

# Higher Education Leaders Eager to Embrace AI and Transform Campus Operations



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# Higher education is navigating an uncharted landscape.

Since the introduction of ChatGPT in late 2022, the education market has witnessed a surge in new Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools.

Education, alongside many other industries, has expressed some concerns about the usage of AI. While some view AI as a game-changer that will “revolutionize” our education system, others worry about the potential for bias and an overreliance on technology among students and higher education professionals.

It’s essential that we approach these new developments with a critical eye, while also acknowledging the significance of AI in our lives. By taking a proactive stance and shaping our interactions with these powerful tools, we can ensure that they serve us well in the future.



## What can AI do?

At its core, AI specializes in processing large amounts of data to inform the desired output, whether a data point or a recommendation. Higher education institutions are currently exploring ways to harness data’s full potential, but they are merely scratching the surface with current tools.

Imagine a program that releases staff from administrative duties, allowing them to focus on developing meaningful relationships with students, or a tool that can analyze an incoming student’s profile and recommend career tracks with an accompanying course of study when class registration opens. For institutional leaders, the ability to leverage predictive enrollment data specific to their institution and plan accordingly to meet financial goals and foster growth will be critical.

## Understanding AI Sentiment in Higher Education

In late June, we surveyed 1,000+ administrators from 768 unique institutions across the United States (Appendix Figure A), delving into their aspirations and fears concerning AI adoption. This report outlines the four key findings from that survey – while acknowledging that these insights are only the beginning.

AI can potentially have a vast impact across the higher education industry and within an individual institution.

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INSIGHT 1

# Higher education administrators are excited to use AI at their institutions.

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, a compelling narrative of optimism surrounds the integration of AI technology. More than 70% of respondents hold a favorable view of AI and its potential in their professional work. A deeper dive into the findings highlights that this enthusiasm is widespread among different administrative roles and underscores the anticipation of AI's positive effects on diverse aspects of institutional operations.

**70%+**  
of respondents hold a favorable view of AI and its potential in their professional work.

## How willing are you to embrace AI technologies? 1,477 Responses

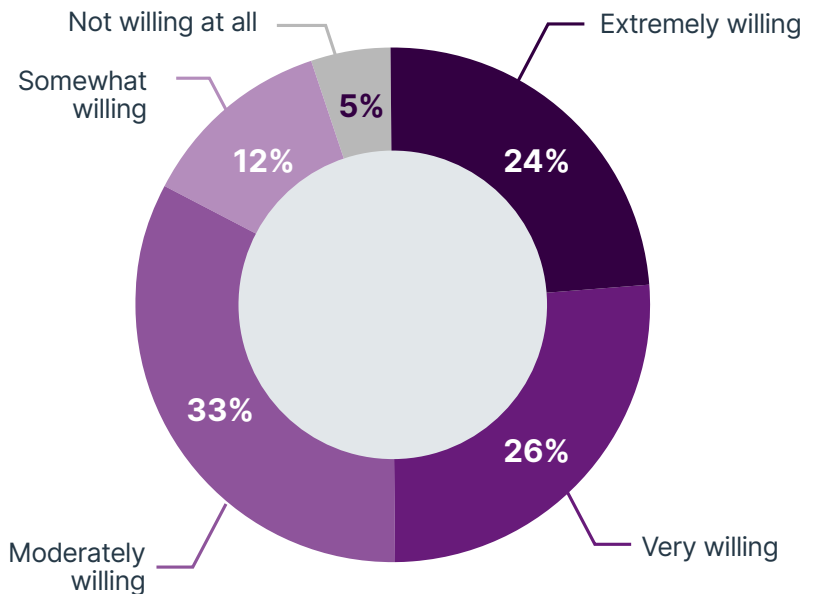


Figure 1: Perspectives on AI

### What are they excited about?

From enhanced individual efficiency to developing a sharper understanding of technological advancements, the anticipated positive impacts are as varied as they are promising. About half of respondents expect that the positive effects of AI will also span the student experience, from better supporting the student journey to improving student outcomes at their institution.

