The State of AI Governance in Higher Education:

A Practical Playbook for Institutional Readiness

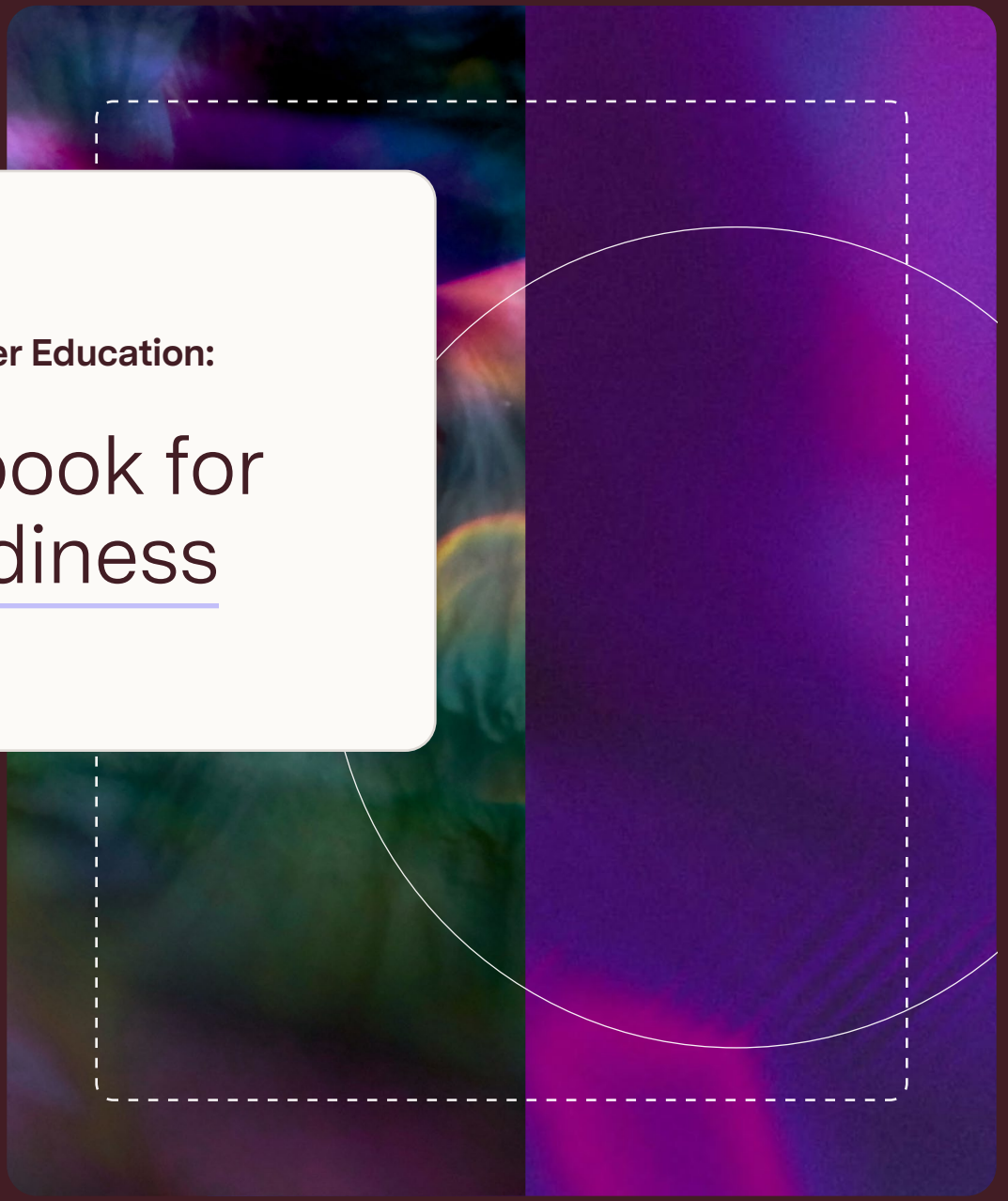

