

# AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION: WHERE LEADERS AND STUDENTS STAND

The American Council on Education’s (ACE) recent Pulse Point surveys show senior higher education leaders embracing artificial intelligence (AI) with cautious optimism; while adoption is accelerating, institutions still face barriers around training, expertise, and ethics. Paired with Studiosity’s Student Wellbeing survey, the data reveal a dual imperative—adopting AI responsibly while equipping students to use it effectively. Together, these findings offer a candid snapshot of where higher education leaders and students stand at this pivotal moment in AI’s integration into academic life.

**71%**

of senior leaders rate instructors’ ability to identify and evaluate student AI use as extremely or moderately important

**68%**

of senior leaders say ethics, including student learning and academic integrity, are extremely or moderately influential when considering AI adoption

**63%**

of students who use AI tools mainly use it as a study aid to help them learn, compared to 37 percent mainly using AI tools to get work done faster

**56%**

of students report that their university has provided training, policies, or guidelines on the ethical use of AI. Students within this group showed lower stress around AI use and more confidence in learning while using AI

## ADOPTION OF & ADAPTATION TO AI

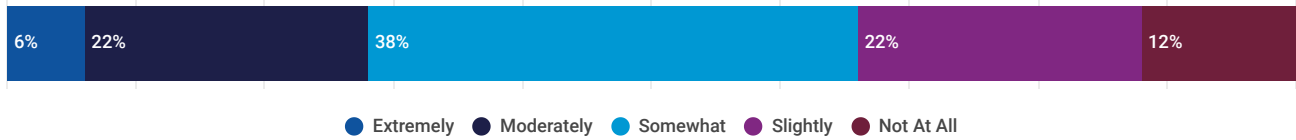
One quarter of higher education institutions have already adopted generative AI for student support, with another 22 percent planning adoption within six months and 43 percent within one to two years. Only 3 percent of senior leaders have no plans to adopt the technology. However, over two-fifths (43 percent) of students believe their institutions are not providing AI study support tools fast enough.



## READINESS TO ADOPT AI

Senior leaders were asked about their personal and institutional readiness to integrate AI across academic, administrative, and operational functions at their institutions and systems.

### Personal Readiness to Adopt AI



### Readiness of Institution or System to Adopt AI



## AI LITERACY & STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

About four in 10 students (44 percent) believe AI skills are important for securing degree-related jobs. Among these students, 67 percent expect to find relevant employment within six months of graduation (compared to 59 percent overall). Students confident in their AI abilities are less concerned about AI threatening job prospects; 54 percent disagree that it will make jobs harder to find.

This suggests that building AI skills can enhance academic progress and reduce anxiety about AI-driven job competition.

## TOP BARRIERS TO AI IMPLEMENTATION & SCALING

Senior leaders indicated the five biggest barriers to implementing and scaling AI tools at their institutions and systems:

1. Insufficient training for faculty, staff, or students (63%)
2. Concerns about data privacy, security, or ethics (57%)
3. Lack of technical expertise or trained staff (51%)
4. Resistance to change among faculty, staff, or leadership (50%)
5. Lack of clear objectives (46%)

## TOP STRESSORS WHILE USING AI

These are a reflection of stressors ranked among students' top three stressors:

1. Being accused of cheating when they did nothing wrong (45%)
2. Privacy and security of their data (40%)
3. Not learning anything due to reliance on AI (39%)
4. Ownership of work when AI is involved (36%)
5. Becoming addicted to AI (36%)

## FRAMEWORKS MOST NEEDED TO SCALE AI

Senior leaders were also asked what national guidelines, frameworks, or standards would be helpful for efforts to implement and scale AI tools at their institutions and systems:

1. Ethical standards for AI use in teaching, research, and administration (72%)
2. Data privacy and protection standards for students, faculty, and staff (67%)
3. AI literacy, competency, and professional training frameworks (64%)
4. Academic integrity guidelines for student use (62%)
5. Accountability and oversight standards for AI misuse or system errors (51%)

## WHAT'S NEXT

The message from both leaders and students is consistent: AI adoption in higher education is inevitable, but readiness is not. Institutions must close the gap between enthusiasm and execution. College and university leaders should prioritize training for students, faculty, and staff; establish clear ethical guidelines and use policies; expand student-facing AI support; and engage stakeholders early to build the buy-in needed for lasting change. Closing these gaps isn't just strategic; it's essential to ensuring the whole campus community can benefit fully from AI's potential.

## Sources

American Council on Education, [2025 Fall Term](#) and [2026 Winter Term](#) Pulse Point Surveys

YouGov (2026). [2026 US Student Wellbeing Report](#), Studiosity North America

## Related Resources

[Webinar](#): Beyond the AI Arms Race: A Responsible Path Forward, ACE, January 2026

[Presentation](#): Beyond the Classroom: Scaling Student Success through Adaptive, On-Demand Support, Studiosity, February 2026