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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: 2026 Civic Engagement and Community Service Award

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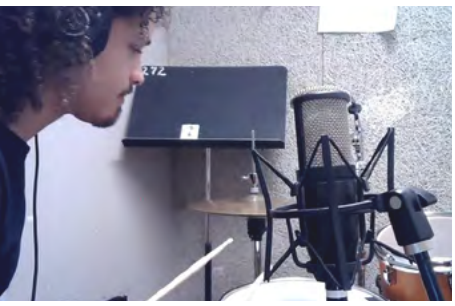

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Cuyahoga Community College®

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Insight Into Diversity HIGHER EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY AWARD 2024 Health Professions School

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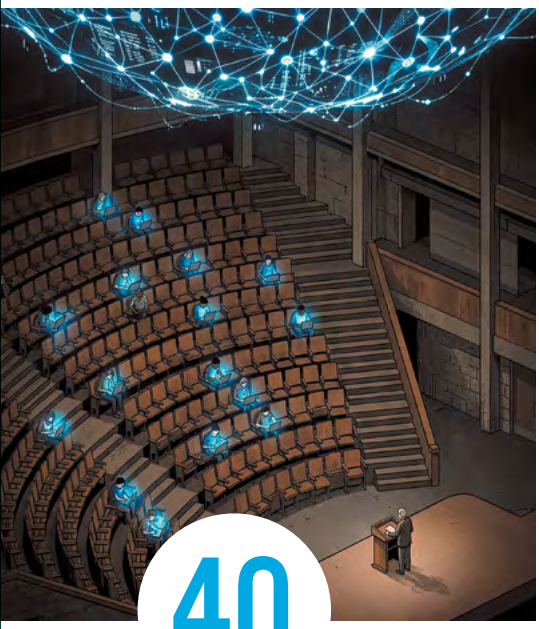

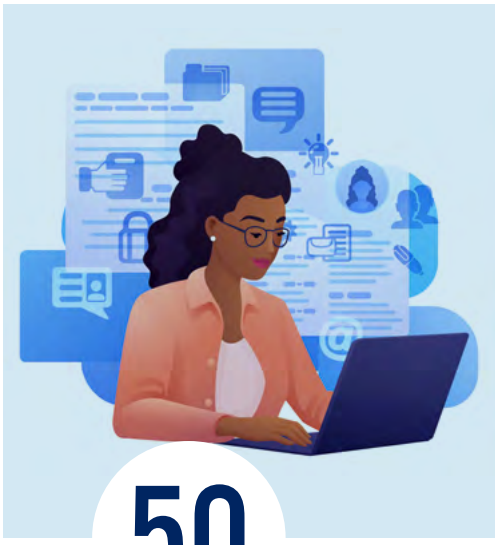

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UGA Grows AI Access, Literacy, and Research

The University of Georgia (UGA) is expanding its engagement with AI through a mix of direct student access, academic support infrastructure, and interdisciplinary research initiatives, positioning it as a core component of its educational and workforce strategy.

During his annual State of the University Address, UGA President Jere W. Morehead announced an $800,000 pilot program designed to give thousands of students access to leading AI platforms.

The initiative aims to help build practical skills in a labor market where automation and AI adoption are reshaping hiring practices across industries. The pilot includes licenses for tools such as ChatGPT Edu and Gemini Pro, extending access beyond faculty and staff.

"Faculty and staff already have access to these platforms through their departments, and we look forward to broadening this student pilot in the months ahead," Morehead said during the address.

UGA's investment reflects a broader shift in higher education. While many universities initially restricted AI use following the public release of ChatGPT in late 2022, institutions are increasingly focusing on "AI literacy" as a foundational competency. This transformation is occurring alongside workforce disruptions tied to automation.

According to outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, companies cited AI directly in announcing 55,000 job cuts in 2025, heightening pressure on colleges to prepare graduates for a changing employment landscape.

University officials have emphasized that UGA's approach centers on responsible and effective use, acknowledging concerns from educators who worry that overreliance on AI could weaken critical thinking, persistence, and independent problem-solving skills.

Beyond classroom access, UGA has invested in structured guidance through its Libraries' AI Literacy Guide, which provides students and instructors with resources on commonly used tools, ethical considerations, fact-checking AI-generated content, and strategies for thoughtful academic engagement. The guide also connects users to workshops, librarian consultations, and additional training opportunities through campus programs and LinkedIn Learning.

UGA's AI efforts extend into health sciences and research as well. In March, the university will host a two-day interdisciplinary conference examining how artificial intelligence and immersive technologies are transforming health care education and practice. The event brings together faculty, clinicians, students, and industry partners, highlighting applications ranging from clinical simulations to AI-enabled health education.

Together, these initiatives signal UGA's intent to integrate artificial intelligence across instruction, research, and professional preparation, while balancing innovation with ongoing debates about the technology's risks and limitations in academic settings.

University of Cincinnati Launches Bearcats Affordability Grant to Cover Tuition for Low-Income Students

The University of Cincinnati (UC) has announced a new initiative aimed at expanding access to higher education for Ohio residents through the creation of the Bearcats Affordability Grant, a program designed to provide a tuition-free pathway to college for qualifying families.

Beginning in fall 2026, the grant will cover any remaining tuition costs for in-state students whose families earn less than $75,000 annually and who are eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. The award applies after Pell Grant funding and the Ohio College Opportunity Grant have been used, ensuring that tuition is fully covered for eligible students. The program is open to first-time, first-year undergraduates admitted for fall 2026 or later and applies across all three University of Cincinnati campuses, including online degree programs.

University officials describe the grant as a significant step in reducing financial barriers that can prevent people from enrolling in college. "This grant program will be transformational for students, families, and for this region," said Jack Miner, vice provost for enrollment management at UC. "Despite their dreams and years of hard work, college is just out of reach for so many students and families. This grant will make dreams a reality for literally thousands of students."

The Bearcats Affordability Grant builds on UC's broader efforts to increase educational attainment in the region, including its Next Lives Here strategic direction launched in 2018. Since that initiative began, UC has grown by nearly 9,000 students. University leaders say the new grant aligns with long-term goals of increasing access to a college degree and supporting workforce development in southwestern Ohio.

"The Bearcats Affordability Grant strengthens families and communities across Ohio, from our largest cities to our rural regions," said UC President Neville Pinto. "By removing financial barriers and expanding access to a UC education, we are preparing many more students to enter high-demand fields and contribute to a workforce that keeps our state competitive."

Students who meet eligibility criteria are automatically awarded the grant and do not need to submit a separate application. To maintain eligibility, recipients must remain enrolled full-time and make satisfactory academic progress, with eligibility reviewed each semester. The grant covers tuition and standard fees, including instructional, general, campus life, distance learning, and program fees, but not housing, meal plans, books, or course-specific costs.

The announcement follows UC's Decision Day on December 10, 2025, when admitted students received their acceptance letters and personalized welcome messages. UC reported receiving more than 35,000 applications for fall 2026 admission, representing nearly a 15% increase over the previous year.

As College Attainment Climbs, Focus Shifts to Potential Post-Graduation Earnings

By Erik Cliburn

The numbers of Americans with an education beyond high school have climbed steadily for more than a decade. Yet a new analysis suggests that degree completion alone may no longer be the most important measure of progress.

In its latest "A Stronger Nation" report, the Lumina Foundation establishes a new benchmark for evaluating higher education—one that looks beyond whether adults earn credentials and focuses on whether those credentials translate into measurable economic gains. The foundation's long-term objective is that by 2040, 75% of adults in the U.S. labor force will hold a postsecondary "credential of value."

The definition is explicit. A credential of value must lead to earnings at least 15% higher than the national median annual salary of a high school graduate. Using that threshold, Lumina reports that 43.6% of adults ages 25 to 64 currently in the labor force meet this benchmark. That figure serves as the national baseline for the 2040 goal.

The new measure contrasts with overall attainment rates. In 2024, 54.8% of working-age adults held a post-high school credential, an increase of 16.7 percentage points since 2009. While that rise reflects sustained gains in degree and certificate completion, it also underscores a gap. Roughly 11 percentage points separate attainment from the credentials that meet Lumina's earnings standard.

"More Americans have formal education or training after high school, but new federal data show the country is far from meeting long-term demand for talent and ensuring widespread economic opportunity," the foundation stated in announcing the findings.

Lumina's president and CEO, Jamie Merisotis, framed the shift as an evolution in the national conversation about college value. "Our objective in encouraging and supporting leaders in business, government, higher education, the nonprofit sector, and workforce development to pursue the 75% goal is not simply to foster more learning after high school," he said. "We want this learning to help people experience economic gains and social mobility that renew American prosperity."

The data reveal substantial variation by credential type. Among those with graduate or professional degrees, 80% earn at or above the benchmark. For bachelor's degree holders, the share is 70%. By contrast, 54% of associate degree holders and 55% of individuals with certifications meet the earnings threshold. Short-term credentials account for 7% of the labor force meeting the benchmark, compared with 36.6% who hold degrees and meet it.

The differences reinforce Lumina's finding that economic value is not evenly distributed across programs. "But the degrees and other credentials people earn must position them for workforce success and financial security," said Courtney Brown, Lumina's vice president of impact and planning. "To reach 75%, more adults will need degrees and short-term options such as certificates and industry certifications."

Geography further complicates the picture. In 2024, the share of adults in the labor force with credentials of value ranged from 25% in Puerto Rico to 67.7% in the District of Columbia. The national average stands at 43.6%, which leaves the country 31.4 percentage points short of the 75% target.

Age patterns also emerge. Among degree holders in the labor force, 40% of those ages 35 to 44 meet the benchmark, compared with 34% of those ages 25 to 34 and 32% of those ages 55 to 64. The data suggest that earnings gains may accumulate over time, though disparities persist across demographic groups.

The foundation situates its new goal within broader economic projections. By 2031, 72% of U.S. jobs are expected to require additional education or training beyond high school. Lumina estimates that increases in educational attainment since 2010 have generated at least $14.2 trillion in additional net lifetime earnings nationally through 2020 alone.

By linking attainment to earnings, Lumina is effectively redefining accountability in higher education. The question is no longer solely how many Americans enroll or graduate, but whether postsecondary education delivers on its economic promise.

At the same time, public confidence in higher education has eroded. Lumina's strategic plan notes that only 36% of Americans express high confidence in colleges and universities, down from 57% in 2015. Rising tuition, concerns about alignment with labor-market needs, and the rapid influence of artificial intelligence have contributed to skepticism about return on investment.

By linking attainment to earnings, Lumina is effectively redefining accountability in higher education. The question is no longer solely how many Americans enroll or graduate, but whether postsecondary education delivers on its economic promise.

As Brown observed, "These baseline numbers show how far we have to go. We have to continue to rethink how education and career training work in the United States."

With 2040 set as the horizon, the new framework places economic value at the center of national attainment goals, signaling a shift that could shape policy, funding priorities, and institutional design in the years ahead.

Fair Share Funding Expands Tuition-Free Access Across Massachusetts

By Erik Cliburn

New investments fueled by the Massachusetts' Fair Share initiative are reshaping the state's higher education landscape, with billions of dollars translating into direct affordability gains for students and families. Since 2023, the policy has underwritten tuition-free community college for tens of thousands of state residents while substantially lowering the cost of four-year degrees at state public institutions.

At the community college level, $257.5 million in Fair Share funding has made no-cost enrollment available to all Massachusetts residents.

According to state data, 50,751 students have enrolled in tuition-free community college programs. The expansion marks a significant shift in access, particularly as community college enrollment is growing for the first time since 2014.

State leaders have framed the investment as both an economic and workforce strategy. "Massachusetts community colleges are economic drivers, helping students move ahead in their careers and meeting the needs of our employers," Gov. Maura Healey said.

For students like Krystin Woodard of Springfield, MA, the policy has had a direct and personal impact. Woodard left high school at 16 and later earned her GED. Financial challenges repeatedly interrupted her attempts to pursue higher education. After learning about the state's no-cost community college programs, she enrolled at Springfield Technical Community College and completed her associate degree in liberal arts with honors alongside her sister, becoming the first in their family to graduate from college.

Fair Share dollars are also reducing costs at Massachusetts' public universities. An additional $249 million expanded MASSGrant Plus, a financial aid program serving students at state universities and the University of Massachusetts (UMass) campuses.

Under the expansion, low-income students pay no tuition and fees. Students from middle-income families can receive up to a 50% reduction in out-of-pocket expenses, and have access of up to $1,200 for books and supplies.

For Graham Kratochwill, a UMass Dartmouth student, the aid provided financial certainty. "Now I don't need to worry about that at all. I look at my bill—it says zero dollars and zero cents—I owe nothing," he said.

Beyond tuition, Fair Share investments are addressing the broader financial pressures that can derail academic progress. The state distributed $30.5 million to public colleges and universities for student support services, including tutoring, childcare assistance, career counseling, debt counseling, and mental health services. Funds also help cover basic needs for transportation, emergency housing, and food. As of December 2025, $28.5 million has been distributed.

In addition to direct student aid, funds are being used to strengthen institutional capacity across the public higher education system. The state set aside $165 million for campus infrastructure improvements, including modernization of laboratories, upgrades to clinical skills simulation facilities, accessibility enhancements, and overdue maintenance projects.

In the 2024 fiscal year alone, $50 million supported improvements to 200 buildings across 29 public institutions, with an additional $115 million allocated in the 2025 fiscal year supplemental budget to continue modernization efforts.

Together, the Fair Share investments signal a state-led model that ties tax policy to direct education funding. The early results—tuition-free community college for more than 50,000 students, expanded four-year aid, and growing enrollment—suggest that Massachusetts is testing a comprehensive approach to affordability that extends from high school through college.

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Community service and civic engagement

have long been tradition in higher education, evolving from simple charitable contributions to today's multi-faceted efforts to address community needs, increase civic participation, and support transformative growth outside of campuses.

In keeping with Insight into Academia's mission of recognizing and sharing best practices in the academy, this past fall we launched the inaugural Civic Engagement and Community Service Award.

The 2026 winners represent institutions whose efforts are making a measurable difference in the lives of the people and communities they serve, and beyond. They understand their responsibility extends beyond the campus walls, and reach into the neighborhoods, cities, and regions that surround them and society's broader democratic and social fabric.