## Top 3 Factors Driving Interest in AI

- 1 Improving efficiency in completing a task
- 2 Better supporting students and student outcomes
- 3 Staying up to date with technological advancements in society

## How do you perceive the potential impact of AI on your department/business function?

1,061 Responses



Figure 2: Sentiment on AI

The correlation between knowledge and perception is intriguing — the data shows a clear connection. The more informed administrators are about AI's capabilities and nuances, the more optimistic their perspective. As the education sector continues to explore innovative avenues, the prevailing sentiment among administrators underscores a collective curiosity and excitement regarding AI's role in shaping the future of higher education.

# AI usage is siloed and rudimentary across higher education.

The possibilities AI can unlock at institutions are limitless, yet the research has revealed a significant gap between perceived institutional engagement and actual individual experience.

## Is AI being widely used by higher education administrators?

- **Nearly 60% of administrators claim their institution uses AI**, but reported personal usage paints a different picture.
- **Less than a third of higher education professionals have personally engaged with AI in their work**, which indicates the isolated nature of institutional implementation.
- **Almost 48% have yet to utilize AI in personal or professional capacities**, while more than 32% report using AI at work.

When we look more closely at how AI is used among those identifying personal and/or work usage, the understanding of AI's potential use cases appears nascent. **A considerable percentage (30%) identify basic information retrieval as the primary function** rather than the more advanced analytical and predictive capabilities that will result in a truly transformative higher education experience.

