LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE FOR TOMORROW

YOUR VOICE

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Dr. Ding-Jo H. Currie
Director – LIFT

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ding-Jo H. Currie is the distinguished faculty of higher education leadership and founding director of Leadership Institute for Tomorrow. She is former chancellor of Coast Community College District.

Having sponsored a global forum on AI and its social impact in January and the CEO AI Leadership Bootcamp in February, I became more inspired – and frankly, intrigued – about our evolving relationship with artificial intelligence.

Through the authors' accounts, this issue offers a glimpse into the varied relationships and implications for practice.

I challenge you with my own questions: What is your relationship with AI? How might you shape this relationship to unlock your fullest potential and capacity?

Perhaps most intriguing is the paradox of how machine-generated AI might actually help us build a more humanistic world.

An experienced trainer of educators, **Meg Foster** lays out 10 best practices for integrating AI as a thought partner for embracing continuous learning. Her focus isn't merely on improving our functionality or productivity, but also on effectiveness and inclusiveness.

Brandyn West, a 9th grade student dually enrolled at a community college, demonstrates the power of AI as a learning partner. Although this relationship is still in its embryonic stage, Brandyn sees its potential clearly: evolving into adulthood, gaining knowledge, and becoming more effective. Brandyn's experience is a powerful testament to how these experimental relationships can transform learning into something truly inspiring.

President Stephanie Bulger's leadership reflects both vision and courage, tempered by accountability and caution. She sees AI as a power tool not just for expanding access but for fostering belonging and inclusion, a visionary stance.

Darla Nunez, brings to the foreground a student's experience and perspective, highlighting the struggles caused by inconsistent policies and practices (or their absence entirely) within institutions. Her voice calls us to action, urging leaders to center students by creating clear, ethical, and purpose-driven policies for AI integration.

I enjoyed **Dr. Gilberto Cardenas's** framing of AI as "Advanced Imagination." He challenges us all to reflect on how our roles as knowledge workers can be enriched by partnering with AI in creative and thoughtful ways.

Chancellor Lee Lambert emphasizes the urgent need for community colleges to proactively lead, rather than passively observe, workforce shifts in the AI era. I encourage you to reflect deeply on the questions he raises.

Dr. Maniphone Dickerson's account of her relationship with AI ventures into self-care, mental well-being, and financial planning. Her transparency about the AI tools she uses invites AI from backstage to stand beside us in our everyday lives.

Math faculty **Dr. Reza Mirbeik**, provides an optimistic view on enhancing teaching and learning with AI. Yet he wisely cautions institutions to thoughtfully support and train faculty while addressing inequities in student access to AI tools.

Chancellor Rick MacLennan's personal AI journey informs his leadership across a district with three colleges. He passionately advocates for giving educators and students the time, space, and encouragement to explore their own relationships with AI. Imagine if every CEO similarly embraced curiosity, responsibly exploring AI's potential to create hope and opportunity.

Trustee **Dr. Shin Liu**, who also serves as faculty, so compelling illustrates AI as a game changer in her dual roles. She champions AI in the classroom, highlighting its capacity to empower students to innovate, lead, and expand their boundaries. Loud and clear, she advocates passionately for community college students, ensuring they will not be left behind in this technology revolution.

ON THE COVER

Our "AI and I" artwork was generated by **DALL-E** with Ding-Jo Currie's inspirations, and finalized with graphic enhancement by video game character designer **Da-Hsiung Hsia**. **The presence of spelling errors reflects the imperfections inherent in AI-generated work.**

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A 1st-year Student's Journey into AI

By Brandyn West

Freshman,
Cypress College;
and Cambridge Virtual Academy,
Anaheim Union High School District

Through my educational journey, I have found myself using AI more than ever, especially in 9th grade and as a dual enrollment student at Cypress College. It has helped me understand topics better, particularly when it comes to math. I love math a lot, but sometimes I still find it challenging.

This year, my math teacher, Mr. Jae Kim, started encouraging us to use AI as a math helper. I took that advice and started off using Microsoft's Copilot as a useful tool. I can do all sorts of things with it, such as having it break down the topic we are learning, have it explain things to me using easy to understand examples, quiz me, and so much more! That was my first step in seeing how much AI can be useful in education.