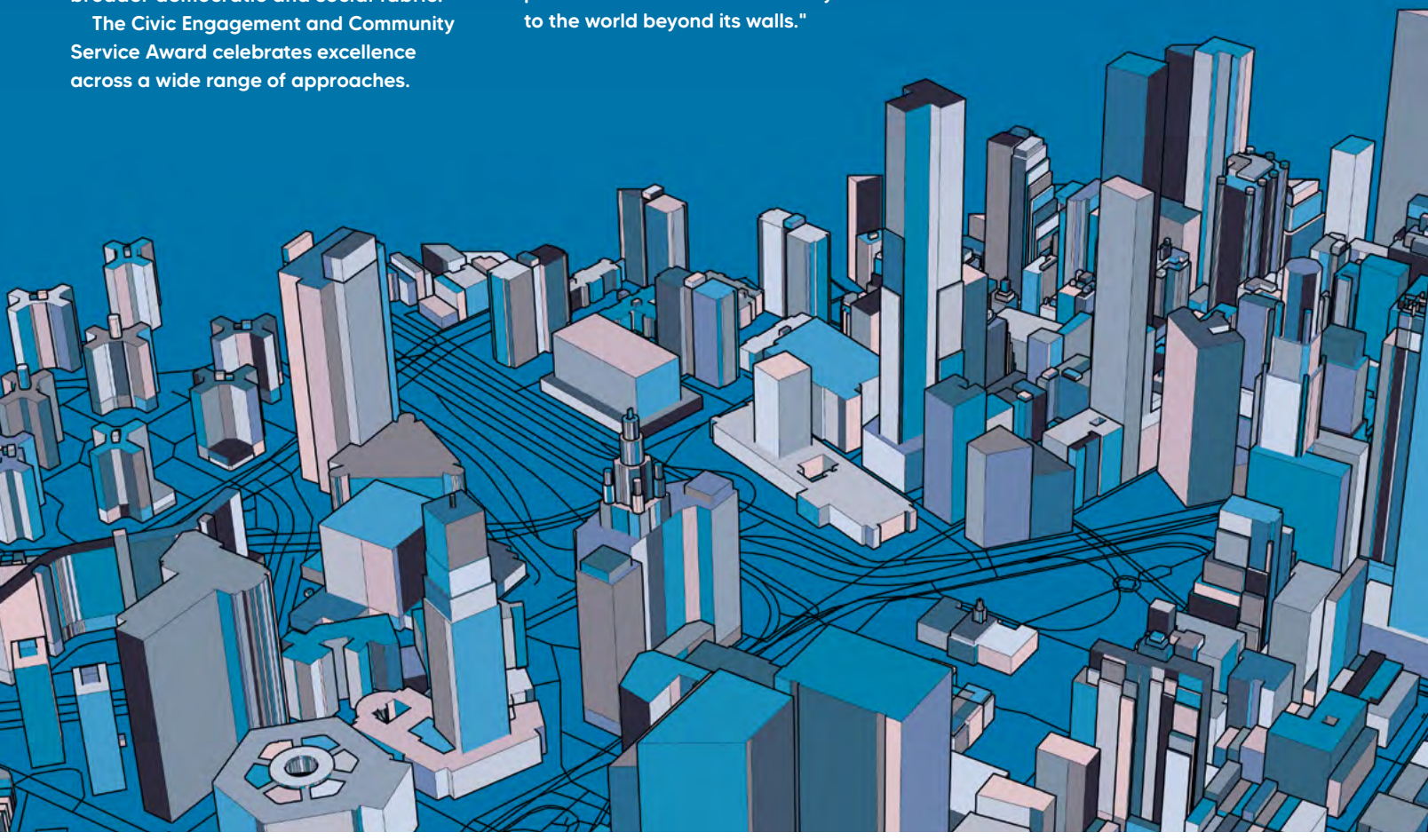
The Civic Engagement and Community Service Award celebrates excellence across a wide range of approaches.

Some honorees are registering new voters and training students in civil discourse. Others are operating free health clinics, providing pro bono legal aid, embedding researchers directly into nonprofit organizations, or mentoring our youth.

What unites this year's honorees is not a single model or methodology, but a shared conviction that the resources of an institution of higher education—its students, faculty, staff, research, and institutional voice—are most powerful when put in service for the public good.

"These institutions are demonstrating that civic engagement and community service are not just add-ons to the academic mission. They are central to it," says Lenore Pearlstein, co-publisher of Insight Into Academia magazine. "Their programs are improving lives, strengthening communities, and showing the rest of higher education what is possible when an institution truly commits to the world beyond its walls."

Selected for their innovation, community impact, and institutional commitment to service, this year's honorees also represent a diverse range of institution types, programs, and communities they serve. Through their stories, readers will find practical inspiration and replicable approaches that can take root on campuses everywhere.



RECIPIENTS OF THE 2026 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Adelphi University, First-Year Community Action Program

Adler University, Adler Community Health Services

Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, The Collaboratory

Binghamton University, Civil Dialogue Project

Bowling Green State University, BGSU Votes

Bowling Green State University, Sidney A. Ribeau President's Leadership Academy

Claflin University Office of Career Development — Service Learning/ Community Service Program

Cleveland State University, Center for Refugee and Immigrant Success (CRIS)

Cleveland State University, College of Health

Cleveland State University, College of Law

Cleveland State University, Lift Up Vikes! Resource Center and Food Pantry

Cleveland State University, Student-Athlete Advisory Council

College of Business at Michigan Technological University, EmpowerUP Students

Cuyahoga Community College, The Voting Experience at Tri-C

Drexel University, Office of University and Community Partnerships

Elizabethtown College, Into the Streets

Hudson County Community College, Hudson Oral History Project

Indiana University, Observing Civic Engagement Lab

Jefferson College, Academic Service Learning in the Civic Leadership and Democracy Engagement Framework

Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, CIRCLE: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

Lehigh University Community Service Office, Bridges to Bethlehem

Lehigh University Community Service Office, Holiday Hope Chest

Lehigh University Community Service Office, SERVE Program

Molloy University, The Rising Star Program

Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences-Mary Baldwin University, Community Practicum

Nazareth University, The Partners Programs: Partners for Learning, Partners for Serving, Partners for Health

Notre Dame of Maryland University, Notre Dame Freshman Class Academic Fair Program

Pace University, Center for Community Action and Research

Quinnipiac University, Center for Interprofessional Healthcare Education & School of Nursing Community Engagement Program

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey-New Brunswick, Advancing Community Development

Saginaw Valley State University, Cardinals Vote

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Office of Engagement, SAIC's Tower Artist-in-Residence Program

Swarthmore College, The Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility

Texas A&M University, BUILD, Student Organization

Towson University, Civic Renewal Initiative

The University of Akron, The [Un]class

University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry, Community Eye Care

University at Albany, State University of New York, Great Dane Dialogue

University of California, Riverside, STEAM Academy

The University of California, Riverside, School of Medicine, UCR Program in Medical Education – Leadership Education to Advance Diversity (LEAD): African, Black, and Caribbean (ABC) Program

University of Cincinnati, Bearcat Buddies Tutoring Program

University of Dayton, The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community

University of Denver's Center for Community Engagement to Advance Scholarship and Learning, Documenting the Past, Fostering the Future: Youth Voices in El Movimiento

University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, From Pathways to Practice: A Model of Veterinary Civic Engagement

University of Houston-Downtown, Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL)

University of Houston-Downtown, Service Learning

University of Massachusetts Amherst, Civic Engagement and Service Learning

University of New Hampshire Civil Discourse Lab for Collaborative Leadership and the Public Good, CDL CIRCLE Conversations at the Intersection of Research and Community Listening Exchange

University of North Texas, Virtual Private Music Lesson Program

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Community-University Research Collaboration Initiative (CURCI)

USF College of Nursing, Mo-Bull Nurse Medical Clinic

William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Christine Smith Community Service Program

Powering Democracy:

Civic Participation and the Voter Engagement Imperative

Few forces shape a democracy

more profoundly than whether its citizens choose to participate in it. The basic capacity to engage across difference are not givens—they are skills and habits that must be cultivated.

The cohort of institutions honored this year has made strides in servicing their communities that are intentional, sustained, and impactful.

At **Bowling Green State University (BGSU),** the BGSU Votes program, housed within the C. Raymond Marvin Center for Student Leadership and Civic Engagement, has built one of the most comprehensive nonpartisan voter engagement infrastructures in the Midwest. Student-led and institutionally supported, the program operates through daily tabling, classroom presentations, large-scale events during National Voter Education Week, and a volunteer corps of more than 100 BGSU students.

The results are measurable: between 2016 and 2020, BGSU increased student voter turnout by nearly 12%—outpacing the national National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) average for colleges and universities.

A similar story is unfolding in Michigan, where **Saginaw Valley State University's (SVSU)** Cardinals Vote program has become a national model for community-centered voter engagement. Combining on-campus voter registration events—often co-facilitated by local election administrators who run mock elections for first-time voters—with Civic Engagement Fellows, a partnership with the Campus Vote Project, and the Great Lakes Bay Region Candidate Forums, Cardinals Votes is a signature initiative that brings hundreds of regional community members face-to-face with candidates in the area's most competitive races. The 2024 forum was televised by C-SPAN. According to the most recent NSLVE data available, 49% of SVSU students voted in the 2022 midterms, far exceeding the national average of 31% and representing a 13-point improvement over 2018.

A Nazareth University student reads aloud to elementary school children through the Partners for Learning program, which placed 57 paid student partners in Rochester-area schools and delivered more than 7,600 hours of engagement during the 2024-25 academic year.

Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) approaches the challenge differently—as Ohio's largest and oldest community college, with 41% of students self-identifying as first in their family to attend college, Tri-C recognizes that it is often training not just first-generation college students, but first-generation voters.

The Voting Experience at Tri-C, now in its eighth year, is the legacy project of the college's Democracy Fellows program and is built around a central premise that peer-to-peer voter education is the most effective. Eight pop-up voting events held across four campuses bring students through the full voting experience—including representatives from the Board of Elections who recreate

A young participant runs through a high-five line of Cleveland State University student-athlete volunteers during a community event hosted by the Student-Athlete Advisory Council, which completed more than 220 hours of community service and engagement during the 2025-26 academic year.

the experience of checking in at a polling station and casting a ballot. In 2025, the program facilitated more than 1,700 peer-to-peer voting conversations.

Beyond the in-person events, the Democracy Fellows produce a creative annual online video series—past editions have included a gospel—inspired voting anthem, a soap opera called The Votes of Our Lives, a film noir series, and a game show called America's Got Voters.

Binghamton University's Civil Dialogue Project, housed within the Center for Civic Engagement, approaches democratic participation from a different angle—one that asks what conditions are necessary for meaningful civic life to occur at all. The program's answer is civil discourse. Through the Constructive Dialogue Badge, incorporated into every first-year experience course, more than 1,000 students each year develop the skills to engage across differences through active listening, intellectual humility, asking curious rather than combative questions, and managing emotion in difficult conversations. Student Civil Dialogue Ambassadors facilitate dialogue events on topics from immigration to loneliness to vaccines, and a faculty fellows program supports instructors across disciplines in integrating civil discourse into their curricula. A fall 2025 pre- and post-survey found a 22-point increase in the percentage of students who strongly agreed they were comfortable having productive conversations about challenging topics—and 97% agreed the workshop was valuable. The State University of New York system has since created a new civic discourse general education requirement, set to roll out in fall 2026, with Binghamton's established work positioning it as a leader in that system-wide effort.

The University of New Hampshire shares a similar philosophy through the Civil Discourse Lab (CDL) for Collaborative Leadership and the Public Good and its signature initiative, CIRCLE (Conversations at the Intersection of Research and Community Listening Exchange). Launched in 2024, CIRCLE connects New Hampshire citizens directly with university research that affects their lives through structured public deliberative forums, each organized around the work of a CDL Engaged Research Fellow.

Healing Communities: Health Access, Clinical Training, and Hands-On Care

Among the most urgent expressions of institutional civic and community responsibility is the commitment to bring health care to those who need it most. A remarkable cluster of programs honored this year demonstrates how health sciences colleges—from pharmacy to physical therapy to veterinary medicine—are deploying their clinical expertise and student talent to close gaps in access, reduce health concerns, and train future practitioners in community-centered care.

Adler University in Chicago has embedded this philosophy into the very architecture of its clinical training model. Adler Community Health Services (ACHS), the university's clinical training center, delivers trauma-informed behavioral health services—spanning mental health and substance use prevention and intervention—in underserved, high-need communities across Chicago and Vancouver, B.C.

In Albany, New York, **Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (ACPHS)** operates The Collaboratory, a community health resource center partnering with Trinity Alliance for the Capital Region. Serving low-income adults in Albany's South End, West Hill, Arbor Hill, and North

Community members participate in adaptive sports at Quinnipiac University's Adaptive Sports and Recreation Expo, part of the Center for Interprofessional Healthcare Education's efforts to connect students across health disciplines with individuals with disabilities in the local community.

Teens participate in an icebreaker activity with an instructor through Adler University's Adler Community Health Services program, which provides trauma-informed behavioral health services to underserved communities across Chicago and Vancouver, B.C.

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For more information, visit: www.hccc.edu

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LIBRARY EXCELLENCE IN ACCESS AND DIVERSITY AWARD 2025

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY AWARD 2024

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proudly accepts the 2026 INSIGHT Into Academia Civic Engagement and Community Service Award for our innovative Hudson County Oral History Project.

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Towson University Civic Renewal Initiative fellows discuss community engagement strategies during a training session, part of a program that equips students with skills in dialogue, restorative practices, and civic organizing to facilitate campus-wide conversations and drive policy change.

Albany neighborhoods—communities with up to three times the poverty rates and disproportionately high rates of hypertension and type 2 diabetes compared to Albany County overall—the Collaboratory delivers an extraordinary breadth of services. These include a hypertension management program and CardioKidneyMetabolic syndrome screenings conducted at community events.

The Collaboratory's newest initiative, the Food Farmacy, pairs 50 food-insecure families experiencing chronic disease with five-day weekly meal packages and pre- and post-biometric monitoring for six months. More than 1,200 community members were served through the Collaboratory in the past year alone.