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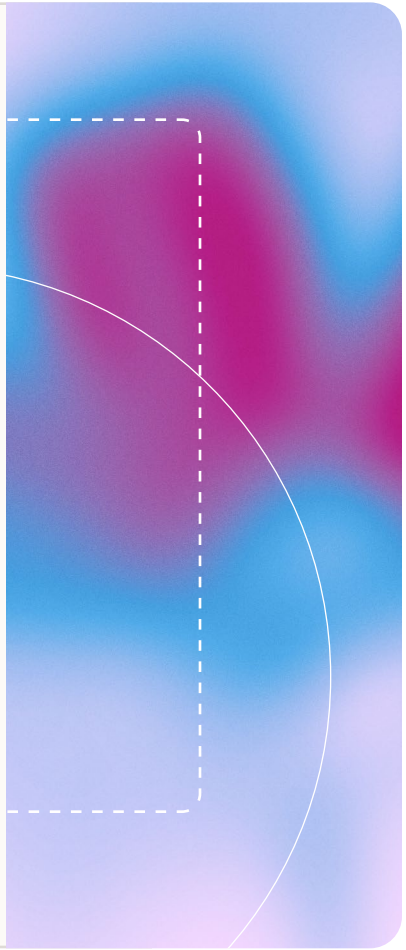
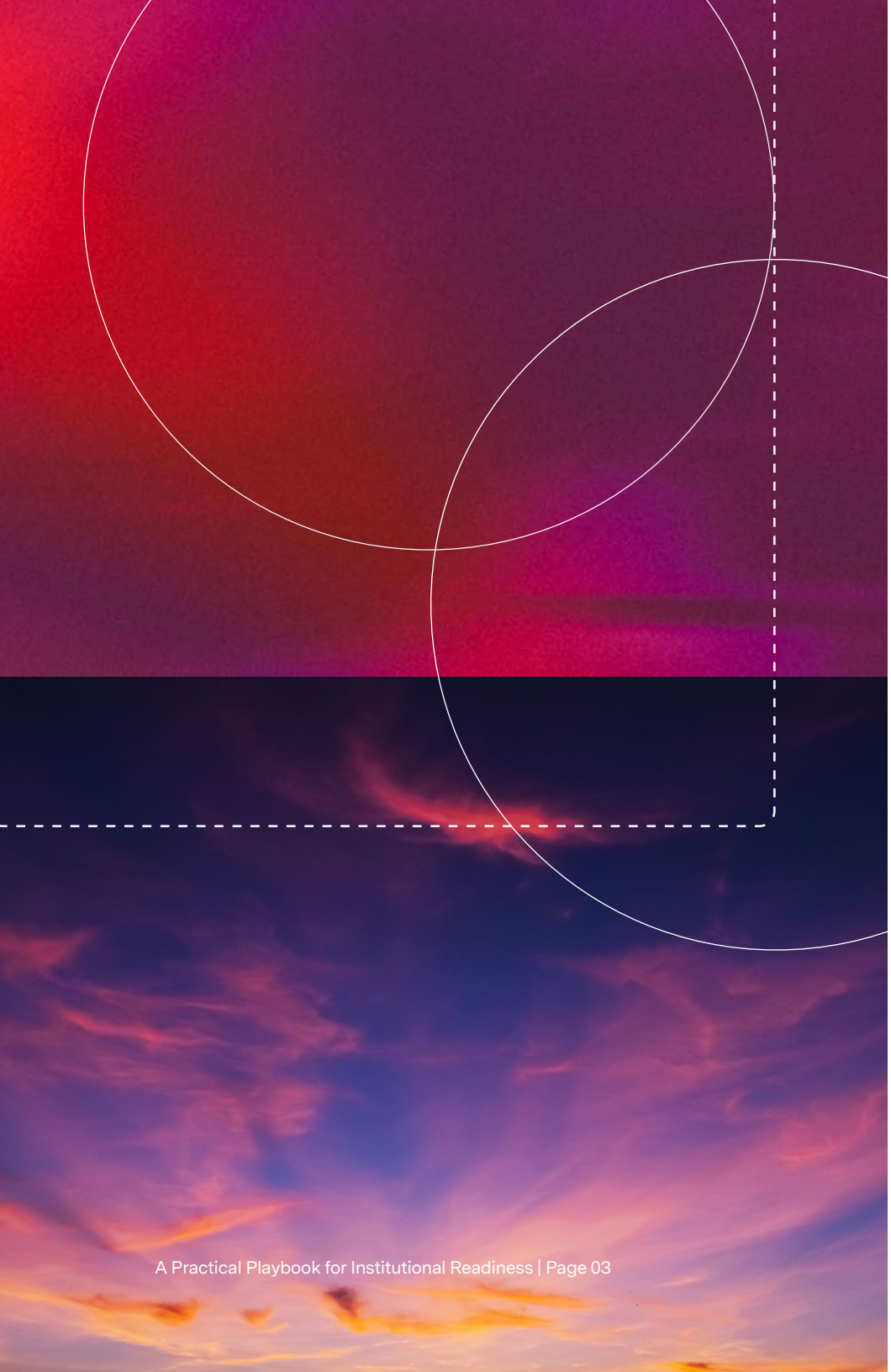
Table of contents