## How familiar are you with Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

1,480 Responses

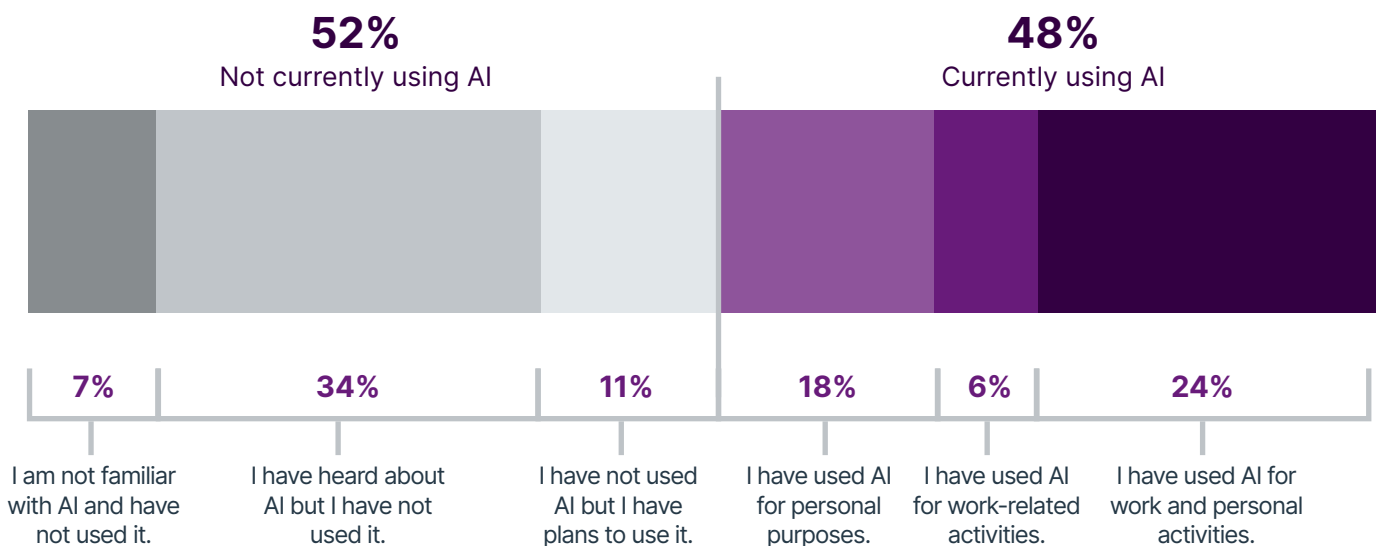


Figure 3: Familiarity with AI

**We asked higher education administrators to identify how they leverage AI based on the following categories:**






					
	<b>Draft</b>	<b>Assist</b>	<b>Fetch</b>	<b>Analyze</b>	<b>Proactive</b>
<b>EXAMPLES</b>	Writing outreach emails to prospective students	Automating scheduling tools	24/7 chatbot to answer questions and retrieve information	Identifying at-risk student; analytics to inform decision-making	Forecast enrollment trends, recommending student interventions
	User prompts generally start with:				Does not require prompt from user
	"Draft..."	"Prepare..."	"What..."	"Analyze..."	Recommending
	"Create..."	"Schedule..."	"Where..."	"Forecast..."	Summarizing
	"Write..."	"Provide..."	"When..."	"Compare..."	Scanning

Figure 4: AI Categories of Support

Note: Categories are based on initial research across technology leaders and internal domain research.

“It would be amazing if we had an AI tool that would walk students through any issues they encounter while using self-service, something to explain what the error means and what steps to take next. Or an AI to help staff members determine where our institution store information and how to use those forms.”

**Systems & Data Management Director,  
Pacific Northwestern 4-year Institution**



# AI will have a transformative role in institutional analytics, admissions, and advising.

AI's potential to catalyze innovation at institutions can take many forms. It presents several possibilities for transformative impact, from the analytical complexities of robust datasets to the intricate coordination required of our student-facing staff.

When asked to pinpoint areas with the most potential for AI, administrators focused on a few distinct domains:

- **Institutional Research and Analytics**
- **Admissions**
- **Advising**

“We need to learn more about [AI], and practical ways we can apply it to advance our operations and improve student success.”

