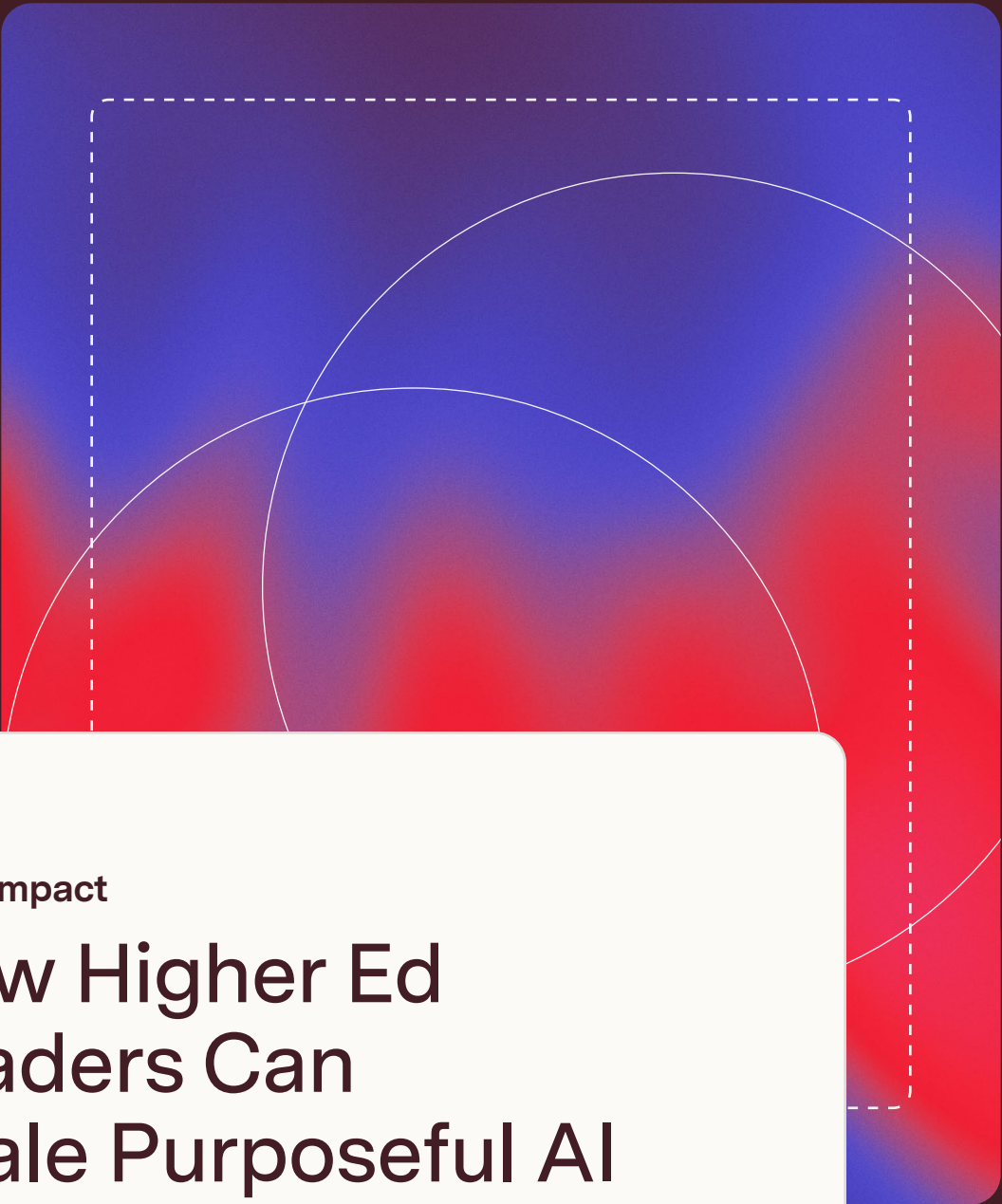




AI for Impact

How Higher Ed Leaders Can Scale Purposeful AI Across Campus



Custom content for Superhuman from Studio by Informa TechTarget

AI use is rapidly increasing across college and university campuses. The challenge for institutional leaders remains: determining which AI use cases have the greatest impact on teaching and learning, and then scaling those across the institution.

Nearly six in 10 (57%) students use AI in their coursework at least weekly, Gallup research shows. Yet institutions continue to struggle to match their oversight of the technology to that reality. In the same poll, more than half of students said their school discourages AI use (42%) or prohibits it altogether (11%), while just four in 10 (42%) encourage students to use the technology.

Even institutions that allow AI likely don't have a full picture of how it's impacting campus workflows. According to EDUCAUSE, just 13% of institutions are measuring the return on investment — that is, the impact — of AI tools used on campus.

