

BRIEF

# UVA to launch data science school with \$120M gift

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## Dive Brief:

- The University of Virginia (UVA) on Friday announced it is launching an interdisciplinary school of data science with the help of a \$120 million donation, the largest private gift in the institution's history. The gift came from a foundation funded by Jaffray Woodruff, co-founder of hedge fund Quantitative Investment Management.
- The school will offer undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates to help meet the growing demand for data scientists. UVA is still designing the school and seeking required approvals but expects it could open either this fall or next.
- Instead of departments, the school will set up satellites in UVA's other schools to foster interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as standalone centers focused on topics such as machine learning, analytics and visualization, UVA President Jim Ryan wrote in an op-ed for the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

## Dive Insight:

UVA's move to open a data science school follows years of rapid growth in the field. From January 2015 to January 2018, job postings for data scientists on Indeed.com climbed 75%, while job searches for those positions rose 65%, Bloomberg reported. In addition, IBM predicts the field will continue to become more in-demand, with the number of data scientist and advanced analyst positions growing 28% from 2015 to 2020.

"Not only are opportunities for exceptional data scientists exponentially growing, but data science is being increasingly applied across diverse industries, in government, and in academia," Phil Bourne, director of UVA's Data Science Institute, said in a statement in August.

In response, colleges are launching programs and opening entire schools to meet that demand. In November, the University of California, Berkeley announced plans to launch a data science division. The move followed the addition of an undergraduate data science program, which swiftly became one of the most popular majors on campus. Like UVA's program, it aims to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration across several fields.

And in October, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology announced it will open an interdisciplinary computing college with a focus on artificial intelligence, computer science and data science. The forthcoming college, behind which MIT is putting a \$1 billion investment, comes in part to stem rising anxieties around the increasing need for computing skills in the job market.

The surge in data science programs marks an effort by colleges to better align their offerings with employers' needs for specific skills. It also represents an effort to give students a clearer return on investment, as the field offers an average starting salary of roughly \$95,000.

Where academia has not been adapting quick enough to workforce demands, industry has been stepping in. Google, for instance, will be on college campuses this year to teach a 10-week machine learning course. Amazon, Apple and Facebook have also been crafting curriculum to address demand for tech workers skilled in their platforms.

### **Recommended Reading:**

 UVA TODAY

UVA Plans New School of Data Science; \$120 Million Gift is Largest in University History [☑](#)

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 RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH

Jim Ryan column: Why UVa is planning a school of data science [↗](#)