Cleveland State University's (CSU) College of Health brings multiple distinct programs to its surrounding community. The CSU Speech and Hearing Clinic—the only provider in Northeast Ohio offering the SPEAK OUT! program for people with Parkinson's Disease—delivered 1,601 therapy sessions and 1,772 off-site screenings in schools, community organizations, and health fairs during 2024-25, serving clients across articulation, cognitive-communication, language, and social communication needs.

Through an ongoing partnership with Special Olympics, College of Health students deliver health screenings, promote physical activity in inclusive and sensory-friendly settings, and attend regional and statewide events, from local health fairs to the Special Olympics games in Columbus.

At **Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences at Mary Baldwin University,** the Community Practicum series gives graduate-level physical therapy and occupational therapy students a hands-on civic engagement experience that is as much about community impact as professional development. Working directly with local clinics, schools, and nonprofits, student teams have designed adaptive equipment solutions for farmers and veteran farmers facing functional challenges; provided health education and ergonomic modifications for immigrant families to reduce injury risk and support return to work; led fundraising efforts for universal design home modifications enabling community members to age in place; and cultivated an on-campus garden that distributes fresh produce to peers and promotes food security.

University of South Florida (USF) College of Nursing took a different approach to community health access. They built a clinic on wheels. The Mo-Bull Nurse Medical Clinic, launched through a four-year Health Resources and Services Administration grant, is a mobile health unit equipped with two exam rooms and vaccine storage that brings screenings, vaccinations, and health education directly to underserved communities in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties. Partnering with the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Metropolitan Ministries, and the Gulf Coast Jewish Community Center, the clinic serves as both a community health resource and a clinical training site for undergraduate and graduate nursing students.

The civic mission of **University of Florida (UF) College of Veterinary Medicine** extends across species, borders, and disaster zones. From Pathways to Practice: A Model of Veterinary Civic Engagement encompasses a youth education pipeline that reaches more than 200 young people annually, from elementary through undergraduate levels, with hands-on veterinary and biomedical career programming; the Veterinary Community Outreach Program, which provides preventive care and spay/neuter services for pet owners who cannot afford general veterinary services; and international service-learning clinics in Honduras, where veterinary teams treated more than 300 animals. It also includes the UF Veterinary Emergency Treatment Services, a volunteer

University of Akron students pause on a nature trail during an [Un]class focused on connecting students to local and national park systems through recreational opportunities, one of more than 75 community-engaged [Un]classes offered since the program launched in 2016.

STAND OUT CITIZENS

Academics is just one facet of the Saginaw Valley State University experience. In addition to developing the skills that prepare them for success in the workforce, Cardinals learn how to be conscientious and engaged citizens of the world.

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disaster response unit staffed by faculty, students, and veterinarians, provided critical animal rescue and first responder training during both Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton.

Campus-wide philanthropy efforts, including a food drive that provided 6,625 meals and a holiday toy drive supporting 25 children, complete a portrait of an institution that understands civic engagement as genuinely all-encompassing.

Classrooms Without Walls: Service-Learning, Community Research, and the Engaged University

Some of the most enduring community service happens through sustained, semester-long partnerships between universities and the communities they call home. The following programs share a conviction that students learn best by doing, and that communities benefit tremendously when academic resources are put directly in their hands.

Rutgers University–New Brunswick's Advancing Community Development (ACD) program, funded by a gift from Johnson & Johnson (J&J), places 16 students each semester with nonprofit community partners in the city of New Brunswick to work on projects addressing health, housing security, tenant rights, food access, and more.

Students also receive mentorship from J&J professionals and present their work at end-of-semester events attended by community partners and corporate representatives.

A presentation on tenant rights developed by ACD students in partnership with Rutgers Law School and county housing experts has since been adopted by other Rutgers campuses and cities across New Jersey.

A project addressing the barriers that criminal records pose to young adults seeking education or employment has been integrated into Rutgers Law School's statewide Pro Bono Expungement program.

At **Michigan Technological University,** the College of Business's EmpowerUP Students program began with two undergraduate students' curiosity about economic mobility in Michigan's western Upper Peninsula. Their initial research project grew into a Team Dynamics & Decision-Making course.

Each semester, new teams produce financial literacy tools, food security access guides, K–12 enrichment programming, revitalized entrepreneurship networks, and educational media. An "Insurance Basics" microsite, developed with Copper Shores Community Health Foundation, translated complex financial topics into accessible, seventh-grade-level language for people seeking financial stability.

A food access project streamlined guides for the university's food pantry, reducing stigma and improving outreach. The program has attracted investment from the KEEN Foundation's Engineering Unleashed Program, which recognized EmpowerUP as a model for integrating civic engagement, entrepreneurial mindset, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Conceived in 2016, the **University of Akron's** [Un]class program, is an experimental, transdisciplinary course model in which students, faculty, administrators, and community partners co-design the class, jointly determine topics of study, and collaboratively generate solutions to local problems—with no predetermined syllabus or fixed outcome.

Lehigh University students take a break during a trail restoration project as part of the SERVE program, a student-led spring break service-immersion initiative that has completed more than 80 trips and drawn over 1,200 participants since its founding in 1995.

A University of Cincinnati tutor works one-on-one with a student through the Bearcat Buddies Tutoring Program, which totaled more than 13,800 tutoring hours across Cincinnati Public Schools during the 2024-25 academic year.

Elizabethtown College students volunteer at a food pantry during the 2025 Into the Streets day of service, which brought together 344 volunteers to contribute 1,205 service hours across 27 nonprofit partners in three counties.

More than 75 [Un]classes have been offered, with more than 800 students and nearly 80 unique instructors of record, including community partners, graduate students, and professional staff. Topics have ranged from uncovering the stories of neighborhoods displaced by Akron's innerbelt project, to teaching media literacy at the LeBron James Family Foundation's I Promise School, to evaluating the City of Akron's Violence Intervention and Prevention Plan, to connecting college students to local and national park systems.

Assessment data is strong, with 96% of students reporting growth in working with people different from themselves, 94% in creative thinking, and 92% in problem-solving. Student persistence the semester after taking an [Un]class averages 89%. One [Un]class led directly to a local foundation establishing an official LGBTQ archive.

University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst's Office of Civic Engagement and Service-Learning (CESL) operates as a hub connecting academic study with social change across 136 undergraduate service-learning courses in 41 departments. CESL's programs range from the IMPACT residential program for first-year students, which integrates community service with contemplative practice and social justice education, to the Community Scholars Program, a two-year engagement experience in which

students complete more than 240 hours of community work over four semesters on projects addressing racial equity, mutual aid, reproductive justice, and more.

The Boltwood Project, UMass's oldest continuously running community engagement program—active for more than 50 years—supports adults and children with intellectual or physical disabilities while building students' understanding of ableism.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Community-University Research Collaboration Initiative (CURCI) was established in 2022 to address a structural gap: communities wanted meaningful university partnerships, and faculty wanted engagement work that counted toward their professional evaluation—but no infrastructure existed to make those connections.

CURCI creates that infrastructure by funding community-initiated research proposals, matching organizations with faculty researchers, establishing accountability frameworks, and advocating for recognizing community engagement in faculty promotion.

Projects have addressed LGBTQIA+ mental health, renters' rights, food access, composting, violence prevention, immigrant storytelling, and voter turnout. CURCI's influence is also reshaping UT's institutional culture: seven courses across four academic units are now linked to CURCI partnerships, and community engagement standards are increasingly being incorporated into faculty and staff evaluation.

Mentorship in Action: Relationships Across Generations and Communities

Behind every great community service program is a relationship. The programs highlighted recognize that showing up consistently, time after time, is itself a form of service and that the bonds formed in the process can be as transformative as any single act of help.

Cuyahoga Community College's 2025 Democracy Fellows cohort poses with college leadership and the Tri-C mascot at the "America's Got Voters" event, part of the college's Voting Experience program, which facilitated more than 1,700 peer-to-peer voting conversations with students across four campuses in 2025.

William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas students volunteer with The Just One Project as part of the Christine Smith Community Service Program, which has surpassed 60,000 hours of legal community service in partnership with Nevada nonprofits and legal aid organizations since 1998.

University of Cincinnati's (UC) Bearcat Buddies Tutoring Program has built one of the most rigorously structured mentorship programs. Embedding trained UC students as tutors in K–12 classrooms and after-school settings throughout Cincinnati Public Schools, the program is co-designed with partner schools to complement existing instruction—not supplement it at the margins.

The result is the kind of sustained, trust-based relationship that educators consistently identify as essential to student motivation and growth. In the 2024–25 academic year, 1,238 tutors completed 13,818 tutoring hours across 1,631 tutoring sessions—representing year-over-year growth of 79% in hours and 82% in sessions.

Cleveland State University's Student-Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC) demonstrates that peer engagement can take many forms—and that student-athletes, often a visible but under-leveraged civic force on campus, can be powerful agents of community change.

In the current academic year, SAAC members have completed more than 230 hours of local volunteer programming, including bone marrow donor registration drives, a basketball mini-camp for adults with developmental disabilities, pen-pal relationships with students from a Cleveland-area elementary school, and an all-day Special Olympics field day hosting hundreds of athletes on campus.

SAAC has built an ongoing presence in advocacy work. Perhaps most distinctive is the Big Vike–Little Vike peer mentoring initiative, launched this year to support incoming international student-athletes: each new international student is paired with both a SAAC member

and a returning international student athlete, creating a layered support structure for those navigating a new campus, culture, and country.

Texas A&M University's BUILD organization occupies a category of its own: a student-led nonprofit that designs and constructs fully functioning medical clinics from shipping containers and deploys them to underserved communities around the world. Since its founding in 2013, BUILD has constructed 54 Texas Aggie Medical Clinics, providing access to healthcare for more than 200,000 individuals in 22 countries across five continents. Students run every aspect of the organization—from strategic planning and fabrication to fundraising and global logistics—in executive leadership roles that mirror the structure of a professional nonprofit. More than 16,000 Aggie students have developed professional skills through BUILD, graduating not only with engineering and project management experience, but with the practical knowledge of how to run an effective civic organization.

Art and Legal Education: Civic Engagement Culture and Justice

Not all civic engagement takes place in a clinic or a classroom. Some of the most enduring community transformations are catalyzed by local art that names what a neighborhood has lost, or legal assistance that restores what injustice has taken—and it is often universities, with their unique combination of creative talent, research expertise, and institutional power, that are best positioned to make that work possible.

School of the Art Institute of Chicago's (SAIC) Tower Artist-in-Residence (Tower AIR) program is Chicago's only residency for West Side artists and has, over 10 years, become one of the most sustained and community-responsive programs of its kind in higher education.

A Hudson County Community College faculty member and microhistory fellows pose at the college's Jersey City campus, part of the Hudson Oral History Project's initiative to document the stories of the diverse Journal Square community through student-led interview-based projects.

Housed in a historic community where the predominantly Black population has faced decades of disinvestment, the program welcomes four resident artists each year and provides them with space, materials, financial support, community contacts, and administrative infrastructure to realize projects defined by neighborhood needs.

Since 2016, 40 artists have participated, producing murals and lighting installations that brought beauty and safety to the neighborhood, community gardens that grew food and created gathering spaces, and healing circles for mothers who have lost children to violence.

Drexel University's Office of University and Community Partnerships (UCP) represents a comprehensive institutional model of civic engagement—one that coordinates academic integration, student and employee volunteerism, and anchors institutional investment into a single, coherent strategy.

The office comprises three centers—the Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships, the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement, and the ExCITe Center—along with core initiatives, including the Writers Room literary arts program, a K-12 engagement strategy, and the Beachell Family Learning Center, which provides digital literacy, entrepreneurship, financial wellness, and workforce development programming in West Philadelphia. One of only 16 private U.S. universities to hold both Carnegie R1 and Community Engagement classifications, Drexel has raised more than $130 million over the past 13 years to support community engagement—including $40 million to build a new K-8 campus housing two public schools adjacent to its campus.

Middle and high school students from Riverside County gather on the UC Riverside campus during the free STEAM Academy program, which served 90 middle schoolers through hands-on workshops in coding, engineering, and sustainability led by UCR students, faculty, and community partners.

Students and community members view a mural depicting Chicano and Indigenous heritage as part of the University of Denver's Documenting the Past, Fostering the Future program, a community-centered initiative that has collected 25 oral histories from regional Latino/a leaders in El Movimiento and reached more than 350 students across 20 courses.

At **William S. Boyd School of Law at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV),** civic engagement is woven into the requirements of the school's education itself. The Christine Smith Community Service Program requires all law students to complete a minimum of 20 hours of legal community service before graduation, in partnership with legal aid organizations and nonprofits across Nevada. Through collaborations with the Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada and Nevada Legal Services, students provide pro bono education on consumer law, family law, child welfare, and tax law, and assist community members in completing essential documents such as guardian nominations and powers of attorney.

Over the past year, students and faculty contributed more than 2,500 hours of service to more than 350 community members through more than 15 partner organizations.

University of North Texas's (UNT) Virtual Private Music Lesson Program demonstrates how civic engagement can cross disciplinary boundaries in unexpected ways. Now in its fourth year, the program connects approximately 800 Dallas Independent School District (ISD) students on 43 targeted campuses with 80 UNT College of Music students for free, one-on-one online music lessons—helping middle and high schoolers improve technique, music reading, and overall performance in ways that level the playing field with better-resourced suburban schools.

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Belonging and Well-Being Drive Student Persistence

By Misty Evans

Retention is often framed as an academic effort: improve grades, strengthen advising, refine curriculum. But decades of research suggest something deeper is at work. Students persist when they feel they belong, their basic needs are met, and their well-being is supported.

Scholar Terrell Strayhorn defines a student's sense of belonging as perceived social support on campus, connectedness, and the experience of mattering, or feeling cared about. In his foundational work, College Students' Sense of Belonging, he argues that belonging is a basic human need that directly influences motivation and achievement and has measurable links to academic engagement and persistence.

In a landmark randomized controlled trial published in Science, Gregory Walton and Geoffrey Cohen demonstrated that a brief social-belonging intervention designed to normalize first-year students' concerns about fitting in produced long-term academic benefits for Black students and narrowed achievement gaps over several years. The intervention required minimal time and financial investment, yet its effects endured.

For student affairs leaders operating within budget constraints and enrollment pressures, the implications are clear. Retention strategies that overlook belonging and well-being leave measurable gains unrealized.