New research from Superhuman, in partnership with Higher Ed Dive's Studio, validates these findings and uses responses from more than 150 higher education executives to delve deeper to explore the factors holding colleges and universities back from realizing AI's ability to improve the work of teaching and learning campuswide.

57%

students use AI in their coursework at least weekly

42%

of students said their school discourages AI use



The number of AI tools used on campuses has increased considerably over the last three years, our survey found, with a wide variety of use cases reported across faculty, students, and staff. Yet most higher education executives surveyed said sanctioned AI use on campus is much narrower. That suggests many institutions lack comprehensive oversight of how this emergent technology is already influencing workflows. And because institutions can't measure what they don't track, they are likely missing opportunities to identify and amplify AI use cases that can help students, faculty, and staff work smarter.

"This is one of the most interesting tensions in higher ed right now. Institutions are still very

much trying to catch up with just how quickly AI adoption is happening, especially informally, across campus," said Yolanda Wiggins, Senior Researcher at Superhuman.

Institutions are not struggling with AI access as much as they are struggling with AI coordination, governance, and measurable integration across workflows.

Colleges and universities that will be leaders in bringing AI into campus workflows in measurable, scalable ways are those that balance the centralization needed for effective oversight and measurement with the decentralization critical to fostering impactful use cases.

"The institutions that are doing this best are the ones creating enough guidance and structure to support reasonable AI use, while still giving people room to explore what actually works for them, in their particular roles, and their specific workflows."

Yolanda Wiggins,
Senior Researcher at Superhuman



How much of the AI use happening in colleges and universities today is actually sanctioned?

19%

Strategic: AI use is formally embedded in institutional operations and policy through governance, procurement, and usage policies.

36%

Extensive: AI use has been formalized in many areas of the institution.

28%

Limited: AI use has been formalized in a few areas of the institution.

16%

Experimental: AI is being tested or piloted in select areas of the institution.

0%

None: AI is not officially used or supported, though individuals may use it independently.

Finding the “sweet spot” for AI to drive impact

Highly Centralized

Looks like: A very limited number of AI platforms are approved for use, and the rest are restricted.

Opportunity: Leadership can more easily surface and measure the outcomes of AI investments.

Challenge: Can be overly prescriptive, with limited flexibility and customization, slowing innovation.

Highly Decentralized

Looks like: Little or no coordination in determining which AI tools are used.

Opportunity: Departments and individuals have more runway to explore tailored use cases.

Challenge: Siloed workflows limit the ability to share learnings institution-wide, while duplicative tools add costs.



How colleges and universities use AI today

Higher ed leaders are aware of the widespread use of AI on campus. However, our findings also show that awareness alone does not always translate into strategic oversight or measurable implementation.

Executives are aware of a wide array of AI use cases

Administrators

Students

Faculty

Top 3...

79%

Student support

(e.g., identify at-risk students and propose interventions, chatbots to connect students with services)

74%

Data analysis and reporting

(e.g., analyze trends, develop narratives, and create supporting materials)

68%

Document drafting (e.g., create drafts of policies, handbooks, meeting summaries, reports)

81%

Study support (e.g., generate summaries, study guides, practice exams, flashcards)

79%

Research help (e.g., develop and refine research questions, summarize sources, compare viewpoints, identify keywords)

65%

Writing assistance (e.g., brainstorm ideas, organize outlines, get feedback on drafts) & **Communication support** (e.g., draft or edit emails, discussion posts, presentations)

91%

Generative AI platforms & productivity tools

83%

Academic research tools

71%

Student support and engagement tools (student-facing chatbots, early alert / predictive analytics, career preparation tools)



Institutional AI policies cover several (often overlapping) categories of AI tools



87%

Generative AI

(ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.)



64%

Productivity

agents (Superhuman, Copilot, etc.)



59%

Academic support

agents (Grammarly, Copyleaks, etc.)

IT and security teams take the lead in deciding which AI tools to onboard and use, with support from academic leadership.

Responsible

Completes the task and makes the final decision.

Procurement:

70%

CISO

50%

IT department

Accountable

Owens the outcome and approves the decision.

Procurement:

62%

Provost/CAO

46%

IT department
Also: deans,
procurement office

Consulted

SME whose opinion is solicited; two-way communication

Procurement:

75%

Department heads

74%

Faculty

Informed

Kept up to date on progress; one-way communication.

Procurement:

86%

Student liaisons

49%

General counsel

Use:

70%

CISO

51%

IT department

Use:

62%

Provost/CAO

44%

Deans
Also: IT department

Use:

78%

Faculty

74%

Department heads

Use:

87%

Student liaisons

48%

General counsel



Despite the top-down decision-making structure, the highest level within the institution offering students instruction or guidance on AI use for learning and career prep varies widely.