The Grammarly you trust, evolved to support institutions in the AI era of learning

Superhuman for Education extends Grammarly's trusted writing support into a human-centered AI platform designed for teaching, learning, and working. It helps students write and learn with AI through visible, defensible processes, and provides faculty and staff with context-aware agentic assistance embedded in their workflows, enabling transparent, controlled, agentic AI use that helps institutions innovate and meet today's challenges head-on.

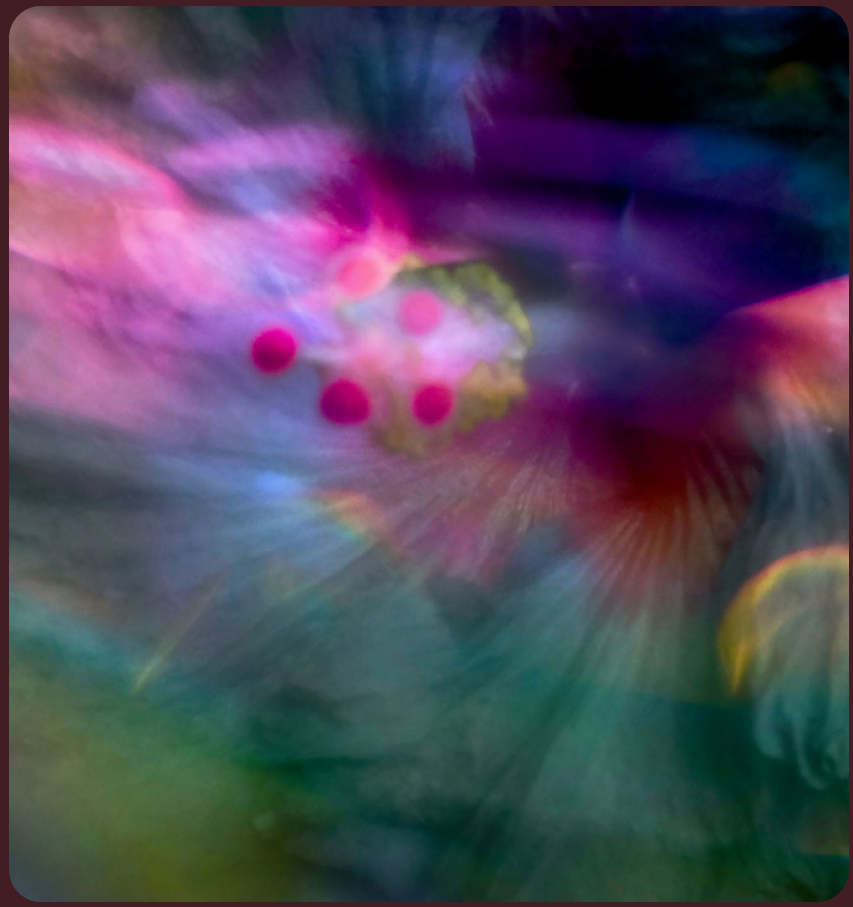
Superhuman is the trusted technology partner for education institutions to complete your AI strategy, not compete with other AI tools.

Introduction

Higher education is adopting AI in 2026. More than 80% of institutions actively use AI tools, and 67% of higher ed leaders rank AI as a top strategic priority, according to a national survey conducted by Grammarly and Higher Ed Dive. Yet governance has not kept pace with adoption at most institutions.

Meanwhile, faculty experiment with AI in their courses, students use it to write and study, and vendors increasingly incorporate AI into their product offering. But in most cases, few institutions have established clear expectations for what responsible use actually looks like.