Recently, Mr. Kim created his own AI tool, and my honors 9th grade math class were the beta-testers. For his first AI chatbot, it was pretty good! It wasn't perfect of course, but I still use it to help me sometimes when I am struggling to understand a topic or module in his class.

A few weeks after using it, I was asked by Mr. Kim to use the feedback I gave him on his AI tool to create our very own classroom chatbot, tailored to our class. It has been such an awesome experience creating it, because knowing how all of my classmates and I learn best has helped me start to develop an AI chatbot that we can all use, and will work based on our needs.

Tools such as Copilot and ChatGPT are great resources, but because it is made for the whole world, and not just 9th grade math students, it can do things like give you the answers right away, or explain things in a way that doesn't make sense.

By coding my own AI, I can prompt it to know who its audience is, and how to respond. Again, the point is to be tailored to a specific group of people. Not only am I learning math in Mr. Kim's class, but I am now learning a little bit of real coding!

AI and I work so well together, and learning more about it day by day is helping me succeed educationally. Thanks to teachers like Mr. Kim, and the opportunities I get to experiment with AI, I feel that by the time I become an adult, I will have the proper knowledge of where to ask for help, and how to use AI effectively to get the desired results!

AI Is Here, and It Already Matters

By Dr. Stephanie Bulger

President,
Lane Community College,
Eugene, Oregon

My journey with technology in higher education has always been about expanding opportunity.

Early in my career as dean of distance learning with a background in online education research, I saw firsthand how technology could break down barriers — giving working adults and those with family responsibilities a chance to pursue higher education. My time working in the ed tech industry reinforced that technology can improve access, boost retention, and personalize learning.

With artificial intelligence, particularly Gen AI, I see similar possibilities, but also a need for thoughtful leadership in how we guide its adoption. AI is not just another tool; it represents a fundamental shift in how we work, learn, and engage with information. I believe AI can be a force for good if we center it around people.

Why AI Matters at Lane

Two years ago, I created the Presidential Task Force on AI with cross-institutional participation to study, experiment, and guide our approach to AI. The task force developed eight recommendations which align with my belief that AI should enhance human expertise, not replace it.

At Lane Community College, we are embracing AI intentionally and strategically. While some institutions see AI adoption happening gradually, Lane is seizing the opportunity to lead. AI will touch every part of the college from teaching and student support to institutional operations, so we are actively shaping its impact.

AI has already proven useful in early alert systems and predictive analytics, helping us identify students who need support before they fall behind. We believe that AI has the potential to take this further, helping personalize learning, streamline services, and create chances for employees to focus on higher-value work.

AI and the Changing Workforce

Generative AI is transforming the world of work. It's redefining roles, reshaping expectations, and accelerating the shift from routine tasks to those requiring critical thinking, creativity, and human connection.

Entry-level jobs now mirror the complexity of mid-level roles, prompting institutions like Lane to rethink how we prepare students and support employees. Understandably, many across sectors, including our own, are anxious about AI's impact. At Lane, we view this not as a threat but as a call to lead with purpose.

Our role is to guide students, employees, and industry partners through this transition. That includes helping individuals reskill, supporting professionals in using AI to elevate their work, and assisting employers in defining evolving skill sets.

To support this, we launched the Fusion Lab, a space for faculty and staff to explore AI tools and grow in confidence. AI literacy is more than technical; it's about ethics, strategy, and finding the right solutions.

AI as a Tool for Access and Belonging

One of the most exciting possibilities of AI is its ability to expand access and create belonging.

AI-powered tools such as real-time language translation, adaptive learning platforms, and accessibility features can remove barriers for students who might otherwise struggle. Lane is committed to ensuring that AI serves as a tool for inclusion, not exclusion.

Looking Ahead

AI is already here, and its impact is only growing. Our role as higher education leaders is to shape AI's use thoughtfully, ethically, and strategically. Some institutions will take a wait-and-see approach, but Lane is seizing this moment to lead with intention.

For me, AI is about people. It's about using technology to create more opportunities, support students in meaningful ways, and prepare people in an evolving world.

As we move forward, I will continue to champion an approach to AI that is human-centered, responsible, and focused on the success of our students, employees, and community.

Students' Dilemma: Use AI or Not?

