Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute Launches First Research Projects

Projects aimed at uncovering social issues to improve communities locally and nationally

MILWAUKEE, Feb. 12, 2020 – The Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute has announced its first research projects that will use data science to address challenging societal issues that have a local and national impact. Faculty members and students from Marquette University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, as well as community organizations, are collaborating on projects that use data science to better understand three topics: voter sentiment, neighborhood wellbeing and equitable housing, and the opioid crisis.

“These projects are perfectly aligned with the mission and vision of the Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute,” said Dr. Purush Papatla, Co-Director, Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute and Professor of Marketing at UW-Milwaukee. “In addition to using data science to solve societal issues, we’re providing opportunities for students to cultivate the skills they will need for a future in data science while introducing them to societal and political issues that have an impact locally and nationally.”

A Big Data Lens on the Elections

Using a variety of data sources, including online and social media, traditional polling methods, and political advertisements, the big data lens on elections project will determine what issues are on voters’ minds as the 2020 elections approach. The project, which began in January 2020, will shed light on what is likely to drive voter behavior.

“We can use data science to investigate Americans’ priorities surrounding the election, including how voters and candidates are talking about current issues,” said Dr. Amber Wichowsky, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Marquette University. “We’ll be able to see if there is a match between what voters are talking about online and what they report in public opinion polls, as well as examine how the electorate is responding to candidates’ political messaging.”

Wichowsky and Papatla will lead the project together with a team consisting of students from both universities.

Walnut Way Data Dream Project

The Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute is partnering with Walnut Way on a community project that uses data science to understand anti-displacement and equitable housing in the Lindsay Heights neighborhood in Milwaukee. Students from both universities will analyze nearly 20 years of data on the social, environmental and economic aspects of the neighborhood to determine how it can be leveraged to access financial resources to address the barriers to equitable housing and economic development.

Data Science to Address Health Crises: Opioids

The Institute also approved a project that will use public data from local sources and will rely on geospatial analysis to study opioid overdoses in Milwaukee. The project, which launches February 21, hopes to find insights that may be applicable to other communities across the country. Faculty members from both universities will comprise the project team.

Findings from all projects will be communicated with early insights expected in Spring 2020.

About the Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute
The Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute is an industry and academic partnership between Northwestern Mutual, Marquette and UWM formed to inspire and cultivate passion for data science in the Milwaukee region. Leveraging the strengths of the three institutions, the groundbreaking partnership will contribute $40 million over five years to help build a technology ecosystem and advance southeastern Wisconsin as a national hub for technology, research, business and talent development, while creating an organic pipeline of tech talent in the area.

To learn more about the Northwestern Mutual Data Science Institute, visit nmdsi.org.

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