University Registrar,  
Southwestern 4-year Institution

## In what areas or business functions of your institution do you believe AI could be most beneficial?

1,235 Responses

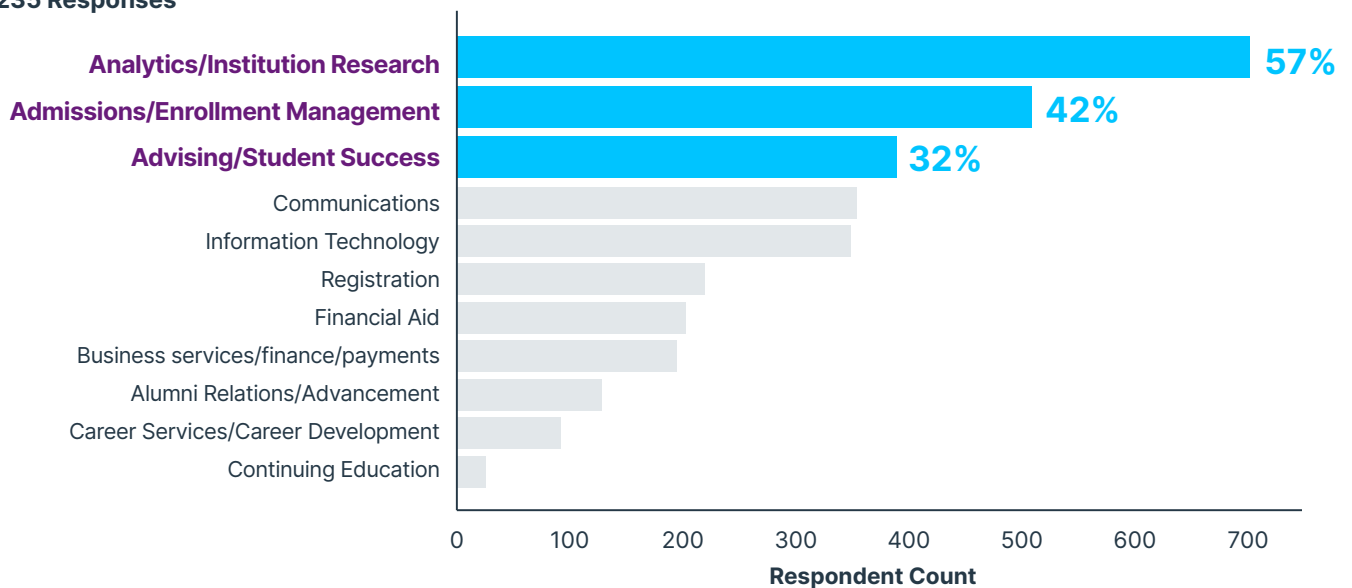


Figure 5: Impact of AI on Business Functions



# The potential impact of AI on...



## Institutional Research & Analytics

*Streamlined processes, optimization, and a seamless learning experience*

### Examples of what AI can do:

- Analyze historical data on classroom utilization, faculty availability, and student enrollment patterns
- Generate optimized class schedules that minimize conflicts, maximize room utilization, and evenly distribute teaching loads

This ensures a seamless learning experience for students and enhances faculty satisfaction by eliminating scheduling challenges. As a result, you witness reduced operational costs, increased utilization of campus spaces, and improved academic outcomes – all while freeing up valuable time for other strategic decision-making and improving the faculty and staff experience.



## Admissions & Enrollment

*Personalization, meaningful connections, and an engaged student body*

### Examples of what AI can do:

- Personalize communication with prospective students in real time
- Address inquiries promptly and provide tailored guidance
- Offer insights into enrollment trends with predictive analytics

Staff can focus on nurturing meaningful connections with applicants and refine recruitment strategies to meet institutional targets. Prospective students benefit from a streamlined application experience. In the end, campuses are able to optimize the admissions journey, paving the way for a diverse and engaged student body.



## Advising & Student Success

*Tailored support, proactive intervention, and academic success*

### Examples of what AI can do:

- Provide a comprehensive view of each student's academic journey
- Identify potential challenges and opportunities for tailored support
- Foresee academic roadblocks using predictive analytics and enable proactive interventions

This technology also equips staff to offer personalized recommendations for courses and resources, ensuring students receive precisely the guidance they need. Streamlining administrative tasks through AI automation frees up more time for meaningful one-on-one interactions, fostering stronger student relationships and enhancing overall academic success for all students.

**...and across many more business functions in higher education.**

# Successful AI adoption must include ethical implementation and robust data sources.

The journey toward successful AI adoption in higher education requires a targeted effort to address current barriers. The foundation of robust and reliable data sources lies at the heart of building robust AI capabilities. Yet only 30% of respondents indicate advanced or extensive utilization of data analytics and data-driven decision-making at their institutions.

While AI can certainly support capacity-building in institutional data analytics, an AI tool will only be as impactful as the data it has access to. The time for institutions to ensure data fits their future needs is now — not when the AI tool has already been integrated into campus systems.



“I’d love to have a learning environment for getting acquainted with AI capabilities — in particular with data that’s relevant to higher education. I’d jump into a training platform like that very quickly!”

Systems & Data Management Director,  
Pacific Northwestern 4-year Institution

## How do you address common barriers to AI implementation?

Introducing an AI tool often poses more questions than answers. To facilitate effective AI integration for teams, institutional leaders must confront barriers that may inhibit quality adoption. Paramount among these challenges are data security and administrator training.

Fortunately, 70% of respondents desire training programs, recognizing the need for additional support. Ethical considerations also emerge as a significant facet. The survey results underscore the demand for guidance on the ethical implementation of AI, as less than a third of institutions have initiated conversations on this topic.

The journey toward transformative outcomes and successful AI adoption starts with a strong foundation by addressing barriers like data quality, training, and ethical considerations.

# Here's how institutions can succeed with AI.

## Foster a culture of exploration and discourse.

By encouraging conversations and facilitating exploration of the tools, institutions can help everyone learn together. This creates a welcoming environment where institutions can debunk common concerns and discuss ethical usage from the onset.