By Darla Nunez

Student, Golden West College, Huntington Beach; and Trustee, Coast Community College District, Costa Mesa

Does AI know everything?

Based on my experience, AI does not always deliver the correct answer.

As a student navigating the fluctuating waters of how AI should (or should not) be used in the classroom, I find it challenging. Some professors encourage AI use, while others deem it cheating. This confusion highlights a bigger issue: There is no clear statewide academic policy for AI in education.

Without formal, unified guidelines, institutions are left to create their own policies.

This inconsistency causes stress, confusion, and even inequality among students. I'm currently taking a difficult chemistry course. A fellow student mentioned that their professor encouraged them to use ChatGPT to ask questions, understand concepts, and prepare for exams. It's true that professors don't have the time to give every student one-on-one support, so AI can help fill that gap. But advice like this might be interpreted as a green light to use AI broadly, without clear boundaries.

STEM students often take the maximum allowed credits to benefit from the California College Promise Grant, leaving them little time to seek help. Many turn to AI to complete homework or understand assignments. I've personally used AI to understand a lab report, but my professor told me it was wrong and inappropriate even though I didn't copy anything, and the formulas I got from AI were incorrect.

On the other hand, a different professor in the same department said another student submitted a report that was "clearly AI" and was incorrect.

So which is it? Are we supposed to use AI or not?

Chemistry demands precision such as significant figures, correct formulas, and detailed procedures. There's less room for finding your own way, unlike in some other subjects. If AI tools give wrong answers or students misunderstand how to apply them, their grades can suffer. Worse, students may be accused of academic dishonesty just for using tools they thought were permitted. The problem is not just the tool, but the unclear rules around using it.

It's confusing and frustrating to receive mixed messages about what's acceptable, especially from professors within the same department. This lack of consistency forces students to constantly question whether they're crossing a line. While we're encouraged to use resources to succeed, not all resources are treated equally from one classroom to another

AI is a powerful learning resource, but inconsistent guidelines make it difficult for both students and professors to know how to use it responsibly. As AI continues to grow, it's essential that state and institutional leaders adopt clear and consistent policies that support learning while upholding academic integrity. Students shouldn't be held to different standards by different professors. Every syllabus should clearly state how AI can and cannot be used, with examples.

Faculty and staff need a shared understanding and clear district guidelines to help administer fair rules that foster learning and maintain trust in education.

Questions to Ask Yourself About AI

By Dr. Gilberto Cardenas

Interim Director,
Special Projects-Innovation,
Santiago Community College,
Orange

In his book, "The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy," renowned sociologist Manuel Castells suggests that in a knowledge-based society, those who can adapt are more likely to thrive.

As classified staff at a community college, we are knowledge workers in this technological society. Our roles are dynamic — one moment responding to multiple emails, the next processing data requests, building reports or referencing board policies, all while ensuring our work is done timely and accurately. The demands of our work continue to evolve, especially as we are asked to do more with less.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed our understanding of the traditional college. No longer just a brick-and-mortar institution, it is a hub serving all types of students from in-person to online modalities. This shift has redefined how we engage with knowledge and technology in our daily work. Fortunately, AI has not only kept pace with these changes but has become a valuable collaborator in navigating them.

I first encountered AI in 2017 with IBM Watson. At the time, it seemed like a novelty; I used Chef Watson to generate recipes from random ingredients, but it was not very tasty.

However, as AI advanced, so did my curiosity. When ChatGPT became widely available, what once seemed futuristic was now easily accessible. AI was no longer just a tool; it became a resource that expanded possibilities.

My imagination was the only limitation to what I could accomplish.

For me, AI is not just artificial intelligence. It represents Advanced Imagination, a tool that amplifies creativity, automates tedious processes, and serves as a collaborator in our work. It is also a trainer and lifelong learning partner, helping us expand our knowledge, gather insights, and craft solutions to everyday challenges. More importantly, AI allows us to reimagine what is possible in our roles.

I invite you to identify your own "I" in AI:

- **What if I could automate my work?**

Before AI, analyzing reports was a long and tedious process. Creating automation tools was equally time-consuming, sometimes taking months. Now, I can generate automation tools instantly.

- **What if I could learn new technologies faster?**

I can upload screenshots or manuals to AI and receive quick explanations, eliminating hours of troubleshooting.