This playbook is for the institutional decision-makers responsible for shaping how AI is adopted and governed on their campuses: provosts, IT leaders, CISOs, academic administrators, and compliance teams. It offers practical guidance to help leaders understand where higher education institutions stand today and what steps to take next.



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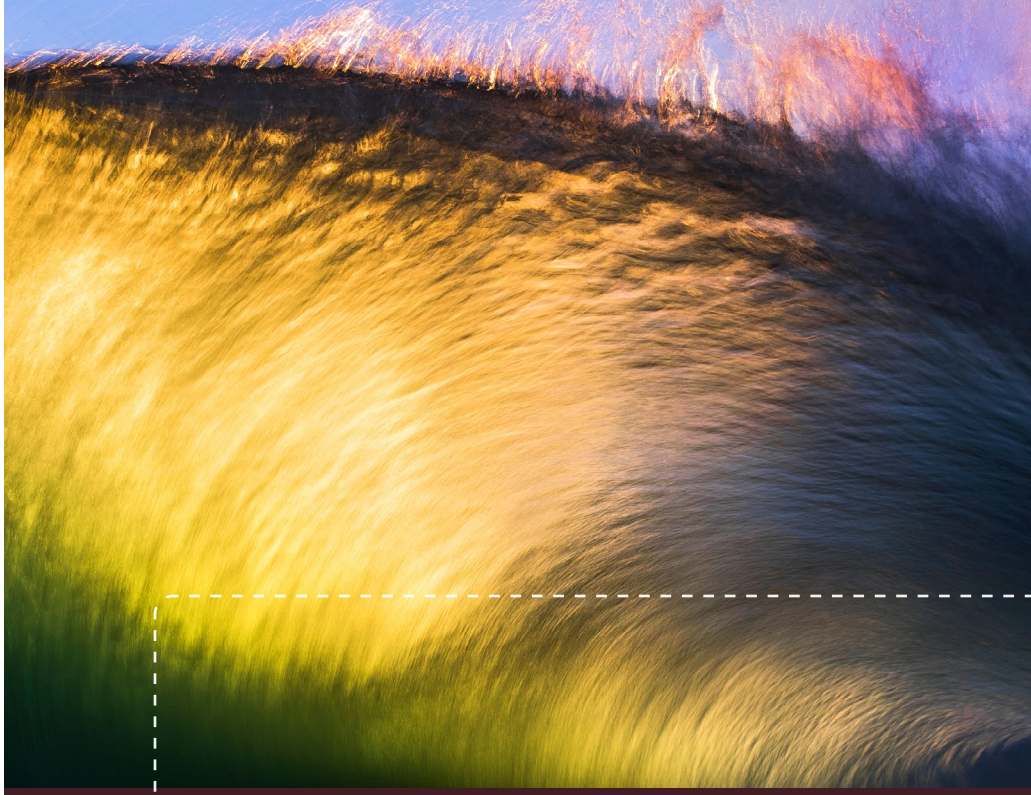
Section 1

What AI governance means in higher education

“In plain language, AI governance is about setting shared expectations so people aren’t guessing,” says Yolanda Wiggins, Senior Researcher at Superhuman supporting Grammarly for Education. “It’s not micromanaging teaching or shutting down experimentation. It’s not telling faculty how to teach or students how to learn.”



“AI governance is about setting *shared expectations* so people aren’t guessing.”

Yolanda Wiggins

Effective AI governance answers four fundamental questions:

01 **What AI use is acceptable?** Governance clarifies where AI adds value and where it doesn't belong.

02 **What data can be used?** Student, research, and institutional data all have different sensitivities and regulatory requirements.

03 **Who's accountable if something goes wrong?** Clear ownership matters when AI produces inaccurate information or creates unintended consequences.

04 **Where does human judgment stay in the loop?** Important decisions around students, faculty, and institutional direction require human oversight.

Common governance gaps

Without intentional governance, predictable problems tend to emerge in higher ed. Decision-making ownership becomes fragmented when everyone's involved, but no one feels empowered to make calls. Meanwhile, as AI use grows informally, policies can trail reality by months or even years.

The consequences are most evident in students' experiences: inconsistent expectations across courses, with some instructors encouraging AI use while others are penalizing it. Wherever expectations and protections aren't distributed evenly across the student body, gaps in access and consistency typically surface first.