## Think beyond ChatGPT.

Leaders need to think outside the box. Spending time identifying the most impactful use cases for individual institutions will help streamline implementation. AI will be most impactful when used to address each institution's unique needs.

## Prepare institutional data to be set up for success in an AI environment.

Institutions to ensure their data is organized to be processed by an external tool. Key decisions must be made to determine what data will produce the most meaningful insights for the institution's end goal. AI is only as smart as the data institutions feed it.

## Provide targeted training and development.

Specialized training will empower administrators to leverage tools appropriately and often. Institutions must offer continued support to help build confidence in AI and find innovative ways to incorporate AI in administrators' day-to-day lives.

**We are hopeful about the impact of AI in higher education and excited by the creative ways institutions will leverage AI tools to best support faculty, staff, and students.**

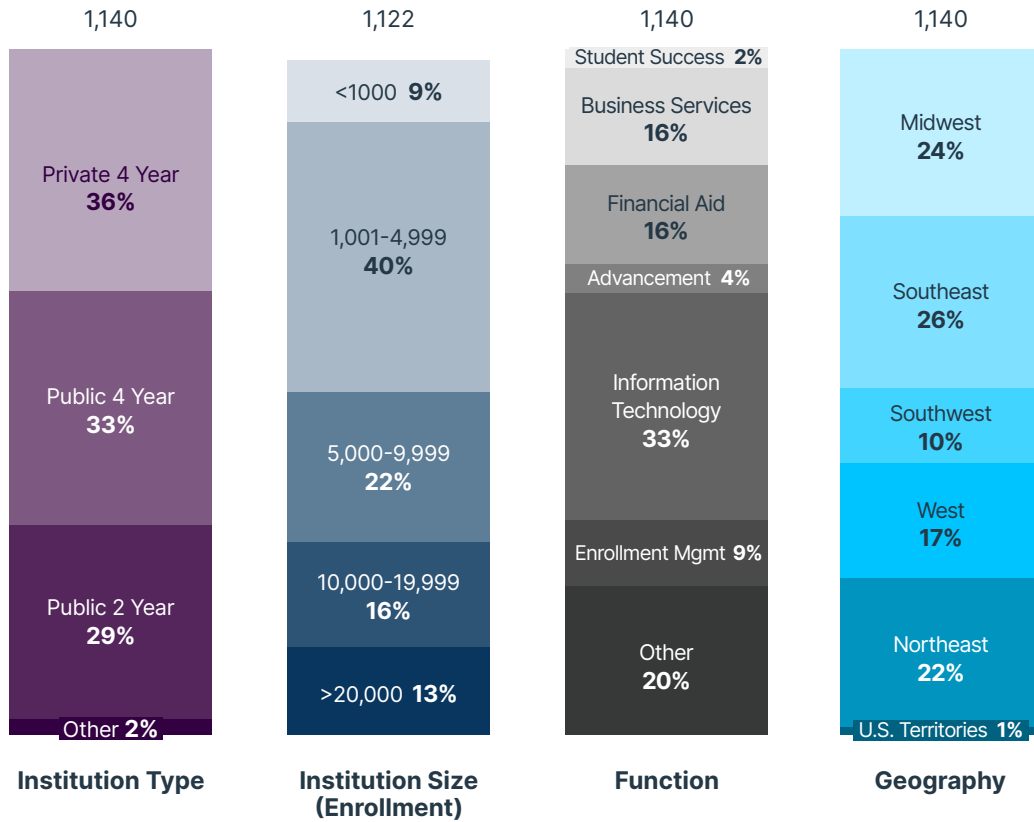
## ABOUT ELLUCIAN

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# APPENDIX

Appendix Figure A

## Respondents included 1K+ higher education administrators across a representative sample of our customer pipeline



Appendix Figure B

## What are the main factors driving your institution's interest in adopting AI?

