Security leaders learn AI fundamentals through MIT professional program

Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brittany A. Chase | DAF-MIT AI Accelerator

The Department of the Air Force-Massachusetts Institute of Technology Artificial Intelligence Accelerator has again partnered with defense and academic institutions to host the AI for National Security Leaders program at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, May 16-18.

Lincoln Laboratory, a federally funded research and development center at MIT; DOD's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office; and MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory teamed up with the AI Accelerator to host the initiative.

The AI4NSL program garnered more than 30 DOD and foreign officials from around the U.S. and Europe, to learn the basics of modern AI.

The three-day training opportunity was designed to inform DOD senior leaders about AI's national security implications and ways to apply it in their domains of responsibility.

Army Brig. Gen. David Warshaw, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency's operational analysis director, attended the most recent A14NSL offering and said his agency has an AI, machine learning and data science strategy in place.

"I've done a lot of reading about AI, but as the senior intelligence officer inside the agency, I knew there was a technology and capability out

Airmen with the Department of the Air Force-Massachusetts Institute of Technology Artificial Intelligence Accelerator and Defense Department senior leaders gather for a group photo at MIT in Cambridge, Mass., May 18, 2022. The AI Accelerator partnered with MIT Lincoln Laboratory, DOD's Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office, and MIT's Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory to offer the AI for National Security Leaders course, teaching defense officials the basics of modern AI. (DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brittany A. Chase)

there we were probably not leveraging to the degree that we could," he said. "I made the choice to come to the course because I wanted to learn more about what AI can offer and how to develop a strategy to pull it through."

The interactive, problem-solving course included an array of learning modules, such as presentations, group discussions, case studies, a live demonstration in an MIT research lab, and the opportunity to speak to about a dozen AIA Airmen on a variety of projects.

"I've learned not just the obvious opportunities and possibilities, but also some of the challenges in AI," the general said, noting one of the intelligence community's challenges is the vast amount of data generated by our intelligence assets.

Security leaders learn AI fundamentals through MIT professional program (continued)

The training focused on AI fundamentals, to include the ethics of AI, adopting and scaling AI across the force, and practical solutions for how to effectively implement AI.

"AI is the future of warfighting and we cannot successfully change the face of warfare alone," said the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center Chief of Staff Heather Durgin. "We must establish partnerships, and grow together on this journey to modernize our workforce to meet the challenges the AI revolution will present to the DOD."

Attendees noted that the unique combination of Accelerator Airmen, MIT faculty and CDAO staff presented an opportunity to learn from people from diverse backgrounds and industries.

"Unless we have people who are prepared to implement, who have a good understanding of AI and what actually needs to happen to implement it, we won't have any headway," Durgin said. "That's why this course works; we can take the lessons we've learned from each other and build on that in our workspaces."

One of the highlights of the AI4NSL program was the Blueprints for Action break-out groups. Teams of attendees proposed practical AI and machine learning solutions to real problems in their areas of responsibility, applying information from the course to current AI challenges.

The DAF AI Accelerator is currently working with MIT and Headquarters Department of the Air Force Manpower and Personnel office to make AI4NSL a permanent initiative for the joint force.

"This course is the cornerstone that provides senior leaders with a tangible understanding of ethical AI and how they can be stewards of this knowledge," said Maj. John Radovan, DAF-MIT AIA deputy director. "We want to equip these leaders with ways they can make informed, well thought out, data-informed decisions, and this course did just that."

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