Unfortunately, these gaps require deliberate attention. The longer they persist, the harder they become to address. As informal practices harden into expectations and inconsistencies compound, understanding where your institution stands matters more than ever.

1 Experimental

Often fueled by curiosity and good intentions, individual faculty and staff experiment with AI out of personal interest, but with little coordination across the institution.

☑ **Signals:** AI use is happening, but no one knows the full extent. Because policies don't exist or aren't enforced, each department handles AI differently. As a result, students receive conflicting guidance from course to course.

2 Awareness

Even when institutions recognize that AI is everywhere, conversations begin at the leadership level and task forces are established to address it, but decision-making remains fragmented.

☑ **Signals:** The energy at this stage is often palpable, but it lacks clear direction. Leadership asks questions about AI while multiple groups work without coordination. Here, pilot programs exist but aren't connected to a broader strategy.

3 Structured

Governance bodies, policies, and review processes are established with a clear point of accountability and documented expectations for AI use.

☑ **Signals:** Written policies exist and are communicated by a governance body with clear authority. Faculty and students know where to find guidance, and new AI tools go through a defined review process.

4 Integrated

Governance is embedded into procurement, teaching and learning, data governance, and leadership routines.

☑ **Signals:** Procurement includes AI governance criteria, and data governance frameworks account for AI-specific concerns. Faculty development addresses and embeds AI in pedagogy, and student orientation covers AI expectations.

5 Reflective

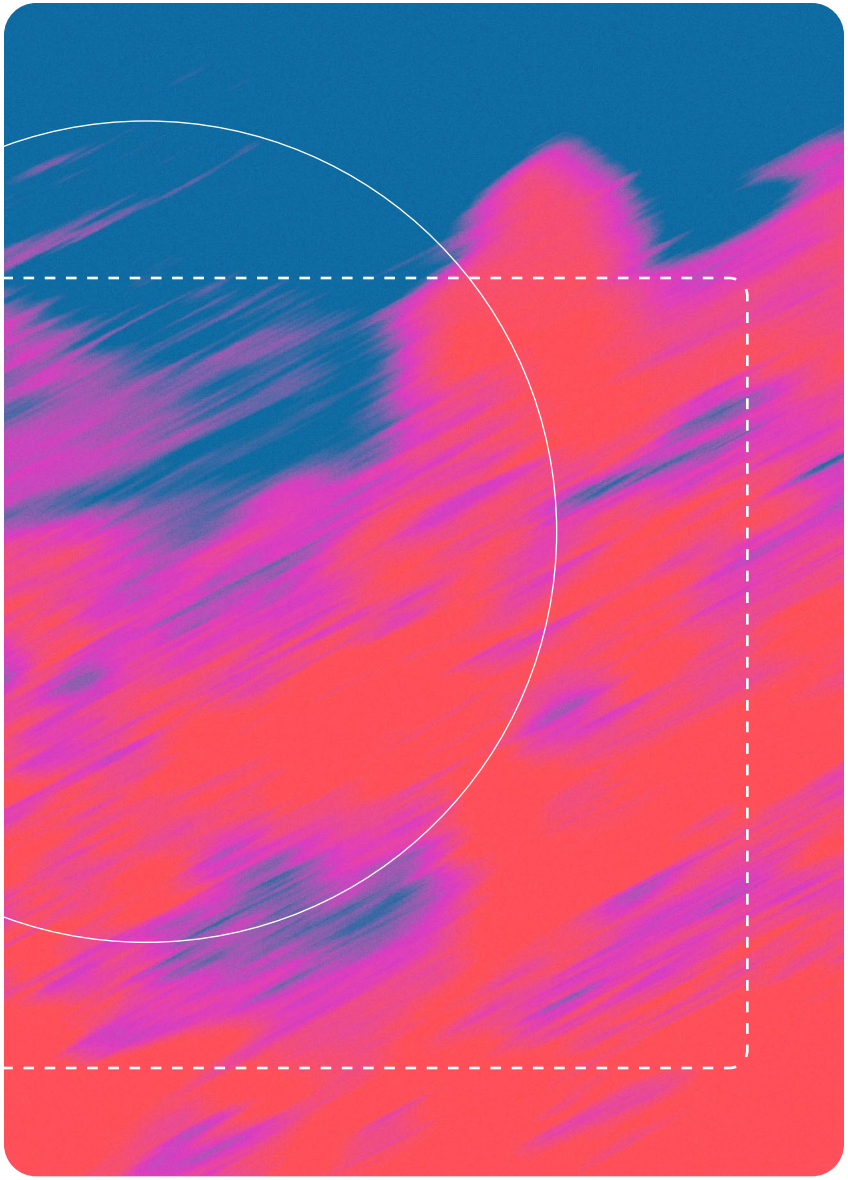
The institution regularly assesses what's working and what isn't to adapt governance based on outcomes, paying explicit attention to who benefits from AI and who might be left out.