Belonging does not happen by accident, it can be designed. The Walton and Cohen intervention worked because it was structured and scalable. In the study, students read peer narratives explaining that doubts about fitting in are common and temporary, then reflected on their own experiences in writing.

Institutions can adapt similar models into first-year seminars, orientation curricula, or residence life programming. Embedding belonging reflections into orientation, featuring authentic peer narratives from first-generation and marginalized students, and training residence life staff to reinforce normalization messaging during predictable stress points, such as midterms, are all low-cost approaches that rely more on coordination than on new funding streams.

Identity-affirming community structures further reinforce persistence. A 2024 study published in Scientific Reports examined an identity-based learning community in the biological sciences designed specifically for first-generation students.

Researchers found positive impacts on students' experiences and retention following participation. The model emphasized cohorting, peer interaction, and mentorship rather than expensive programmatic additions.

The University of Texas at Austin's University Leadership Network (ULN) similarly supports students from low socioeconomic backgrounds through a structured model that combines financial support with a tiered peer mentoring system. Evaluations describe ULN as a large-scale initiative that strengthens first-year persistence through consistent engagement and community-building.

Belonging alone, however, cannot offset financial instability. National data increasingly links insecurity in basic needs to enrollment disruption. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice's 2023–2024 Student Basic Needs Survey Report found that among students who had stopped out or were considering it, a substantial proportion identified financial pressures and unmet basic needs as contributing factors. Housing and food insecurity, transportation challenges, and unexpected expenses can quickly escalate into withdrawal decisions.

Emergency aid programs provide a practical intervention. Scholarship America reports high rates of term completion and next-term enrollment among students receiving emergency grants, underscoring the preventative value of timely financial support.

Institutions can implement centralized intake forms for basic needs, develop rapid-response microgrant processes with defined award caps, and conduct proactive outreach during predictable high-risk periods, such as registration or tuition deadlines. These measures typically require process redesign and cross-campus coordination rather than substantial new funding.

Technology can complement these relational efforts. Research from the National Bureau of Economic Research examining digital messaging interventions in higher education suggests that text-based communications can positively influence student behavior.

The evidence indicates that implementation context matters. Generic reminders are less effective than personalized outreach linked to real human follow-up. Institutions that use these at predictable friction points such as financial aid verification or registration holds, while ensuring immediate access to advising support, are more likely to see measurable effects.

The broader retention landscape reinforces the urgency of these strategies. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics show persistent gaps in first-year retention across demographic groups, with first-generation and low-income students facing disproportionate challenges. As demographic shifts intensify competition for enrollment, institutions must consider retention not simply as an academic metric but as a comprehensive institutional strategy.

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The Human Advantage

Why Interpersonal Skills Matter More Than Ever

By Misty Evans

As AI systems draft emails, analyze data, and even generate code, employers say the skills they struggle most to find are not technical, they are human.

National employer surveys consistently show strong confidence in higher education's ability to prepare students for work. Yet those same surveys reveal a persistent disconnect between what employers value and how prepared they believe graduates actually are, particularly in regard to communication and teamwork skills. At the center of that gap is a cluster of competencies often described as social-emotional learning (SEL) including empathy, self-regulation, perspective-taking, and the ability to collaborate across differences.

Once associated primarily with K-12 education, social-emotional learning is increasingly being embedded in college curricula. Institutions are adopting contemplative practices, structured dialogue programs, and compassion training as deliberate strategies to improve student success and workforce readiness in an economy increasingly shaped by automation.

A new national survey released by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 70% of employers report a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in U.S. higher education, and 85% say colleges are doing a good job preparing students for the workforce.

Nine in 10 employers say it is important for students to develop AI-related skills, and 81% express confidence that colleges are helping build competencies aligned with workplace AI applications.

That confidence, however, does not erase concerns about graduates' foundational skills.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), employers and students agree that communication and teamwork are among the most important career-readiness competencies. But NACE's 2024 Student Survey and Job Outlook 2025 data show a substantial gap in perceived capabilities. For areas such as critical thinking and communication, the difference between students who rate themselves proficient and employers who agree with them is roughly 25 percentage points.

In other words, students often believe they are ready to collaborate, persuade, and problem-solve. Employers are less convinced.

That gap has material consequences. In highly automated environments, entry-level roles increasingly require judgment, cross-functional coordination, and client interaction rather than routine task execution. When communication falters or team dynamics break down, productivity slows, conflict escalates, and retention suffers. For institutions under pressure to demonstrate return on investment, closing the interpersonal skills gap is not cosmetic. It is economic.

Research on SEL in higher education suggests these competencies can be intentionally cultivated.

A review published in Education Sciences describes SEL as an integrated model of human intelligence and learning that supports academic performance while fostering empathy, social awareness, and relationship skills. The review reports that the implementation of SEL-informed strategies is associated with improved communication skills, greater

understanding and acceptance of differences, and stronger social awareness.

The research emphasizes that emotion and cognition are not separate tracks. Supportive learning environments and emotional intelligence practices can enhance academic engagement and foster empathy by breaking down barriers. In practice, that means institutions must design classrooms where students practice attention, reflection, and dialogue alongside disciplinary content.

Across the country, universities are testing how to do that systematically.

At the University of Virginia, the Contemplative Sciences Center frames its mission as fusing contemplation, connection, and research to enhance human flourishing. Housed in the university's Contemplative Commons, the center integrates mind-body practices into academic and community life to support social, emotional, physical, and professional development.

One initiative, the Civic Cornerstone Fellowship, makes the workforce connection explicit. In today's polarized political climate, the fellowship brings undergraduates and graduate students together for structured conversations across diverse perspectives. The program combines dialogue skill-building, mindfulness practices to support self-regulation and authentic communication, and knowledge of the American political landscape.

The model treats calm attention and reflective listening not as wellness accessories but as prerequisites for effective civic and professional engagement. Students practice staying present in difficult conversations, managing emotional reactivity, and articulating positions with clarity and respect.

In workplaces where collaboration increasingly spans geography, culture, and ideology, those capabilities are not abstract virtues. They are operational necessities.

Dialogue-based programs similarly position communication across difference as a learnable skill set.

At the University of Denver, Student Affairs uses "Voices of Discovery" dialogues modeled on the University of Michigan's intergroup dialogue approach. According to program materials, a multi-year national research study has demonstrated the efficacy of intergroup dialogue for engaging with social issues and developing critical thinking skills. The initiative also explicitly connects the work to employer expectations that graduates be able to communicate and work in groups across differences.

Scholarship from the University of Michigan characterizes intergroup dialogue as a "critical-dialogic" teaching and learning approach structured to engage difference, inequality, and social identity. Rather than avoiding contentious topics, the pedagogy creates facilitated spaces where students examine assumptions, practice perspective-taking, and develop collaborative problem-solving skills.

Such programs move beyond generic group projects. They teach students how to recognize power dynamics, repair misunderstandings, and sustain engagement when disagreement surfaces. Those are precisely the moments when teamwork either matures or fractures.

Some institutions are drawing from contemplative traditions and behavioral science to strengthen empathy and prosocial behavior more directly.

At Emory University, the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics describes its work as educating "both heart and mind through a research-based approach." The center collaborates with undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs and investigates compassion science through seminars and academic partnerships.

At Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, training has been examined in peer-reviewed research. A randomized controlled trial published in the Journal of Happiness Studies evaluated the effects of a compassion-cultivation program, contributing to a growing body of literature examining whether compassion and empathy can be systematically developed.

Broader research supports the relevance of such interventions for university populations. A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that mindfulness-based training for university students improved distress, anxiety, depression, and well-being with small to moderate effect sizes shortly after completion.

While mental health is not synonymous with workforce readiness, emotional regulation and attentional control are foundational to effective communication and collaboration. Students who can manage stress and remain present during conflict are better positioned to contribute constructively in team settings.

These initiatives share a common premise. Interpersonal competence is not innate and fixed. It can be taught, practiced, and assessed.

For areas such as critical thinking and communication, the difference between students who rate themselves proficient and employers who agree with them is roughly 25 percentage points.

HIGHER ED HEROES

Higher education is powered by people.

Behind every thriving campus are faculty and staff members who mentor students, build community, create opportunity, and lead with purpose. Their impact often extends far beyond the classroom or office, shaping lives, strengthening institutions, and connecting campuses to the broader world.

Insight Into Academia is proud to introduce Higher Ed Heroes, a new initiative designed to spotlight individuals who make a meaningful difference at colleges and universities across the country.

This project celebrates the everyday people who strengthen higher education from within. Whether it's someone guiding students toward career success, building inclusive spaces, mentoring first-generation scholars, advancing innovation, or strengthening community partnerships, Higher Ed Heroes exists to recognize their above and beyond contributions.

Honorees are selected by Insight into Academia via nominations from students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members. We will be recognizing these heroes in every issue of Insight Into Academia.

Clifton Harcum, SUNY Geneseo

Clifton Harcum, Director of Multicultural Affairs at SUNY Geneseo, has been recognized as a Higher Ed Hero for his unwavering commitment to student well-being and belonging.

He is described as someone who truly cares about students and consistently shows up for them in meaningful ways. Harcum takes the time to listen, support, and create spaces where students feel seen, respected, and comfortable being themselves.

Beyond his role in multicultural affairs, he is known for encouraging students to care for their whole selves. As an advocate for wellness, he promotes the healing power of nature and reminds students that learning and growth extend beyond classrooms and offices. His presence helps foster connection, reflection, and community across campus.

Through his care, guidance, and steady leadership, Clifton Harcum continues to make a lasting impact on the Geneseo community, strengthening both individual students and the broader campus culture.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, PhD
Arizona State University

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, PhD, Vice President for Cultural Affairs and Executive Director of ASU Gammage at Arizona State University (ASU), is being recognized as a Higher Ed Hero for her visionary leadership in the arts and her lasting impact on campus and community life.

She has an extraordinary ability to expand access to the arts while strengthening connections between the university, the surrounding community, and audiences nationwide.

Over decades of leadership, she has shaped ASU Gammage into a nationally recognized cultural institution grounded in its mission of "Connecting Communities." Through Broadway tours, diverse performing arts programming, and innovative cultural initiatives, she has positioned the arts as a powerful platform for education, dialogue, and civic engagement.

Beyond programming, she oversees multiple venues and initiatives that create meaningful opportunities for students, faculty, and community members to engage with the arts. Her work has introduced thousands of young people to live performance and strengthened ASU's role as a cultural leader. Jennings-Roggensack exemplifies a Higher Ed Hero by using creativity to connect, educate, and empower across communities.

Pingsheng Tong, PhD
California State University, Sacramento

Pingsheng Tong, PhD, Associate Dean of Academic Programs in the College of Business at California State University, Sacramento, is a Higher Ed Hero for her steady, selfless leadership and transformative impact on her college community.

She has been described as the quiet backbone of the college's operations. In a role that carries enormous responsibility—from course scheduling to program management—Tong consistently leads with patience, humility, and thoughtful precision.

When unexpected staffing changes threatened to disrupt course scheduling, she stepped in, mastered the system herself, and not only averted a crisis, but improved efficiency across the college. Known affectionately by colleagues as "Saint Ping," she is often the person faculty turn to during moments of friction or uncertainty. Her ability to listen deeply, find common ground, and guide collaborative solutions has strengthened trust and unity within the college.

Through her calm leadership and long-term vision, Tong ensures that systems run smoothly while fostering a culture grounded in respect, stability, and care.

Submit a nomination for your Higher Ed Hero here:

AI at Work

A Practical Playbook for Faculty and Staff

By Misty Evans

AI is no longer a speculative technology hovering at the edges of higher education. It is embedded in productivity platforms, writing tools, research workflows, and student support systems. Faculty are experimenting with it to draft materials and refine feedback. Staff are using it to summarize policies and streamline communications. Meanwhile, institutional leaders are working to determine where experimentation ends and policy begins.

The central issue facing colleges and universities is not whether AI will be used. It already is. The more pressing question is whether institutions will shape its adoption deliberately, with governance and accountability at the forefront, or allow decentralized use to become de facto institutional practice.

Guidance from national and international organizations has consistently emphasized that AI in education must remain human-centered. The U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) Office of Educational Technology, in its report "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning," outlines the technology's potential to enhance instruction while cautioning institutions to address bias, data privacy, and transparency concerns. UNESCO's "Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research" similarly calls for ethical guardrails, capacity-building, and clear policy frameworks to ensure that AI strengthens rather than undermines educational missions.

For campus leaders, the implications are both operational and philosophical. AI should be treated not as a novelty tool, but as an institutional infrastructure that requires governance, oversight, and measurable standards.

Governance Before Deployment

Effective AI adoption begins with clarity around data and accountability. Under FERPA regulations, education records are broadly defined and protected. Faculty and staff must assume that student identifiable information cannot be entered into external AI systems unless those systems are institutionally approved and contractually protected. The regulatory framework does not distinguish between traditional data systems and emerging AI tools as both are subject to the same privacy obligations.

Similarly, federal enforcement agencies have warned that AI-enabled employment tools can create disability discrimination risks if not carefully designed and monitored. Any AI use in hiring, screening, or performance evaluation must be approached with documented safeguards.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework reinforces that AI oversight is not a one-time compliance exercise. Institutions must implement continuous monitoring, documentation, and evaluation processes to ensure that tools perform as intended and do not introduce unanticipated risks.

In practical terms, this means institutions should clearly define which AI tools are approved, what categories of data are prohibited from use, how outputs are verified, and who retains ultimate responsibility for decisions influenced by AI. Governance structures should be explicit and visible to faculty and staff rather than implied.

Faculty Applications: Productivity With Oversight

For faculty, the most sustainable use of AI tends to fall into course design, accessibility support, and structured feedback.

AI can assist in drafting learning objectives, generating case scenarios, suggesting quiz stems, and producing discussion prompts aligned to specific pedagogical frameworks. When used appropriately, such tools can reduce planning time while allowing instructors to refine and contextualize materials.

The DOE's report emphasizes that AI's value lies in augmenting educator capacity, not replacing professional judgment.

Accessibility and clarity also present opportunities for responsible use. AI can help translate complex instructions into plain language, create alternative explanations for challenging concepts, or generate structured study guides.

UNESCO's guidance emphasizes inclusivity and an educator's need to retain control over instructional content. When faculty carefully review and revise AI-generated drafts, these tools can expand access without compromising quality.