- **What if I could understand the legalese of board policies, administrative regulations, and union contracts?**

AI-powered custom chatbots allow me to interact with and reference these documents efficiently, saving hours of research.

What are your "What if I" questions?

As an administrative assistant, I have often thought, "Wouldn't it be nice to have an assistant?"

Exploring agentic AI, also known as AI agents, has allowed me to create specialized virtual assistants, each with expertise in different fields, enhancing my work and decision-making. In the end I am working smarter, not harder.

Castells was right: In a knowledge-driven society, adaptability is key to success.

I encourage my colleagues to embrace AI, not as a replacement, but as your creative partner.

What could you accomplish with **A**dvance **I**magination?

Meeting AI's Challenges Head On

By Lee D. Lambert, J.D.

Chancellor and CEO,
Foothill-De Anza Community College District,
Los Altos Hills

I first encountered ChatGPT at a reception in Washington, D.C., where someone explained how this generative AI technology could produce text, images, and audio. Intrigued, I decided to explore its capabilities when I returned home to Tucson, Arizona.

One of my first prompts was a simple question: Did Mao have a son? ChatGPT responded quickly: No. However, I knew this was incorrect — his son died during the Korean War. When I challenged the response, the system promptly apologized for the mistake.

That moment sparked my deep fascination with AI, a technology that not only provides information but also learns and corrects itself.

At Foothill-De Anza, and throughout my career, I've seen how technology can break down barriers for students. AI has the power to do the same, but only if we lead its integration with intention and equity. The crucial question isn't what AI will do, but how we leverage it to further student success, workforce development, and social and economic mobility.

AI's Transformative Potential

AI offers immense opportunities. Imagine personalized learning experiences, real-time student feedback, and streamlined pathways to in-demand careers. For faculty, AI can reduce administrative burdens, freeing time for deeper student engagement. Institutions can leverage AI-driven insights for better resource allocation, improved operations, and stronger community service.

As a college student in the mid 1980s, I recall a critical interaction with my faculty member in which he provided honest feedback on my writing abilities. Thanks to his support, I became a better writer and communicator.

That moment was transformative. What if AI could create that same special magic? What if it could provide critical feedback and support to many students on a grander scale? AI has the potential to replicate and scale those meaningful learning moments, ensuring that every student receives personalized, high-quality feedback. not just for those lucky enough to have a pivotal mentor at the right time.

However, AI also presents significant challenges: algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, and the digital divide. If higher education doesn't actively shape AI's implementation, external forces will, often disconnected from our mission and students.

Proactive engagement is essential. AI integration must prioritize access and inclusion, ensuring it enhances, rather than replaces, the human element central to quality education.

Shaping AI for Equity and Innovation

At Foothill-De Anza, in partnership with the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the founding California community college partners of the Digital Center for Innovation, Transformation, and Equity, we are actively rethinking AI integration across all areas, from curriculum design to student support.

We are grappling with critical questions:

• How do we ensure AI benefits all students, regardless of digital access?

• How do we prepare faculty and staff to use AI effectively for innovation?

• How do we align AI with our values of equity, social justice, and economic mobility?

Preparing for an AI-Driven Workforce

This is not a hypothetical exercise. The workforce is evolving rapidly, demanding an AI-ready generation. We must equip students not just with technical skills, but also with critical thinking and adaptability to thrive in an AI-driven economy.

Community colleges are engines of social and economic mobility. We cannot be passive observers. We must lead this AI transformation. At Foothill-De Anza and the Digital Center for Innovation, Transformation, and Equity, we embrace this challenge, recognizing that the future belongs to those who embrace change.

AI as a Powerful Tool for Well-being

By Dr. Maniphone Souphanya Dickerson

Vice President, Strategic Partnerships & Workforce Innovations, San José City College

As a refugee from Laos and a first-generation college student, I express a keen interest in technology, stemming from my initial exposure during my journey to the United States. My perspective has evolved from simple curiosity about machines to becoming an adapter of generative artificial intelligence.

Having spent over 25 years in higher education, including nine years in Silicon Valley, I have witnessed the explosive growth of generative AI. The rapid proliferation of AI startups, or "unicorns" and "decacorns," ($1 billion and $10 billion in funding) has created a sense of both awe and apprehension.

