

TESTIMONY: Fotis Sotiropoulos, executive vice president and provost, Penn State

Joint hearing of the PA Senate Committees on Education + Communications and Technology
October 6, 2025

Chairwoman Culver, Chairwoman Pennycuick, and distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

This hearing reflects a shared commitment to future-proofing Pennsylvania’s workforce—an essential step toward securing the long-term economic success of both the Commonwealth and the nation.

The concept of “future-proofing” is central to how we think about integrating artificial intelligence into higher education. It is our responsibility not just to prepare students for the jobs of today, but to equip them with the skills to solve the problems of tomorrow. To future-proof our students means preparing them to continue learning and adapting—to new skills, new technologies, and new moments of technological disruption.

No student, regardless of discipline, is future-proof—or even future-ready—if they are not AI literate. The facts are clear: AI is here, and it’s here to stay. More than 80% of students report already using AI in their coursework. Higher education, like every other industry, is already changing profoundly and rapidly as a result. In the next 5 to 10 years, we expect AI to reshape the role of educators, allowing for deeper student engagement, more creative instruction, and expanded experiential learning.

Simply put: institutions of higher education must adapt or be left behind.

At Penn State, we’re fortunate to have a strong foundation to build on. We offer AI-focused degree programs across multiple disciplines and campuses—including one of the first AI engineering degrees and minors in the country. The Nittany AI Alliance empowers students to solve real-world industry challenges through workshops, open innovation competitions, and industry-sponsored internships. And we’re already using AI-powered tools like LionChat to support the student experience.

This reflects an important truth: while the conversation around AI in higher education often centers on the classroom, true innovation means thinking about AI across the entire institution—academics, yes, but also research, admissions, advising, and more.

Penn State is working to build on our existing strengths and rapidly respond and evolve to meet the needs and opportunities posed by AI.

I have posed six ambitious goals:

- By Fall 2026:
 - All faculty and administrators will be AI literate and explore AI implications for their disciplines
 - We will provide a cohesive curricular AI program
 - AI-enabled interdisciplinary research will be the norm
 - Staff will be equipped with AI tools and upskilling
 - Each unit will create a culture of AI experimentation and adoption
- All of which flows upwards toward our student-focused goal:



- By Fall 2027, every student (undergrad, grad, transfer, etc.) will have opportunities to become AI literate

This is designed to make us more nimble, more efficient, and more effective in our core goals, which remain unchanged:

To conduct research that solves our world's biggest problems. To drive positive impact, workforce development, and economic growth for our Commonwealth. And to educate our students to prepare them for careers of achievement and distinction—which requires future-proofing them to innovate and evolve as the Age of AI continues to do the same.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today. I welcome your questions and look forward to continued collaboration.