Assessment practices require particular attention. Generative AI has altered the landscape of academic integrity, prompting institutions to reconsider traditional assignment structures. EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing the strategic use of technology and data in higher education, has advised that rather than relying solely on detection technologies, campuses should redesign assessments to emphasize process, reflection, and authentic demonstration of learning.

Faculty may use AI to help draft rubrics or comment banks aligned to established criteria, but final grading decisions must remain human and documented.

Staff Applications: Operational Efficiency Without Compromise

Administrative offices can realize significant gains in communication and workflow efficiency when AI is implemented thoughtfully.

Units such as financial aid, advising, and the registrar's office frequently respond to recurring questions. AI tools can assist in drafting FAQ language, templated responses, and plain-language policy summaries, which staff review for accuracy and alignment with institutional policies. This approach can reduce response times and alleviate workload pressure.

AI can also be used to summarize lengthy policy drafts, extract action items from meeting notes, and distill complex reports into executive summaries. In institutions facing staffing constraints and increased reporting demands, summarization tools can free time for strategic planning and student engagement.

Process mapping is another

promising application. Departments can input anonymized workflow descriptions to identify redundancies or generate clearer standard operating procedures. As long as sensitive data are excluded, such use supports operational improvement with minimal compliance risk.

Student-facing chatbots represent a more advanced implementation area. Georgia State University's National Institute for Student Success recently received a DOE grant to study AI-enhanced classroom chatbots in foundational courses. Research-based pilots such as this underscore that deployment should be measured and outcome-focused rather than reactive. Any automated support system must include transparent escalation pathways to human staff.

Managing the Risk

AI-related risks on campus typically cluster in three areas: accuracy failures, bias, and data protection.

Generative systems can produce information that appears authoritative but is factually incorrect. NIST's AI Risk Management Framework highlights the necessity of verification and ongoing oversight to mitigate such risks. Institutions should incorporate fact-checking steps into any workflow that relies on AI outputs, particularly when those outputs influence policy language, public communications, or academic materials.

Bias concerns are equally significant. Federal agencies have warned that algorithmic tools can inadvertently discriminate against individuals with disabilities or other protected characteristics. Universities must evaluate AI-enabled employment or evaluation systems carefully and maintain documentation demonstrating equitable review processes.

Data protection remains foundational. Without enterprise agreements and explicit contractual safeguards, public AI tools may retain or log user inputs. Faculty and staff should assume that non-approved systems are inappropriate for sensitive institutional data.

A Structured Implementation Model

To ensure all areas of concern are addressed, campuses can organize AI adoption around five interrelated pillars: policy, procurement, training, workflow redesign, and monitoring.

Policy establishes acceptable use parameters and clarifies accountability. For example, The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors has stated that AI tools cannot be listed as authors because they cannot assume responsibility for content integrity.

The broader institutional lesson is that humans remain accountable for outputs, regardless of technological assistance.

Procurement ensures that tools are licensed, supported, and governed at the institutional level. The University of Oxford's decision to provide campuswide access to ChatGPT Edu reflects a centralized approach that pairs tool access with training and oversight.

Training builds prompt literacy and verification skills among faculty and staff. Rather than assuming intuitive use, institutions should provide structured guidance on responsible prompting, bias awareness, and data protection boundaries.

Workflow redesign acknowledges that AI changes how work is performed. EDUCAUSE has argued that institutions should adapt teaching and operational practices to the presence of generative AI rather than attempting to prohibit it entirely.

Monitoring and documentation create defensible records of AI use in high-stakes contexts. Simple AI-use logs documenting the tool used, the nature of the task, and the verification process can support institutional transparency and audit readiness.

Aligning AI With Institutional Mission

Ithaka S+R,'s, a research and strategy organization that helps higher education navigate economic, technological, and demographic change, the Making AI Generative for Higher Education project found that while experimentation is widespread, institutional support structures often lag behind. That gap can expose campuses to risk and inconsistency.

In an environment characterized by enrollment volatility, budget constraints, and public scrutiny, AI should be framed as operational infrastructure rather than a transformative spectacle. When governed appropriately, it can reduce administrative friction, clarify communication, and support instructional design. When deployed casually, it can introduce compliance vulnerabilities and erode trust.

Higher education's credibility rests on professional judgment, ethical responsibility, and public accountability. AI can draft, summarize, and suggest, but it cannot assume responsibility. Institutions that approach AI adoption with disciplined governance, clear boundaries, and continuous oversight will be better positioned to harness its benefits while safeguarding their mission.

The future of AI in higher education will not be determined by technological capability alone. It will be shaped by institutional leadership, policy clarity, and the enduring principle that human accountability remains central to academic work.

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From Early Alerts to Enrollment Strategy:
How Predictive Analytics Is Redefining Retention

By Misty Evans

Higher education leaders are facing converging pressures: enrollment volatility, demographic shifts, staffing shortages, and growing expectations for personalized student support. At the same time, institutions are being asked to operate more efficiently and with greater accountability. AI is increasingly positioned as a solution.

Across college campuses, AI is being deployed less as a workforce replacement tool and more as an institutional amplifier—strengthening forecasting, improving service delivery, and reducing administrative drag.

According to EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit focused on advancing the strategic use of technology and data to further the promise of higher education, their annual surveys of technology leaders show that institutions are prioritizing analytics, automation, and decision support tools that augment human expertise rather than substitute for it. The following 25 applications reflect where AI is already helping campuses operate more strategically.

Enrollment and Revenue Stability

1. **Enrollment forecasting.** AI-driven predictive models analyze historical yield, geography, financial aid sensitivity, and engagement data to improve admissions projections and reduce revenue uncertainty.
2. **Financial aid optimization.** Modeling tools allow institutions to simulate packaging strategies that balance access goals with new tuition revenue targets.
3. **Personalized recruitment communications.** Marketing systems tailor outreach to prospective students' academic interests and engagement behavior, thereby improving conversion rates.
4. **Alumni engagement analytics.** Predictive tools help advancement offices identify likely donors or volunteers.
5. **Labor market alignment.** AI-powered labor market analytics inform program development by identifying emerging workforce needs.

Student Retention and Success

6. **Early-alert systems.** Predictive analytics flag attendance patterns, Learning Management Systems (LMS) engagement drops, and grade trajectories that signal those at risk before traditional reporting mechanisms. Research from the Community College Research Center (CCRC) has found that early-warning systems are most effective when paired with proactive advising interventions.
7. **Advising preparation tools.** AI summarizes a student's academic record and engagement history, allowing advisors to focus on conversation and coaching rather than data retrieval.
8. **Transfer credit automation.** Automated transcript evaluation accelerates admissions decisions and reduces administrative backlog.
9. **Sentiment analysis of surveys.** Natural language processing (NLP) tools identify recurring concerns in course evaluations or campus climate surveys.
10. **Accessibility enhancements.** AI-generated captioning, transcription, and translation services expand access for students with disabilities and multilingual communities.
11. **Course completion monitoring.** Analytics detect patterns in course withdrawal (DFW) rates, supporting targeted academic interventions.
12. **Orientation personalization.** AI-driven systems tailor onboarding content to first-generation, transfer, or adult learners.

Academic and Operational Efficiency

13. **Course scheduling optimization.** Data-driven scheduling tools reduce classroom conflicts and better align supply with student demand.
14. **Curriculum mapping.** NLP analyzes syllabi across departments to identify gaps in learning outcomes or redundancies.
15. **Automated meeting transcription.** AI tools produce notes, summaries and action items, reducing administrative burden.
16. **Policy clarity analysis.** AI readability tools flag complex language in student-facing policies and suggest plain-language alternatives.
17. **Administrative workflow automation.** Routine form processing and data entry tasks are streamlined, reducing errors and freeing staff time.
18. **Library search enhancement.** AI-assisted search tools improve discovery across research databases.

Finance, Risk, and Governance

19. **Budget scenario modeling.** Institutions simulate enrollment shifts or funding changes to test fiscal resilience under different conditions.
20. **Procurement oversight.** Machine learning tools flag unusual spending patterns to strengthen fiscal controls.
21. **Grant opportunity matching.** AI systems match faculty research profiles with potential funding sources.
22. **Cybersecurity threat detection.** AI-assisted network monitoring identifies anomalous activity more rapidly than traditional rule-based systems.
23. **Peer benchmarking dashboards.** Analytics platforms enable real-time comparison of institutional performance metrics against sector benchmarks.

Facilities and Infrastructure

24. **Predictive maintenance.** Facilities teams use AI to anticipate equipment failures, reducing emergency repair costs.
25. **Energy optimization.** Smart building systems adjust heating, cooling, and lighting based on occupancy patterns, improving sustainability outcomes and costs.

Evidence of Impact

Institutions that combine predictive analytics with structured human outreach have reported measurable gains. Georgia State University's data-informed advising model, for example, has been associated with improved graduation rates and reduced achievement gaps.

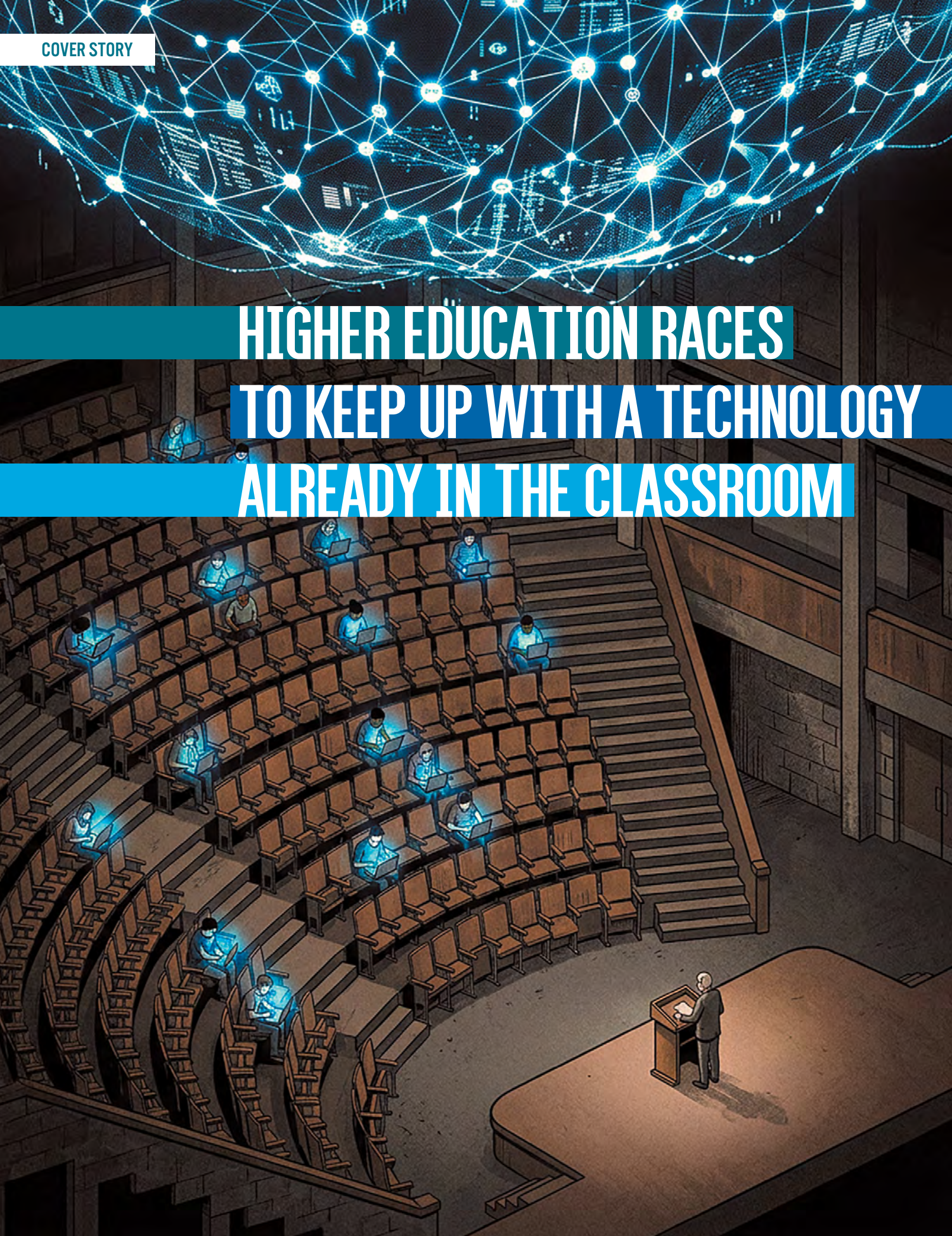
Research from the CCRC emphasizes that analytics are most effective when paired with coordinated advising systems rather than automated alerts alone.

EDUCAUSE reports that campus technology leaders view AI primarily as a decision-support tool. The emphasis, according to sector surveys, is on strengthening forecasting, accelerating service, and enhancing institutional intelligence, rather than eliminating roles.

Faculty, advisors, and administrators retain judgment, context, and empathy—the qualities central to higher education's mission.

In a period of fiscal constraint and enrollment uncertainty, the strategic question is not whether AI will replace human expertise. It is how effectively institutions can use it to amplify human capacity. Properly deployed, AI allows professionals to focus on the work that matters most: teaching, mentoring, and building community.

The opportunity is not a substitute. It's institutional leverage.



HIGHER EDUCATION RACES TO KEEP UP WITH A TECHNOLOGY ALREADY IN THE CLASSROOM

Walk into almost any college library today and you'll find students doing what students have always done. Research, writing, cramming before exams. What's changed is that millions of them now have a new kind of study partner: AI.

The numbers tell a story of near-universal adoption among students. Surveys conducted in 2024 and 2025 consistently find that the vast majority are using AI tools in their studies, with ChatGPT leading the pack by a wide margin.

Students are reaching for these tools to do everything from drafting essays and summarizing research papers, to brainstorming ideas and decoding complex concepts.

But heavy use doesn't equal confidence or competence. Many report feeling underprepared for an AI-enabled workplace, and one of their most consistent concerns is accuracy, specifically the risk of receiving incorrect or misleading information. The challenge isn't just that students are using tools they don't fully understand. It's that the institutions meant to guide them are struggling just as much.