Initially, I utilized AI to assist with drafting templates for charts and diagrams. However, my use of AI has expanded to encompass self-care.

Recognizing a personal weakness in developing effective self-care strategies, I turned to AI-powered health applications. For example, consider **Earkick** and **Replika**. Both AI are a series of chatbots focused on providing real-time conversation, guided self-care sessions, mental well-being, and self-reflection.

However, I am mindful that generative AI is in an early stage of its evolution, so I use these essential practices:

• Be mindful of the privacy implications of sharing personal data with AI self-care applications;

• Seek professional guidance, because AI self-care tools should not replace professional medical or mental health care; and

• As AI becomes increasingly sophisticated, critically evaluate the information provided by AI self-care applications.

Beyond health, AI plays a role in my retirement fiscal planning. My investment portfolio utilizes AI to analyze earning potential across various investments, providing a financial outlook.

For example, **Mint** tracks my budget for future retirement savings.

I have not moved to be a super user of investment AI yet, such as adopting **Plum**. This AI application contributes to an overall sense of financial well-being, which many investors consider a crucial aspect of self-care.

In essence, the AI tools that I use provide efficiency in my mental brain space, giving a sense of clarity of both myself and to what levels in self-care I need to next proceed.

I have highlighted the growing integration of AI into various aspects of my daily life, in health management and financial planning, and underscored its potential to empower me to be better and improve my pursuit of well-being.

*Google's **Gemini** and Anthropic's **Claude.ai** were used to re-read and analyze the first and second drafts of this article based on my original thoughts and writing.*

Viewing AI Through an Equity Lens

By Reza Mirbeik, Ed.D.

Associate Professor of Mathematics, School of Continuing Education, Santa Ana College

As a faculty member in the Santa Ana College School of Continuing Education, my relationship with artificial intelligence has grown and shifted over the past year.

At first, I approached AI tools with curiosity, but also caution. Like many faculty, I wasn't sure what this technology would mean for my role as an educator or for the academic integrity of student learning.

Over time, though, I've come to see how AI can support and not replace the teaching and learning process.

For example, I've used tools like ChatGPT to brainstorm lesson plans, clarify communication in emails, and even scaffold complex math topics for students. These tools have allowed me to be more efficient and responsive in my work, particularly with adult learners who often bring a wide range of academic backgrounds, languages, and life experiences into the classroom.

From an equity standpoint, AI has the potential to level the playing field by offering students just-in-time language support, alternative explanations, and personalized reinforcement when the instructor isn't immediately available.

I'm also part of a pilot program in the California Community Colleges system using an AI assistant designed to support students within the course. This tool learns from the syllabus, weekly content, and materials I upload. It allows students to ask questions about assignments or concepts, and I can control how much help it gives. I've set it up to act more like a tutor, guiding students step by step instead of giving them direct answers.

For students who may feel hesitant to ask questions or who are juggling work and family obligations, this kind of AI access can help reduce barriers and promote greater engagement and confidence.

One moment that stood out to me was when a student was struggling with unit conversions in a math lab. Instead of coming to me, she asked the AI assistant how to approach the problem. The assistant walked her through the steps, helping her think through the process. Later, the student told me she felt more confident because she figured it out on her own. That interaction reminded me that, when used intentionally, AI can encourage independence and build confidence especially for students who may not have had prior academic success or support systems.

At the same time, I do have concerns.

Many students now use publicly available AI models outside of what we offer institutionally, and these tools often provide full solutions with little effort. This challenges traditional assessments and makes it harder to measure real learning. It also raises equity concerns: Students with access to advanced tools and digital literacy may benefit more, while others may fall.

I don't view AI as a threat; I see it as something we need to adapt to thoughtfully. But faculty need time and support to redesign courses that work within this new environment. We also need institutional leadership that prioritizes equity by ensuring all students have access to ethical, supportive AI tools and the skills to use them responsibly.

Looking ahead, I'm optimistic. With intentional use and thoughtful design, I believe AI can help us personalize learning, reduce equity gaps, and empower students especially when paired with strong teaching, a culturally responsive mindset, and human connection.

Finding AI's Role In Your Workflow

By Rick MacLennan

Chancellor,
Ventura Community College District

When invited to write this article, I immediately turned to my go-to AI applications. How could I resist?