87%

Structured, comprehensive instruction at the **institutional level**.



64%

Structured, comprehensive instruction at the **departmental level**.



59%

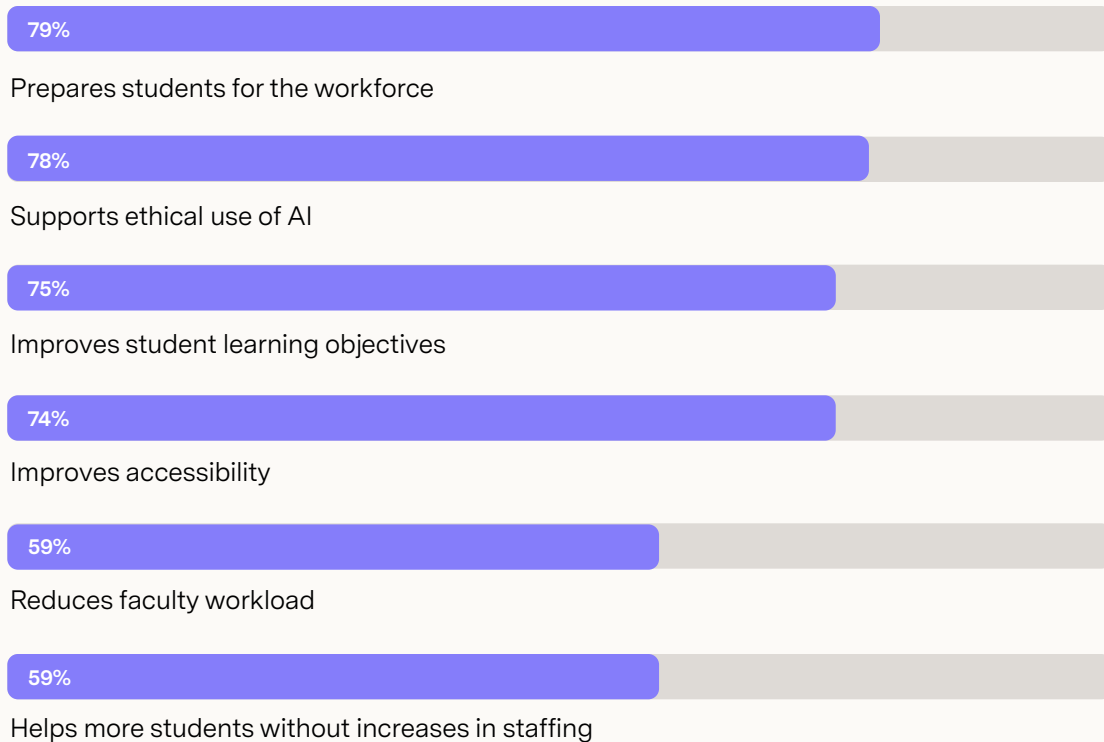
Individual faculty or courses offer instruction on AI use.



Poor alignment between what institutions want AI to do and their selection criteria

Higher ed leaders have several priorities in mind when deciding whether to invest in AI. But our findings reveal a potential blind spot in how they approach them, indicating that institutions are thinking about AI defensively rather than strategically.

When deciding to invest in AI tools, higher ed leaders rated the following outcomes as “very” or “extremely” important factors in the decision:



But their selection criteria don't universally support those goals.

In pursuit of those outcomes, higher ed leaders prioritize the following criteria when deciding whether to invest in AI tools:

62%

Data privacy and security

46%

User friendliness

39%

Ease of implementation

The blind spot: Scalability across the institution (29%), alignment with institutional strategic goals (21%), and learning needs/usage scenarios (19%) are all selection criteria in service of respondents' most desired strategic outcomes from using AI. Yet they ranked low on the list. This finding suggests institutions may be prioritizing risk mitigation over strategic alignment.

"When AI adoption is being driven defensively rather than tied to institutional goals, institutions struggle to clearly demonstrate impact."

Yolanda Wiggins,
Senior Researcher at Superhuman



How institutions can get aligned to show AI's impact

Until AI advocates on campus can demonstrate the value of investing in the technology, they will struggle to secure senior leadership support. And when senior leaders aren't on board, even compelling use cases will be difficult to sustain and scale, Wiggins says.

That's a problem worth solving, given that the biggest challenge to expanding AI use across the institution, cited by one in three respondents in our survey, is the lack of support from senior management.

When institutional leaders can more easily see and measure the outcomes of investing in AI, it's more likely that those initiatives will become part of the college or university's strategic priorities.