A major new survey released in January 2026 by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center puts the state of faculty sentiment in sharp contrast. The survey of more than 1,000 U.S. faculty found that nearly half view the future impact of generative AI in their fields as more negative than positive, while only one in five see it as the other way. This is not a portrait of a profession eagerly embracing a new tool.

Elon University President Connie Book, PhD, whose institution has been among the more proactive in developing AI frameworks for students and faculty, offered a nuanced read of where things stand.

"Faculty express deep concerns about AI's negative impact on learning outcomes, along with longer-term effects of AI systems on young adults' attention spans and the prospect that these learners could develop an overreliance on AI tools," Book says.

"At the same time, faculty views are not uniformly pessimistic. Significant numbers acknowledge AI's potential to improve aspects of teaching and learning, including the customization of instruction, efficiency in course preparation, and the quality of assignments and research support," she said.

The challenge isn't just that students are using tools they don't fully understand. It's that the institutions meant to guide them are struggling just as much.

The numbers behind faculty skepticism are striking, nonetheless. Ninety percent of faculty in the survey said the use of generative AI will diminish students' critical thinking skills. Seventy-eight percent reported that cheating on their campus has increased since AI tools became widely available, and nearly 75% said they have personally dealt with academic integrity cases involving student use of AI. Those figures help explain why most faculty said they feel their schools are not prepared to use AI tools effectively.

Faculty adoption of AI in their own teaching remains limited and uneven. While a meaningful share have experimented with tools like ChatGPT, most use them minimally, and many have stayed away entirely. A quarter of faculty in the AAC&U survey said they do not use generative AI tools at all, and 33% said they choose not to use them for teaching. The range of opinion is vast, from outright hostility to cautious optimism, and the profession has yet to arrive at a consensus about what responsible use even looks like.

Those who have embraced the technology tend to describe its appeal in practical terms, citing time savings and reduced cognitive load for routine tasks. But comfort with AI as a personal productivity aid is a long way from knowing how to integrate it responsibly into a classroom.

Meanwhile, the AAC&U report found many are deeply uncertain about where the ethical lines are, even for their own use. When presented with scenarios about using it to grade essays, write portions of research articles, or respond to student emails, survey respondents were nearly evenly split on many of these questions. The ambiguity reflects a genuine lack of shared norms across the profession, a problem that institutional policies have largely failed to address.

"These are not peripheral anxieties; they go to the heart of what higher education exists to cultivate—habits of mind such as critical analysis, reflection, persistence, and judgment," says AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella.

"Faculty skepticism reflects a principled concern for student learning and for the public purposes of higher education. It also reflects the reality that institutions have often adopted new technologies without sufficient guidance, shared norms, or investment in professional development. GenAI raises crucial questions about assessment and authorship, equity, accessibility, data privacy, and the future of expertise itself. Faculty are right to insist that these questions be addressed deliberately rather than reactively," she said.

The AAC&U data also brings to the surface a troubling gap between the scale of AI's arrival on campuses and the readiness of graduates to navigate it responsibly. More than 70% of faculty surveyed said they believe last spring's graduates were not prepared in their understanding of the ethical issues raised by generative AI systems, and nearly as many said those graduates were not prepared to use AI in the workplace.

The American Association of University Professors' (AAUP) national survey of its members, released in 2025, adds a governance dimension to this picture. It found that nearly three-quarters of respondents said AI decision-making at their institution is overwhelmingly led by administrators, with little meaningful input from faculty, staff, or students.

Faculty are asked to navigate a technological transformation that is largely being handed down to them rather than developed with them. The report argues that institutions need meaningful shared governance mechanisms around technology, something most campuses currently lack.

"Faculty skepticism reflects a principled concern for student learning and for the public purposes of higher education. It also reflects the reality that institutions have often adopted new technologies without sufficient guidance."

AAC&U President Lynn Pasquerella

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There are also equity dimensions that tend to get lost in the broader conversation about chatbots and cheating. Research has found that first-generation college students are less likely to feel confident about appropriate uses of AI compared to their peers.

The AAC&U survey showed that more than 80% of faculty believe generative AI will widen digital inequities. As AI becomes an increasingly expected competency in professional settings, that gap carries real consequences for students who are already navigating higher education with fewer resources.

A few institutions are leading the way. The University of California San Diego rolled out TritonGPT, an AI support system for its 37,000 employees, through a process that included town halls, pilot programs, and ongoing feedback mechanisms.

Arizona State University established a dedicated team to evaluate AI capabilities and facilitate training across the institution. These are not magic solutions, but they represent something that most campuses still lack—a strategy.

The AAC&U survey asked faculty an open-ended question about which human skills colleges should teach in an AI-saturated world. The most dominant response by far was that critical thinking becomes more important, not less, as AI becomes more pervasive.

Respondents argued that without skills like skepticism, verification, reasoning, and discernment, AI accelerates misinformation, intellectual passivity, and what the report describes as epistemic collapse.

That framing points to something the data across all of these surveys suggests but rarely states directly. The arrival of AI in higher education is not primarily a technology problem. It is a question about what education is for, and whether institutions are willing to defend that answer with the same urgency the technology demands.

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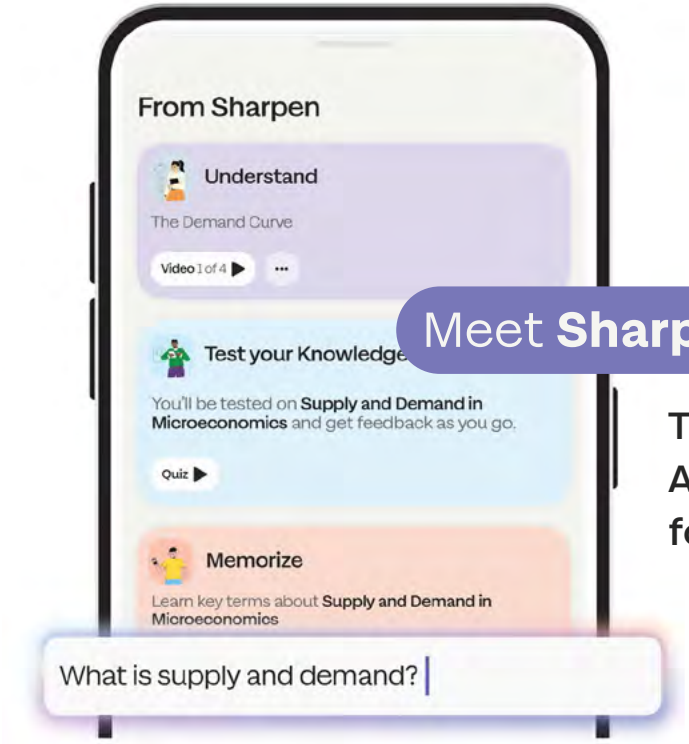

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AI Is a Stress Test for the Modern University

Notes from a dean leading AI transformation at Sacramento State, with a French passport, a Gen-X mixtape, and zero patience for AI theater

By Jean-François Coget, PhD

For most of the day I'm a normal dean: triaging budgets, accreditation timelines, and the infinite physics of committee calendars. I'm also the person on campus who gets the forwarded emails. The faculty member warning that AI is "cheating on demand" and demanding that the administration "do something about it." The admissions staff begging for an AI solution because student questions arrive faster than they can answer them. The well-meaning administrator who wants a "splashy" AI announcement by Friday. Three messages. Three directions. One institution.

Universities aren't fragile because they're old. They're fragile because they run on norms: trust between faculty and students; trust that grades reflect learning; trust that decisions are explainable; trust that scholarship is authentic. AI presses on those norms like a thumb on bruises.

I'm 50, French-American, trained at HEC Paris and UCLA, and I once served as a Navy officer at the French embassy in Portugal. So I'm not shocked by bureaucracy. I am shocked by how quickly a new tool can turn "trust" from background music into the whole plot.

In my experience at Sacramento State, three areas buckle first: assessment and academic integrity, administrative approval processes, and governance/turf wars.

Where AI Breaks Universities First: Assessment and Academic Integrity

AI didn't create cheating. It industrialized it. The old academic integrity regime assumed a detectable boundary between a student's work and someone else's. Large language models blur that boundary. A student can brainstorm, paraphrase, translate, rewrite, and polish an AI-produced draft in ways that are hard to classify and even harder to prove.

The reflex response has been to reach for AI detection tools. The problem is that detectors are unreliable in exactly the situations where fairness matters most, especially with mixed human and AI writing. If we try to "police our way back" to 2019, we'll spend years burning trust in hearings over a probability score, and we'll still lose.

The alternative is harder up front but healthier long term. We need to redesign assessment so learning becomes visible again. Where stakes are high, use more in-class writing, oral checks, and authentic demonstrations of skill. Use iterative assignments that require drafts, reflection, and "show your work" traces. Use projects tied to local data, lived experiences, or unique constraints that make generic AI output look like it came from nowhere.

This is also where the AI is the same everywhere story breaks down. Nursing, creative writing, and accounting do not face the same educational problems. In nursing programs, a hallucinated answer about medication dosing is not an interesting mistake. It forces hard questions about simulation design, supervision, and how students demonstrate safe clinical reasoning before they ever touch a patient.

In creative writing, voice is the point. The challenge is not whether AI can produce a competent short story, but how a student develops a distinct voice when a machine can generate variations on demand.

In accounting education, AI can generate a polished set of financial statements from a messy dataset. But the real learning objective is whether a student understands the assumptions behind revenue recognition, can detect anomalies, and can defend their reasoning when facts change. Producing a clean answer is not the same as demonstrating judgment. Each discipline must rethink integration based on what it is actually trying to form in students.

And yes, assessment redesign takes resources. Real resources. It requires disciplinary expertise and time: course releases, summer stipends, and political capital to protect that time from being eaten by the next urgent thing. Buying that time is not nothing. When leaders say redesign but don't buy time for it, we are asking faculty to do surgery between meetings. It's not fair, and it won't scale.

Student Services and Administrative Operations

On the administrative side, AI has real promise and real risk. If your campus handles tens of thousands of repetitive questions each semester (such as "What are the deadlines?", "How do I change majors?"), AI can be a relief valve. But it can also become a confident liar at scale if it isn't grounded in accurate information and wrapped with a clear handoff to humans.

At Sacramento State, one of our earliest low-risk proposals, a narrow admissions bot focused on routine questions, took far longer to clear than anyone expected. That delay wasn't

about one chatbot. It was what happens when an institution doesn't have a tiered process for approving AI pilots. Every idea gets treated like a data breach, a legal threat, and a reputational event, all at once.

Security teams are paid to imagine the worst day. Innovators are rewarded, if they are rewarded at all for imagining the best day. Put those groups together without decision rights and you get stalemate rather than strategy.

This is why many universities are providing supported, institutionally governed AI platforms. The logic is simple. If you don't provide a supported option, people will use unsupported ones. Shadow AI isn't a moral failing. It's what happens when demand outruns governance.

Governance, Turf, and AI Theater

Generative AI is an accelerant on campus politics. Leaders want momentum. Faculty want academic freedom and due process. IT wants security and standardization. Students want clarity, fairness, and a job when they graduate. When those interests aren't aligned, AI becomes symbolic: an announcement, a committee, a slogan, a strategic priority with no staff. That's called AI theater.

I've watched conversations get hijacked by questions that sound academic but are really about power such as who "owns" AI? Does it belong to computer science? To business? To everyone? To no one?

In a shared governance environment, that question can swallow a year of meetings and produce exactly zero improvement in student learning or staff workload. A real coup de théâtre but with no audience benefit.

One more truth. The best AI pedagogy right now is often invisible. It sits in individual classrooms, while the colleague next door reinvents the wheel. That isolation is a governance problem. A simple informal exchange mechanism would help.

Organize monthly "teaching kitchen" sessions where faculty share one assignment redesign that worked and one that flopped, plus a lightweight repository of prompts and rubrics. Nothing fancy, just making the invisible visible.

Layered on top is the program design argument. Do we create a standalone applied AI degree, or do we treat AI as a skill set to be infused across majors? I hear the same analogy again and again. "Remember when e-commerce was a degree?"

The point isn't that AI is a fad. It's that rigid program labels can age quickly, while flexible pathways (concentrations, minors, certificates, practica) can evolve with the technology and the labor market.

Students also need to be treated as agents here, not just recipients. They are already using these tools in uneven, sometimes surprising ways. Bringing students into policy development does two useful things: it forces realism, and it builds legitimacy. If we want norms that hold, students should help write them.

A Sacramento State Lesson: Begin With the Student, Not the Tool

Sacramento State has a special advantage and a special temptation. We sit in the capital city of California, with access to public sector problems that matter. We also have a special talent for talking ourselves into big innovation narratives without building anything that survives procurement, privacy review, or leadership turnover.

Recently, I had lunch with a civic tech operator who helped modernize the California DMV during the pandemic. He said something that should be printed on the wall of every campus AI committee: data is infrastructure, but people are the point.

His approach wasn't "we have this technological tool, let's use it." It was to define the citizen's experience, collapse redundant processes, then build the architecture around the human being at the center with the help of technology.

That's also the correct instinct for universities. Most of our debates begin with tools ("Should we allow ChatGPT?") or ownership ("Which college hosts the program?"). A better starting point is seeing the need. Where are students stuck? Where are faculty overloaded? Where is staff work looping pointlessly? Then pick the smallest intervention that reduces friction without creating new harm.

If you want to kill AI theater, ask one unglamorous question: what will be measurably better, for whom, and how will we know?

The Darker Side We Need to Name

The biggest danger of generative AI isn't robot rebellion. It's surveillance creep. AI makes it cheap to monitor work, communication, and performance at granular levels. If universities import corporate surveillance logic, tickets closed per hour, productivity dashboards, and constant activity logging, we will corrode the autonomy and trust that make academic work possible.

Automation of judgment is the second danger. Students are using AI to write. Some educators are using AI to grade. AI can help generate rubrics or draft feedback which is fine. What is dangerous is outsourcing the evaluative judgment itself. When both sides outsource judgment to machines, the university becomes a hall of mirrors.

Privacy and data leakage is the third danger. Student work is sensitive, and so are advising notes, disability accommodations, and the little bits of personal story students share when they trust us. If we push people toward consumer tools with vague terms, we increase the odds that private academic life becomes training data, breach data, or accidental public data.