It produced a beautiful essay that felt close to my own voice, yet it confidently filled gaps it couldn't possibly know about me or my experiences. The guesses were good and even believable, but they missed the mark.

Throughout my higher education journey, maintaining a high degree of technological literacy has been a priority. I've typically been an early adopter. Yet my relationship with AI began hesitantly — not from skepticism, but from time constraints and the overwhelming potential of AI's transformational impact.

This hesitation created anxiety, keeping AI at the periphery of my professional toolkit longer than I'd have liked.

A familiar paradox emerged. A tool that might help manage my workload required an investment of the very resource I lacked: time. Meanwhile, the rapid advancement of AI technologies created a sense that I was falling behind, challenging my longtime commitment to technological literacy.

Then an opportunity appeared: an invitation to the three-day Community College CEO AI Leadership Bootcamp hosted by the **Leadership Institute for Tomorrow**. The luxury of dedicated time to focus on AI and learn from thought leaders and community college colleagues was irresistible, providing the space I needed to pursue my AI journey in earnest.

I've come to understand that engaging with AI isn't about mastering rapidly changing tools, but rather understanding how these technologies can augment and support my thinking. What I bring to the table remains essential, not replaced by AI but complemented by it. The learning curve has been manageable and intellectually invigorating.

AI has become an invaluable asset for supporting critical analysis and problem-solving. The most significant change has been how AI encourages me to think more deeply about complex topics. When preparing responses to board inquiries on complex subjects, for instance, AI helps me consider multiple nuanced perspectives I might have overlooked.

Rather than simplifying my thought process, AI has expanded it. I'm not necessarily spending less time on tasks, but the quality of that time and the resulting outcomes are dramatically better.

I've also appreciated how efficiently AI incorporates accurate data and technical knowledge into my work. It integrates information elegantly into the subject at hand, allowing me to focus on developing my narrative rather than gathering information. AI serves as a sounding board that challenges me to refine ideas and approach challenges with greater depth.

What does all of this mean for our district's three colleges? We're just beginning to have meaningful district-wide discussions on this topic. While thoughtful conversations about implementation and governance are emerging, we're still in early stages. The administrative team is beginning to explore AI's implications for operational efficiency and student support, and we recognize these conversations need to accelerate.

Based on my evolving experience with AI, it's imperative that I provide the time, space and encouragement our district and college leaders need to embrace their own journeys. In doing so, we must balance the promise of AI's potential with thoughtful consideration of its challenges and biases.

By approaching AI with curiosity and an investment of time, we can take our mission of creating hope and opportunity to a whole new level.

Students and their AI '*Aha*' Moment

By Shin Liu, Ph.D.

Trustee, Cerritos College;
and professor of Computer Science,
Rio Hondo College,
Whittier

I still remember when one of my students who had struggled with an abstract coding concept finally had an "*Aha!*" moment in 2024, thanks to AI-powered visualization.

Using **Canva AI**, we created a theater seating chart to illustrate a two-dimensional array. His eyes lit up as he exclaimed, "*I get it now!*"

That was when I knew AI wasn't just another tool — it was a game changer.

Throughout my career of 20 years in teaching, I have consistently sought new ways to engage students, but nothing has transformed my classroom quite like artificial intelligence.

Before AI, engaging an entire class in problem-solving was challenging. Now, I see students more motivated and eager to learn than ever before. With AI in the classroom, it feels like students have a genie at their fingertips, ready to assist them in their learning journey.

One of my favorite projects, Theater Ticketing, has transformed the way my students learn. With Mermaid Chart's **Mermaid AI**, they design coding roadmaps using flowcharts and pseudocode, making complex programming concepts approachable. AI has made coding an interactive and exciting experience.

Debugging, once a major frustration, is now an engaging learning process with NinjaTech AI's **Ninja AI** debugging tools. Instead of feeling overwhelmed, students gain confidence and are eager to tackle bigger challenges. The excitement is palpable, and not just for them, but for me as well. It's a joy to see students light up as they use AI to enhance their learning.

The classroom atmosphere becomes like an action-packed movie, where every student is engaged in solving challenges, rather than passively following instructions. Beyond student engagement, AI also improves my effectiveness as an instructor. I use AI to analyze student interactions in Canvas, export reports and leverage ChatGPT to generate insights. This helps me identify students who need extra support, adjust my teaching strategies, and improve overall course effectiveness.

