate capabilities of this country. We're sort of leaving people on the sideline that shouldn't be on the sideline, they should be on the playing field."

Georgia State and Operation HOPE are partnering with Atlanta Public Schools on the program. The primary focus is on Title I schools, Bryant said, which are schools with a high number of poor students. In Atlanta, those schools are primarily concentrated in the south side of the city and are overwhelmingly Black. "There's a (African billionaire and tech leader) Strive Masiyiwa and an Andrew Young of technology in those communities right now, with no nurturing, no support and no opportunities," Bryant said.

But the program is not limited to those students, "we're not going to exclude anybody," he said. "If you happen to make your way ... from Buckhead, we're happy to talk to you, we'll be happy to help you."

APS will help develop the program's curriculum, and Phillips said they are aiming to launch a pilot next summer. Georgia State's College of Education, the mayor's office, Clark Atlanta, Morehouse College, Georgia Tech and other members of the AI Ethics Council are also partnering on the program.



Credit: Jenni Girtman

Operation HOPE CEO John Hope Bryant, from left, and Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens sit down for a discussion during the kick off the national “American Aspiration Tour,” highlighting the importance of financial literacy Thursday, July 25, 2024 at Atlanta City Hall. The event also unveiled the Business Plan for America, positioning Atlanta as the national model. (Jenni Girtman for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

As the program develops, it will also provide AI internships to high school students, AI-focused scholarships and financial literacy programming through Operation HOPE.

The program is initially being funded by the AI Ethics Council, Georgia State, Operation HOPE and Mastercard. Bryant declined to disclose the exact amount of funding.

The ultimate goal of the program is to have Atlanta be a model that can then be implemented in other cities in Georgia and around the United States. But Bryant also sees the pipeline as a new model for trying to create equity-focused programs in a time when diversity, equity and inclusion is under legal and political crosshairs. “This also might be an example of something that’s the future of what was called D, E and I, because this is for everybody,” he said. “This is inclusive economics. Whether you’re white, poor, rural in the mountains of Georgia. Whether you’re Latino, whether you’re Asian, whether you’re African American in the inner city, wherever.”

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