Then there are legitimacy shocks. One AI mistake in financial aid guidance or graduation advising can erase the goodwill generated by a dozen quiet successes. Higher education is already in a legitimacy fight. We should not set ourselves up for additional headlines.

What We Should Do Next, Without Pretending It's Easy

At many public universities—including mine—the AI "priority" has been assigned the way universities sometimes assign priorities: with sincere intent, a steering committee, and approximately zero new staff or budget. That reality doesn't excuse inaction, but it does force

discipline. We have to choose pilots that are small enough to govern, useful enough to earn trust, and visible enough to justify the next resource ask.

First, start with a risk-tier framework with named decision makers. Low-risk uses (e.g. drafting internal documents, summarizing public policies, tutoring that doesn't make decisions) should move quickly. Medium-risk uses (e.g. student-facing guidance with disclosures and human escalation) should have a clear review path. High-risk uses (e.g. anything affecting student standing, employment, or sensitive data) should be slow and strict. If everything requires the same gauntlet, nothing moves and people route around the system.

Second, provide supported tools and training, or accept you will get shadow AI. Equity matters here. When only the students with money can access high-quality tools safely, the institution has quietly built a new digital inequality.

Third, treat assessment redesign as core academic work, and fund it like you mean it. Buy time. Build the exchange mechanisms so faculty can learn from each other. Otherwise, we will keep saying "redesign" while rewarding everyone for avoiding the hard parts.

Fourth, build a portfolio of student pathways rather than one politically volatile flagship degree. AI is vertical (specialists who understand the technology) and horizontal (fluency in every discipline). Both are true.

Finally, be honest about place. Sacramento is a government town. Many of our graduates work in public agencies or in companies that serve them. A practical, mission-aligned direction for a capital region university is applied AI for public service: training, practica, and carefully scoped projects that help agencies modernize without breaking trust.

Universities have always been slow for a reason. We exist to preserve knowledge, not chase hype. But slowness becomes a vice when the world changes underneath you. AI is becoming infrastructure in the way the internet became infrastructure. You don't get to opt out. You get to choose whether the change happens with you steering it or with you clinging to the bumper.

Some days, steering feels like trying to turn a cargo ship with a canoe paddle. I'm exaggerating. A little. But drift is worse. Drift is how you wake up one morning and realize students stopped believing your signals, staff stopped trusting your processes, and faculty stopped thinking the institution can tell the truth about change.

The job now is simple to say and hard to do. Protect trust, preserve learning, modernize operations, and do it without turning the university into a surveillance machine. Bon courage.

Jean-François Coget, PhD, is Dean of the College of Business at Sacramento State University and a member of the Insight Into Academia Editorial Board.

RIT and AI

We're Future Focused, Always Looking Ahead

"Institutionally, my personal goal is to help position RIT as a national leader in AI in higher education."

Those words are from **Christopher Collison**. He knows a thing or two about Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and higher education. He is the director of RIT's Artificial Intelligence Hub. The mission? To develop solutions for teaching and learning and promote AI focused innovations for use campus wide.

As a leading technology university with world class experts, Collison says RIT is ahead of the curve when it comes to AI and higher education.

" We were early in recognizing AI's importance, and we have extraordinary talent across disciplines, among faculty, staff and students. If we align our efforts strategically, we have the opportunity not just to participate in the AI transformation, but to shape it."

Much of that "shaping" happens within the AI Hub, Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), and Wallace Library with a focus on providing meaningful exposure to explore AI tools and critical evaluation skills.

Jenna Sadue leads a team doing just that. She is the assistant director of Learning Design and Technology in the CTL and an educational technology leader in higher ed. She works with instructional technologists and designers who seek out, survey and listen to RIT faculty to identify teaching and learning needs. They use that feedback to provide support and problem-solve.

" The CTL helps faculty through the development and facilitation of general and customized workshops, focused faculty programming, management of educational technology platforms, and through individualized consultations. Our goal is to provide a neutral space for faculty to explore AI in teaching."

In addition, RIT also created the AI Foundry, an innovation engine where RIT builds its own tools for use with AI. To help stay ahead of the AI curve, Collison points out the need for higher education institutions to be self-sufficient.

"While we partner with external platforms, we are also developing internal tools like TutorBot and other tools built at the AI Foundry. That approach builds institutional resilience, leverages our student talent, and avoids over-dependence on commercial tools for which current low prices will surely surge once users are hooked!"

Artificial Intelligence is here to stay. Collison says, "Our responsibility in higher education is to prepare students not just to use AI, but to understand it, question it, and apply it in ways that benefit society."

Sadue adds, " AI is impacting all industries; it is vital that faculty are preparing students to enter their respective fields with solid discipline-area competencies and the ability to articulate the value they add to any work completed with AI."

To learn more about RIT's AI HUB and the Center for Teaching and Learning, visit www.rit.edu/ai and www.rit.edu/teaching

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How AI Is Reshaping College Recruitment

By Erik Cliburn

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how prospective students search for colleges—and how institutions must respond. New data from EducationDynamics and EAB suggest that AI-driven tools, zero-click search behavior, and compressed decision timelines are altering the enrollment landscape in ways that leave little room for delay or incremental change.

EducationDynamics' 2026 "Marketing and Enrollment Management Benchmarks" report argues that higher education recruitment has reached a "point of no return." It found that 78% of education-related Google searches now surface AI Overviews—AI-generated summaries that often answer questions before users click through to an institution's website. At the same time, nearly 45% of Google searches end without a click, signaling a decisive shift from traffic-based strategies to visibility within AI-generated responses.

The report frames this moment as structural rather than cyclical. "The greatest threat to enrollment growth isn't the demographic cliff; it's cultural paralysis. We can't build a future-ready institution with a wait-and-see-mindset," said Brent Ramdin, CEO of EducationDynamics. His comments reflect a broader warning that institutions relying on legacy recruitment tactics risk losing ground as students increasingly conduct much of their research independently.

One of the most consequential changes is the rise of the so-called "stealth applicant." These students do not submit inquiry forms, attend campus tours, or engage with admissions counselors before applying. Instead, they rely on AI tools, search engines, and third-party platforms to compare programs, evaluate outcomes, and narrow options on their own. EducationDynamics reports that stealth applicants now account for 9.7% of total applications in 2025, up from just 1% in 2020.

Enrollment timelines are also accelerating. The report notes that 55% of learners move from consideration to inquiry in under three weeks, and 72% enroll at the first institution that admits them. In this compressed environment, delays in follow-up or unclear digital information can directly affect yield.

Greg Clayton, president of enrollment management services at EducationDynamics, emphasized the disparity he sees among some institutional leaders. "We see a dangerous disconnect within higher education leadership. While institutions view AI through the lens of cost savings, the modern learner is already living in an AI-native world," he said.

The shift toward AI-mediated research is forcing colleges to reconsider what visibility means. Traditional search engine optimization aimed at driving clicks may no longer be sufficient. The benchmarks introduce concepts such as Generative Engine Optimization and Answer Engine Optimization, strategies

designed to ensure that institutional content is structured so it can be cited accurately in AI-generated responses. They also propose AI density as a new performance metric, measuring how often an institution appears as a cited source within AI ecosystems.

At the same time, student trust in AI remains uneven. Findings from "EAB's 2025 Student Communication Preferences Survey" indicate that 26% of students have used an AI-based chatbot, such as ChatGPT or a chatbot on a college's website, during their search process.

While that figure represents a substantial minority, AI chatbots ranked lowest among the information sources surveyed in terms of trust. Only 11% of students said they read AI-generated results when conducting online research about colleges, with most preferring to click through to a specific institution's website or another known platform.

Digital engagement remains high overall. Eighty-eight percent of students report checking email at least daily, and 85% monitor social media at least daily.

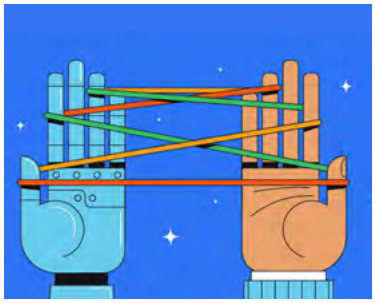
EAB also found that 59% of college-bound high school seniors are exploring potential colleges on Appily.com. Notably, the organization observed a 377% increase in visitors to Appily.com from large language models such as ChatGPT between January and March 2025 compared to the same period the previous year. Although the absolute numbers remain relatively small, the growth trajectory suggests that AI tools are increasingly acting as gateways to more traditional, trusted destinations.

For enrollment leaders, the implications are operational as well as strategic. EducationDynamics warns against treating AI as a standalone add-on, such as a single chatbot layered onto an otherwise unchanged process.

Instead, it urges institutions to integrate AI into core marketing, attribution and enrollment workflows, using it to identify high-intent students earlier and reduce friction across the funnel.

The broader message is that inquiry volume alone no longer signals future success. In a market where students can compare programs, confirm requirements and evaluate return on investment through AI-enhanced searches, institutions must prioritize clarity, speed, and credibility. Brand authority—defined by accurate data, transparent outcomes, and consistent messaging—becomes essential, not just for ranking in search results, but for being cited as a trusted answer.

As AI continues to mediate discovery and decision-making, higher education faces a dual challenge: maintaining trust while adapting to tools that reshape how that trust is earned. Institutions that align marketing, technology, and enrollment operations around these new behaviors may be better positioned to compete in an increasingly AI-driven marketplace.



Hands-On AI Training Gains Ground

By Erik Cliburn

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to influence how institutions teach, operate, and prepare students for work, colleges are expanding practical training that moves beyond abstract discussions of this emerging technology. Across campuses, workshops and redesigned courses are emphasizing hands-on experience, responsible use, and alignment with workforce expectations.

At Ohio University, Regional Higher Education (RHE) will host a series of in-person AI workshops this spring aimed at equipping both campus and community participants with immediately applicable skills.

Supported by a Talent Ready Grant, the three-hour sessions are open to faculty, staff, students, and community members, including local businesses and nonprofit organizations.

The workshops combine guided instruction with structured time for experimentation. Topics include accessible AI platforms, grant-writing support, and strategies for using AI in everyday tasks and process improvement.

"RHE exists to expand access to learning and opportunity, and that includes preparing our communities for the tools shaping today's workplaces," said Lewatis McNeal, PhD, vice provost for RHE and partnerships at Ohio University. "These workshops reflect Ohio's commitment to working alongside partners across the region, helping people build skills that support economic growth and community vitality."

Tricia Denny, coordinator of RHE workforce initiatives and support, emphasized the practical orientation of the sessions. "Our goal is to offer training that is useful on day one," Denny said. "Whether someone is strengthening a grant proposal, managing communications, or looking for ways to improve operations, these sessions provide practical strategies and a clearer understanding of how to use AI responsibly and effectively."

Facilitators address ethical, legal, copyright, and privacy concerns that vary by profession, underscoring a broader institutional effort to embed responsible AI use into community-facing programming.

A similar emphasis on applied learning appears at Purdue University, where monthly AI Bytes sessions provide one-hour, hands-on workshops for instructors. Designed to help faculty integrate generative AI tools into their courses, the sessions focus heavily on time-saving applications and accessibility compliance.

The goal is to equip instructors with practical strategies they can deploy immediately in course design, research preparation, and student engagement.

While Ohio University and Purdue concentrate on professional development and community engagement, Howard University has embedded applied AI directly into its academic curriculum. In collaboration with CodePath and the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, Howard redesigned its longstanding Intro to Artificial Intelligence course to align more closely with industry expectations.

"Howard has a long history of preparing students to not just succeed in today's jobs, but to become leaders in the economy of tomorrow," said Kimberly L. Jones, PhD, dean of the College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University. "Building on many years of introducing students to traditional AI concepts, this course has been reimagined to reflect AI's ongoing evolution and respond to what our students are asking for, and what employers now expect. By embedding applied AI directly into the curriculum, students who have successfully completed the class have both the foundational knowledge and the practical experience to lead in an AI-driven world of work."

The course, collaboratively taught by Howard faculty and an instructor from CodePath's industry-connected network, emphasizes AI-assisted software development, agentic workflows, and portfolio-ready projects. According to CodePath, employer signals of readiness increasingly include internships, technical interview performance, and demonstrable project experience.

Taken together, these initiatives reflect a broader shift in higher education. Rather than treating AI as a speculative trend, institutions are investing in structured, accessible, and experience-based learning that addresses classroom practice, operational efficiency, and workforce preparation.

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Why Business Schools Need a New Playbook for AI Adoption

Kotter's Model Was Built for a Different Era — Here's What the AI Age Demands Instead

By Anca Cristina Micu, PhD

Recently, I was meeting with a member of our Charles F. Dolan School of Business Advisory Board—a senior executive at a large financial services firm—when the topic turned to AI. I asked how his organization was approaching adoption. He paused, then said something that stayed with me: "We stopped trying to train everyone and started looking for who was already doing interesting things. We built a system to identify the experimenters—people using AI on their own, often without permission—and made them the center of our strategy instead of the recipients of it."

It was a simple reframe, but it cut to the heart of something I had been struggling to articulate. His organization wasn't waiting for a top-down mandate. It was letting curiosity lead, then building institutional infrastructure around the people who were already curious.

That conversation sent me back to a comparison I had been developing between John Kotter's classical 8-Step Change Model and what I'm calling an AI Adoption Change model. The contrast, once you see it, is hard to unsee.

Kotter's framework is to create urgency, form a guiding coalition, develop and communicate a vision, empower others, generate short-term wins, consolidate gains, and anchor change in culture. It is elegant, sequential, top-down by design, and assumes change agents are identified in advance and guided from above.

The AI adoption model works differently.

It begins not with manufactured urgency but with organic exploration of potential. Champions emerge not because they're appointed, but because they're self-motivated. They experiment freely, fail openly, and lead from the ground up. The key difference: Kotter's agents are preselected and guided; AI adoption agents are self-driven and unconstrained.

This is not a minor tactical distinction. Business schools that miss it will find their AI initiatives stuck in policy documents and pilot programs that never scale.

The Implementation Gap

A 2025 Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) survey of 236 deans and 429 faculty found that while more than a third of member schools have allocated dedicated AI funding, only 13% mandate AI training for students, 12% for faculty, and 9% for administrators.