While I fully embrace AI in my classroom, I also believe educators must use it wisely. Our goal isn't just to teach students *how* to use AI — it's to empower them to innovate, lead, and push its boundaries. Students are not just passive users of technology, but active problem solvers who can shape the future.

As a trustee at Cerritos College for 15 years, I have seen how education transforms lives. Community college students must not be left behind in this technological revolution. That's why I advocate for AI literacy across all disciplines, not just in my area of computer science, to ensure our students graduate with a competitive edge ready for the workforce of the future.

AI isn't just changing education — it's elevating it, and I'm excited to be part of this transformation.

10 BEST AI PRACTICES FOR HIGHER ED

By Meg Foster • Guest Columnist

Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a powerful tool for improving teaching, streamlining administrative tasks, and enhancing student support in higher education. To help faculty, staff, and administrators navigate this evolving landscape, here are ten best practices for effectively and ethically integrating AI into campus workflows.

1. Embrace AI as a Thought Partner

Instead of viewing AI as a replacement for creativity or expertise, leverage it as a brainstorming tool. For example, faculty can ask AI to generate alternative approaches to an assignment or identify gaps in a project plan. By prompting AI to ask clarifying questions, educators can refine their ideas and improve outcomes.

2. Build Foundational AI Skills

Completing professional development in AI, whether through micro-credentials, workshops, or self-directed learning, helps build confidence in experimenting with AI tools. Faculty and staff who develop foundational AI skills are better equipped to explore tools that align with their roles.

3. Prioritize Transparency in AI Use

Clear communication about how AI is used is essential. Transparency fosters trust and helps students understand how these tools can enhance their learning.

4. Develop Clear AI Use Policies

Institutions should involve faculty, students, and staff in shaping AI guidelines. This collaborative approach ensures policies reflect educational values and address concerns about privacy, data security, and academic integrity.

5. Use AI to Improve Administrative Efficiency

AI can streamline time-consuming tasks. For instance, staff can create training documents in minutes, saving hours of manual effort. AI can also assist in data analysis, identifying trends and themes across institutional reports to improve decision-making.

6. Support Student Success with AI Tools

AI can assist students better manage time, offer tutoring support, and generate study aids like summaries or practice quizzes. By reducing barriers to comprehension and engagement, AI fosters greater confidence, retention, and academic success. **Comprehensive training help students to use AI effectively**.

7. Encourage Faculty and Student Collaboration

Consider integrating students into AI-focused professional development sessions. These shared learning environments allow faculty to better understand student concerns, while students gain valuable AI literacy skills that employers increasingly demand.

8. Leverage AI for Inclusive Practices

AI can help identify patterns of inequity in data and improve services for marginalized student groups. Additionally, AI tools can help address language barriers, giving students — especially those who are English language learners — more equitable access to educational resources.

9. Foster a Culture of Experimentation

Rather than feeling pressure to master every AI tool, higher ed teams should focus on small-scale experimentation in their area of expertise.

10. Embrace Continuous Learning

AI technology will continue to evolve, and higher education professionals should approach it as an ongoing learning process.

Collaborating with colleagues, sharing successful strategies, and participating in professional development will help you stay adaptable. Learn more with Innovative Educators' **AI focused micro-credential for faculty and staff**.

By implementing these best practices, higher education teams, from presidents to student workers, can harness AI to improve learning experiences, streamline operations, and foster student success while maintaining ethical standards and a student-centered focus.

About Meg Foster

Meg Foster is a first year experience instructor at Piedmont Virginia Community College and serves as an online learning & design specialist and consultant for Innovative Educators.

An educator dedicated to student access and success, Meg has 20 years of online and campus-based FYE teaching experience. While at Reynolds Community College in Virginia, Meg developed orientation programming for online and on-campus students and supported the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Her areas of research include best practices in online learning, college preparation, enrollment and retention. She has presented at many national conferences on issues related to college student success.

Meg previously served as an assistant dean of admissions at Salem College in North Carolina and Virginia Wesleyan College. She earned an M.A. in College Student Personnel Administration from the University of Maryland and a B.A. in History from the University of Virginia.

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