☑ **Signals:** Regular review cycles examine governance effectiveness, who benefits from AI, and who may face barriers to participation. Student and faculty feedback shapes policy updates, and the institution shares its learnings with peers.

To assess an institution's AI readiness, the AI Adoption Compass can help leadership teams align on their current state and future direction.

Section 2

The AI governance maturity model



Not every institution starts from the same place, and not every institution needs to reach the same destination at the same pace. This five-stage maturity model helps leaders understand where their institutions are today and chart a realistic path forward.

Notably, institutions may occupy more than one stage at once. For example, it's common for IT security to be at Stage 3 while academic departments are still at Stage 1, or for individual programs to outpace institutional policy. That unevenness is normal, and recognizing it honestly is more useful than forcing a single label. What matters is having a shared sense of where you're headed next.

Most institutions find themselves somewhere between Stage 2 and Stage 3. But the goal isn't to rush to Stage 5. It's to understand your current state honestly and take the next appropriate step. Because traditional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can oversimplify complex realities or feel punitive in shared-governance cultures, they often aren't useful in this context. Instead, what matters more is whether governance shows up consistently in how decisions get made.

Section 3

Building your governance foundation

Knowing an institution's AI maturity stage is the first step. Next comes building the foundation, and that means getting clear on who owns what before a crisis forces the question.

Key decisions needing early owners

Several categories of decisions can't wait for perfect governance structures. Someone needs authority to make calls right away, even imperfect ones that can be refined later:

- **Which AI tools are approved?** Pay close attention to vendor tools that touch student data or integrate with institutional systems.
- **What data can AI tools access?** Remember that the stakes change significantly when student work, grades, and records are involved.
- **How do academic integrity policies apply in AI contexts?** Provide students with clear expectations before they make mistakes, not after.
- **What about accessibility requirements for AI-enabled tools?** Ask whether AI tools actually work for students with accessibility needs, beyond innovation.
- **What are the risk and escalation pathways?** Decide who gets called and what happens next if and when something goes wrong.

The goal is to clarify who can say yes, who can say no, and who can say not yet. Name decision owners, and don't overlook key stakeholders like librarians, writing center staff, and instructional designers who often have ground-level insight into how AI is actually being used. For starters, consider these 24 questions to ask any AI vendor for higher education.

For example, at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, a transparency-first approach to AI reduced the number of academic integrity violations from

27 to 1.

Addressing shadow AI

Shadow AI is the use of AI tools outside official channels. When faculty, staff, or students use shadow AI, resist the instinct to crack down. Instead, remember that it usually stems from good intentions: faculty trying to save time, staff trying to solve real problems faster than institutional processes allow, and students seeking support with writing, studying, or navigating course expectations. Treat it as a signal of unmet needs rather than a compliance failure.

What works better is creating low-stakes ways for people to surface what they're already doing. That includes clear guidance on what's okay to try, simple intake pathways for new use cases, and reassurance that asking questions won't trigger discipline. When governance starts from support, people are far more willing to bring their AI use out into the open.

Transparency over surveillance

Monitoring and detecting AI use can feel like an effective form of control at first. But institutions that lead with transparency consistently achieve better long-term outcomes.

For example, at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, a transparency-first approach to AI reduced academic integrity violations from 27 to one. Because the shift focused on establishing shared expectations before problems arose, students gained the confidence to have open, honest conversations with faculty about their use of AI. Instead of attempting to hide their use of AI, students brought it into the open. When everyone understood what was expected and felt safe being transparent, the adversarial dynamic disappeared, and learning improved.