A February 2026 AACSB report noted that many schools initially responded to generative AI by issuing policies, updating misconduct codes, and deploying detection software—a posture of control rather than cultivation. The AACSB's own language is telling: deans' enthusiasm "has not yet been fully embraced by faculty to the same extent." That gap is precisely what Kotter's model, faithfully applied, tends to produce in the case of AI adoption.

The schools making the most meaningful progress share a different starting point: explore potential before you prescribe solutions. They create psychological safety for experimentation, elevate champions who are already curious, and build communities where both successes and failures are shared openly.

What Getting It Right Looks Like

The University of Colorado's Leeds School of Business reached a meaningful milestone by fall 2025: AI integrated across 100% of its core 14 business courses and nearly 50 instructors. That outcome wasn't the result of a mandate—it was a faculty-champion model that began with a small group of early experimenters and expanded outward.

By March 2025, Leeds was sharing its framework through AACSB and inviting peer institutions to co-develop pilot projects, embodying step six of the AI adoption model: celebrating quick iterations by sharing successes and failures openly.

Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business

formalized its experimentation first philosophy in an October 2025 California Management Review paper. Its AI Strategic Hub (DASH) frames the classroom as an innovation lab, with faculty running A/B comparisons between AI-assisted and traditional approaches before any institution-wide rollout.

The paper's central argument mirrors the AI adoption model precisely by requiring enabling testing before scaling, co-creating tools alongside end-users rather than delivering solutions from above. In February 2026, the school announced a STEM-designated AI MBA to be launched in September 2026.

The University of Washington's Foster School of Business took a structural step reflecting step five—enabling experimentation by providing tools and data. Beginning in fall 2025, every incoming student must complete a mandatory AI bootcamp covering six learning objectives including core AI literacy, ethical assessment, and cultivating a lifelong AI learning mindset. Access is universal; the goal is capability, not compliance.

Globally, two new 2025 partnerships signal where the most forward-thinking schools are heading. Frankfurt School of Finance & Management integrated ChatGPT Edu institution-wide through an OpenAI partnership. NEOMA Business School in France gave every new student a license for Mistral AI's Le Chat LLM—making experimentation a default, not a privilege. Both remove friction from exploration, rather than gatekeeping access behind approvals.

The Wharton School of Business Human-AI Research center reinforced the stakes in its October 2025 annual report. Chief AI Officer roles now exist in 61% of large organizations, and "people set the pace" of adoption. The implication is direct—organizational readiness, not technology, is now the binding constraint. The most urgent investment for business schools is not in tools, but in the human infrastructure that determines whether tools get used well.

The most urgent investment for business schools is not in tools, but in the human infrastructure that determines whether tools get used well.

Fairfield University Charles F. Dolan School of Business: Values-Driven AI Adoption

Among smaller business schools, the Charles F. Dolan School of Business at Fairfield University stands out—and it is no coincidence that its approach carries a distinctly communal character.

Fairfield is a Jesuit university, and the Ignatian tradition is oriented toward discernment, service, and formation of the whole person. The Jesuit concepts of cura personalis—care for the whole person—and magis—the pursuit of the greater good—are not decorative values at Fairfield.

They have shaped how Dolan has approached AI, not merely whether to adopt it. Where other institutions framed AI adoption as an efficiency play, Dolan's animating question has been more Jesuit in character: how do we use this technology in service of others, and how do we build a community capable of asking that question together?

The journey began with organic momentum, not a mandate. Faculty in the MS in Business Analytics program had been weaving AI principles into the curriculum since 2015. When generative AI arrived, those early explorers had the fluency and confidence to move quickly—and their students followed, producing AI-generated short films and co-authored books and generative art, demonstrating that the school's AI vision was being co-created with learners, not handed down to them.

In April 2025, we launched the Dolan AI and Technology Institute, directed by Dr. Jie Tao, with the stated mission of "AI for the greater good"—hosting experts, training local businesses, and advising faculty and students on responsible use.

Nobel laureate Myron Scholes participated virtually in the launch. In September 2025, we added an MBA concentration in AI—designed, in the words of MBA Director Dr. Mousumi Bose-Godbole, to "bridge the gap between technical AI knowledge and business acumen" and to develop ethical leadership for an AI-augmented world.

A New Change Architecture

The schools leading on AI adoption share a common architecture. They identify the people already experimenting, give them resources and legitimacy, co-create the vision after initial exploration—not before—and build lateral communities where knowledge flows peer-to-peer.

Kotter was right for a world where change was rare and needed to be mandated. AI is arriving fast, from all directions, and cannot be mandated into relevance. The board member I met with understood this instinctively. The business schools that will lead are those that understand it institutionally—and build their change architecture accordingly.

Anca Cristina Micu, PhD, is Senior Associate Dean and Professor of Marketing at the Charles F. Dolan School of Business, Fairfield University and a member of the Insight Into Academia Editorial Board.

FROM HYPE TO IMPLEMENTATION:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MAKING AI WORK FOR YOU

AI is no longer a "pilot project" living in one office with a brave intern and a lot of hope. It's showing up everywhere work happens: agendas, advising notes, curricula, web pages, policies, procurement, and planning. The trick is to treat AI like other campus infrastructure: governed, documented, and focused on real bottlenecks, not on novelty.

TWENTY-FOUR WAYS INSTITUTIONS CAN USE AI NOW

Presidents, Chancellors, and Cabinet Leaders

1. Turn board packets into decision briefs. Use AI to summarize long PDFs and flag decisions, risks, and open questions, then have a human verify key claims before it hits trustees. Governance and human accountability are core themes in National Institute of Standards and Technology's (NIST) framework.

2. Run scenario planning faster. Ask AI to generate enrollment, staffing, and budget "what-ifs," then send the assumptions to IR/finance for validation.

3. Create a one-page "AI rules of the road." Make it plain English: approved tools, banned data, disclosure expectations, who to call. EDUCAUSE recommends institution-wide policies and guidelines that span operations and pedagogy.

4. Accelerate strategic planning inputs. Use AI to cluster themes from listening tours, surveys, and open-ended comments, then use leaders' judgment to set priorities.

5. Shrink the speechwriting grind. Draft remarks in your voice from bullet points, then edit for accuracy, tone, and institutional positioning.

Provosts, Deans, and Other Academic Leaders

6. Speed up program review prep. Summarize assessment reports, accreditation language, and labor-market inputs into a single comparative memo, then verify sources and numbers.

7. Build "policy-to-practice" toolkits. Convert new guidance (AI, accessibility, research compliance) into checklists, FAQ pages, and training prompts for chairs and faculty.

8. Standardize syllabi and course shells. Use AI to generate consistent course policies, learning-outcome language, and student support links across departments, with faculty control of content.

9. Triage email and meeting overload. Draft replies, agendas, and follow-up task lists, then review. EDUCAUSE's 2026 work-focused research underscores how broadly AI is touching day-to-day higher-ed work.

10. Improve internal communications. Rewrite dense announcements into versions for faculty, staff, students, and families, including translated drafts when appropriate.

Faculty and Instructional Teams

11. Design assignments that "teach with AI," not "fight AI." Generate alternative prompts, scaffolding steps, and rubrics that emphasize process, reflection, and source-grounding, then pilot and revise. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) guidance calls for human-centered, age-appropriate pedagogical design and validation.)

12. Create formative feedback faster. Use AI for first-pass comments on structure, clarity, and argument flow, then add your expertise and final grading judgment.

13. Generate practice questions and retrieval activities. Create low-stakes quizzes and working examples aligned to course outcomes, then check for correctness.

14. Differentiate instruction without multiplying prep time. Draft explanations at different levels (intro, intermediate, advanced) and for different modalities (text, audio script, discussion prompt).

15. Support research workflows. Summarize articles, compare methods sections, and draft literature-map outlines while maintaining clear boundaries around copyrighted content and confidential data.

Student Affairs, Advising, and Student Success

16. Draft advising follow-ups and action plans. Turn session notes into a structured email: next steps, deadlines, campus resources, and who to contact. Keep identifiable student data out of unapproved tools and align practice with FERPA expectations.

17. Improve self-service answers. Use AI to rewrite policy pages into plain English FAQs (financial aid, registration, conduct, housing), then have the policy owner certify accuracy.

18. Triage service tickets. Auto-classify incoming requests (IT, registrar, counseling referrals, facilities) and suggest routing and reply templates.

19. Identify process friction. Analyze where students get stuck (forms abandoned, repeat questions, late submissions) and propose fixes, then validate with frontline staff before changing workflows.

Enrollment, Marketing, and Communications

20. Produce multi-channel content efficiently. Generate first drafts for web, email, SMS, and social from one approved message, then edit for brand voice and compliance.

21. Personalize ethically. Create segmented variants for first-gen students, transfer students, or adult learners using non-sensitive attributes and approved data practices.

22. Optimize websites for clarity. Use AI to flag confusing navigation, jargon, and missing calls to action, then A/B test changes.

Human Resources, Finance, Procurement, and Operations

23. Speed up policy and job-description updates. Draft role expectations and performance criteria for "AI-enabled work," including training pathways and boundaries. EDUCAUSE's work research was conducted with partners including CUPA-HR and NACUBO, reflecting cross-functional demand.

24. Draft procurement requirements that protect you later. Require disclosure of data use, retention, training, model updates, audit logs, and incident reporting, aligning with a risk-management approach like NIST AI RMF.

SIX GUARDRAILS TO MAKE AI TOOLS SAFER

Set acceptable-use policies for work.
Decide what data is allowed, which tools are approved, and what requires human review. EDUCAUSE, a nonprofit that supports technology and digital transformation in higher education, has urged institutions to close policy and guideline gaps as AI use spreads across campus operations.

Treat student and employee data as "high-risk by default."
Use privacy-by-design, minimize data shared, and align training and practice with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) expectations.

Use a risk framework.
NIST's AI Risk Management Framework is built around governing, mapping, measuring, and managing AI risks.

Assume generative tools can hallucinate.
Require citation checks, spot-checking, and a human sign-off for public-facing or consequential work. UNESCO explicitly flags validation and data privacy as central challenges.

Procure like you mean it.
Map what you already have (Microsoft, Google, LMS, CRM) before buying point solutions. Ithaka S+R has tracked the fast-moving higher-ed GenAI product landscape and the resulting complexity.

Measure outcomes, not adoption.
Productivity gains are real in many contexts, but they show up as cycle-time reductions and fewer errors, not "we launched a chatbot." Stanford's AI Index summarizes a growing body of research linking AI to productivity gains.

Choose tasks that are high-volume, low-risk, easy to verify. Then expand toward higher-stakes use cases only after you have policies, training, and audit policies in place.

Everyone in Higher Education Loves AI. Except Me.

By Thomas W. Bonagura, PhD

The only thing I ever wanted to be was smart. College was the place to accomplish that. Learning how to learn was the pathway to unlimited capability. To borrow a phrase from a colleague, what is the sine qua non of college? Is it not thinking? Is it not learning how to analyze, how to take existing information and create new? With the unapologetic embracing of AI as a legitimate learning tool, we are eviscerating the notion that college is actually higher education.

The argument made ad nauseam by supporters to embed AI into higher education—"They need to know how to use it when they leave here"—is antithetical to the point of college.

I keep reading that employers want the skills of reading and writing, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. Our response is to train them to use a search engine. AI is a technology with no expertise requirement. I am not suggesting there is no place for AI post-college. In fact, I am saying it is the only place for it.

You need to have those critical skills well developed to even understand how to use AI as a tool. The top of the class who leave with academic skills will flourish, but ultimately, the use of AI in this critical period will create a small-thinking class and a very large unthinking-class all with the same degree.

Why do I have such disappointment in the current higher education zeitgeist regarding AI? Maybe I just wanted to see this question somewhere in the last few years as the pitch for AI training echoed through the webinar ecosystem, "Why do students struggle to formulate questions of depth or specificity?"

If we focused on teaching students how to break down writing, interpret meaning, recognize varied perspectives, and find creative understanding, then they would be able to write a meaningful prompt. Worse yet is the advocation to let AI write the papers for them and allow students to act as editors.

Rhetorically, if students cannot even grasp the concept of writing a meaningful phrase or sentence to use ChatGPT, what reality has them qualified to be editors that can meaningfully critique writing? The concept literally makes no sense.

AI is not even trying to hide its shortcomings; it's in the name. Digital learning is woefully inferior as a learning tool. AI is digital learning on steroids. College should be about developing the brain, not working against its basic physiology. Using AI to summarize an article, create an outline for a paper, write code, or generate paper topics offloads work from your brain.

At a fundamental level, learning and memory involve the creation of neural pathways across different areas of the brain. The neural networks of learning rely on usage. The brain is efficient; it prunes the networks you do not use. It is pretty hopeful to think the brain will keep dormant networks. It is further wishful to think those more complex processing skills will just come back; not everything is just tying a shoe.

Research has reliably shown that reading off of a screen yields less comprehension and understanding compared to a physical book, and the gold standard for note-taking remains pen and paper over typing, over reading a transcript. The incorporation of the tactile engaging multiple parts of the brain is the widespread theory on the power of the old. AI and a digital future throw all of that away. Again, where is the questioning from higher education?

A terribly overused cliché in academia is "data-based decision making." The aforementioned data on learning and neural mechanisms is not new. Neither are the ever-declining results of reading and math testing that places the United States at the bottom of the industrialized world. That is the data.

What decisions are we making from it? Adopt a technology that does not and cannot expand students intellectually? AI is still, by objective measures, not a good product. It is still plagued by hallucinations, incorporating data from discredited sources, and many articles read for this editorial used the phrase "often inaccurate."

A study published in February showed ChatGPT misdiagnosed more than half of the case studies examined. Still, AI is trumpeted by industry insiders and acolytes alike as superior. Data-informed, indeed.

We need to embrace the primacy of teaching, of educating. We are the vital component, not an algorithm. If people could teach themselves ... I would think the lure of keeping a job would have primacy over getting home a few minutes earlier.

In closing, why are the most educated people not displaying critical thinking? We read, "It is here, we cannot stop it. We should learn to work with it." That is a weak capitulation. We know it is bad for students; it is bad for educators.

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan stated that "the medium is the message." It remains true with every technological advance. Today the AI message is "do not worry, I can think for you." Good luck to us.

Thomas W. Bonagura, PhD is Dean of the School of Science and a Professor of Biology at Buena Vista University and a member of the Insight into Academia Editorial Board.

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