Florida Poly students test out self-driving cars for final exam

BY: Ryan Raiche
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POLK COUNTY, Fla. - It's big day for dozens of students at Florida Polytechnic University in Polk County — it's their final exam to prove to their professor that their autonomous car can successfully drive on its own.

It's the culmination of months of prep and fine-tuning of what was once a radio-controlled car that the students have engineered into a self-driving machine.

"We are using a whole very rich sensor suite on this car," said Max Hound, Florida Poly student.

The students' cars are kind of like miniature Tesla's — they're designed to avoid walls, adhere to traffic signs, and steer through a course with all types of terrain.

"It's really pretty cool. I'm proud of everything we have accomplished," Hound said.

Florida's newest university may turn into ground zero for the industry that's quickly picking up steam.

"Over the next ten years it's going to be an 87 billion dollar industry," said Prof. Dean Bushey, who is teaching the autonomous vehicle class.

He describes Florida Poly as an international testing ground for autonomous vehicles, partly for what's happening in the classroom but also because of the

research that will take place on SunTrax, the partnership between the school and FDOT.

SunTrax will be facility designed to test all autonomous vehicles and new technology for tolls.

But for now, students like Hound are immersing themselves into the field because they are convinced in the not-so-distant future, transportation will be totally different.

"It's going to make more sense to not own a car at all and just call an autonomous car and have it come pick you up," he said.