Section 4

Practical first steps

Higher education leaders building governance from scratch can start small and intentionally. The following steps are lightweight and adaptable enough to serve as a starting point for institutions at any maturity stage. From there, leaders can adapt it to fit their own context, capacity, and governance culture.

Higher Ed AI starter toolkit

Name decision owners. Clarify who can approve, reject, or defer AI decisions.

Create a short AI principles statement. Articulate your institution's values and commitments around AI on one page.

Set up a simple intake pathway. Before anyone deploys a new AI tool, document what it does, what data it uses, and who's accountable.

Develop a basic vendor checklist. Decide what AI-related questions need answers before signing a contract. Start with the 24 Questions to Ask Any AI Vendor for Higher Education Institutions.

Write a plain-language FAQ. Help faculty and students understand expectations without needing to interpret complex legal documents.

Invest in AI fluency. Create accessible learning opportunities that help faculty, staff, and administrators build foundational AI literacy to ground governance conversations in shared understanding.

Align leadership early. Align academic leadership, IT, legal, and compliance teams before problems arise, not after decisions are already underway.

Make time for reflection. Build in regular moments to ask what's working, what's not, and who's being left out.

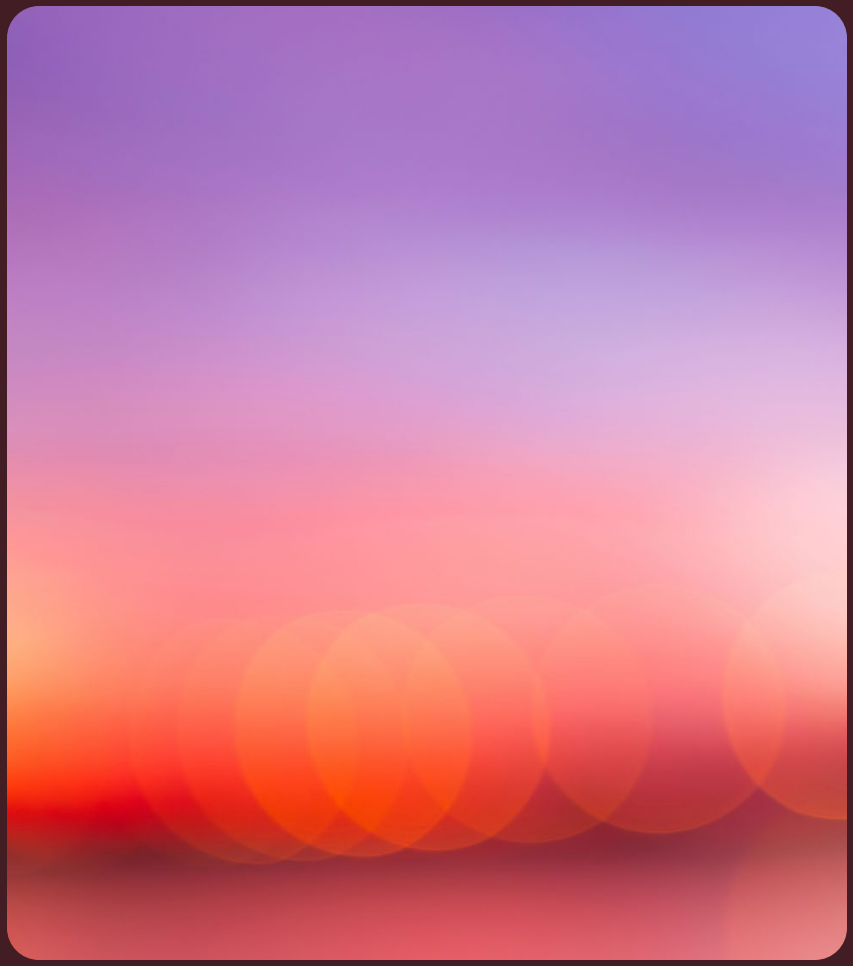
None of these steps require massive investment or perfect answers. But they do require clarity, communication, and willingness to iterate. For more detailed guidance, Grammarly's responsible AI framework offers step-by-step support.

Conclusion

AI governance is about learning in public and improving over time.

“Maturity isn’t about getting it perfect,” Wiggins says. “Pace really matters. What works for a large university isn’t realistic for a community college or a regional public institution. The most effective approaches are pragmatic, focusing on minimal viable structure, clear decision rights, and ongoing learning rather than trying to solve everything all at once.”