Biggest challenges to increasing AI use at respondents' institutions

30%

Lack of senior management support

23%

We don't have the time or resources to train faculty and staff on AI use

19%

Other priorities are competing for the same budget



*“Institutions are experimenting with a lot of different tools, and that makes sense, but in the long term, the real value comes from knowing **how** AI can best support your institutional goals and workflows, and investing in those use cases.”*

Yolanda Wiggins,
Senior Researcher at Superhuman

Lay the groundwork to spotlight value

Institutional leaders shouldn't have to guess which AI use cases best align with their strategic priorities and will make a meaningful impact on their campuses. Wiggins recommends the following steps for college and university leaders looking to proactively foster support for AI use on their campus:

Offer flexibility within structure.

Establish clear institutional guardrails that set the parameters for AI use while leaving room for innovation, Wiggins advises. For example, institutions can spell out what ethical use of AI looks like and then give departments freedom to explore specific, sanctioned tools and share what they learn.

Put the problem first.

Tool overload is a real concern as more AI use cases emerge in higher ed. Instead of starting with a particular tool and looking for a way to plug it into your institution's tech stack, survey campus

stakeholders to see what pain points they are experiencing, then explore how AI can address those specific concerns.

Make it easy to share learnings.

Institutions don't need every department to use the same AI tools in the same ways. In fact, it's highly unlikely they would do so. However, departments and individuals do need easy ways to share and receive lessons from AI experimentation across campus. Formalizing opportunities to spotlight AI success can help open communication pathways across institutional silos.

Be intentional.

The goal shouldn't be to adopt AI as quickly as possible, Wiggins advises. Nor should it be to heavily restrict AI use. Consider how AI can genuinely support productivity as well as teaching and learning by removing friction from everyday workflows. Can AI be integrated right into existing workflows, or does it require additional steps, clicks, and log-ins for an individual user to leverage the AI solution?



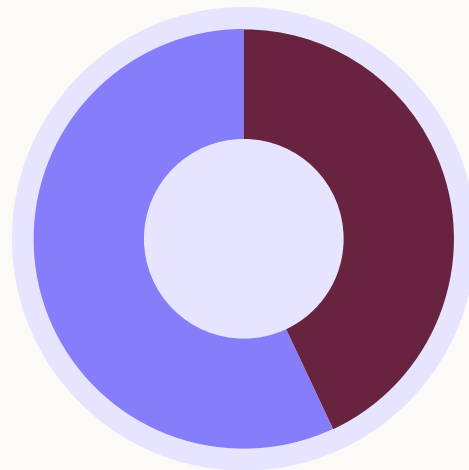
Shift gears from experimentation to intentional coordination

Intentional decision-making around when, where, and how AI is used on campus will foster intentional use by students, faculty, and staff that makes a measurable impact. That, in turn, will help AI advocates make a data-driven case for AI based on its potential to move the needle on progress toward the institutions' strategic goals.

The result: colleges and universities can begin building sustainable systems for AI use, with shared practices that students, faculty, and staff will use and trust over time.

The good news is that a majority of respondents to our survey said most (40%) or all (23%) of the AI tools and platforms used on their campus are already managed and operated at the institutional level. Another 21% said management was evenly split between the institution and department levels. That's similar to the share of respondents who said their school has a formal policy guiding AI use across the institution (57%). Taken together, these findings suggest that many institutions are on their way to introducing greater structure and measurability in how they apply AI on campus.

Does your institution have a formal, institution-wide policy to guide AI use?



57%
Yes

43%
No

"Institutions that move beyond the pilot phase successfully are typically those that focus less on chasing every new AI product and more on using AI to solve real institutional problems in really practical and thoughtful ways."

Yolanda Wiggins,
Senior Researcher at Superhuman



At Arizona State University – a large public university with a significant online footprint and diverse student population – campus leaders have tied AI into teaching, learning, and operations across the institution. Now, they're onboarding Superhuman Go, an agentic AI assistant that works within the university's unique informational context to support the everyday work of teaching and learning where it's already happening. For example, with Go ...



Students can get an explanation of complex language from right inside the reading assignment.



Faculty can update a posted assignment and send an email to all students notifying them.



Staff can quickly summarize past student support discussions to make the most of each session.

“Institutions that move beyond the pilot phase successfully are typically those that focus less on chasing every new AI product and more on using AI to solve real institutional problems in really practical and thoughtful ways,” Wiggins said.

Across higher education, institutional leaders are grappling with pressure to add structure to the use of AI on campus while lacking a clear picture of the technology's actual impact. Until they know which AI use cases are (and aren't) moving the needle, AI is likely to remain a disconnected side project and fail to fulfill its potential to help the institution better understand, establish, and fulfill its long-term strategic objectives.

“When you can build AI into real institutional workflows, you're far more likely to be able to show how AI helps save time, reduce friction, and help everyone across campus work smarter,” Wiggins said.

To learn more about how Superhuman Go helps institutions embed AI within existing teaching, learning, and operations workflows, visit superhuman.com/edu.





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