One early signal that governance is taking root? Leaders start referencing ideas from this playbook in unrelated meetings or decisions, without prompting. When the principles show up organically in how people talk about technology, procurement, or student support, interpret it as a sign of success. The institutions that get this right will create more consistent student experiences, outcomes that support success across the board, and graduates better prepared for an AI-integrated workforce. Start where you are, name what you need, and build from there.



Ready to assess your institution’s AI readiness? Take the AI Adoption Compass quiz to identify your approach and discover how to strengthen it. Or connect with Superhuman for Education to learn how leading institutions are building responsible, transparent AI practices and policies.

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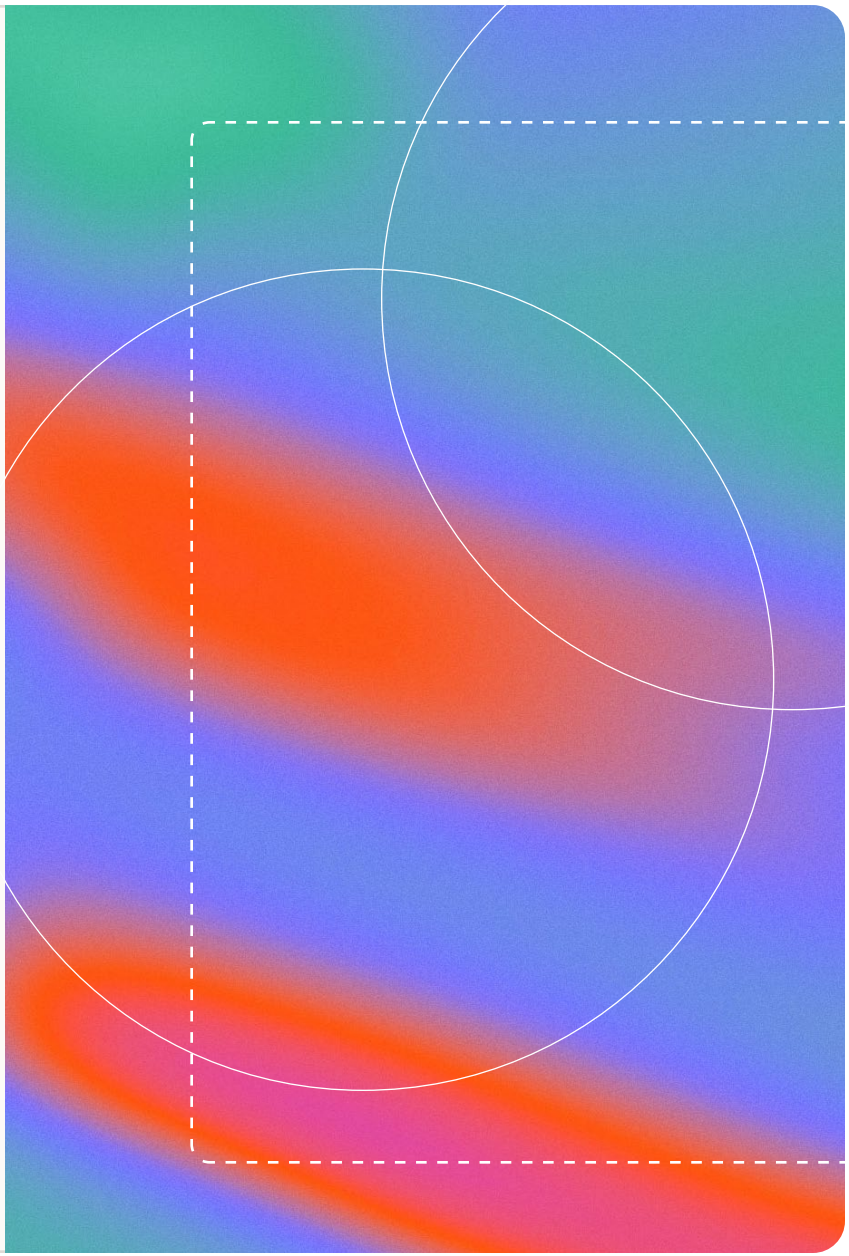
Learn more



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