

Weekly AI in Higher Education Report - April 24, 2026

Executive Summary

- **Public Skepticism vs. Importance:** A new Quinnipiac University survey reveals that while 75% of Americans believe it is important for college students to learn how to use AI, 47% think students are more likely to use it to avoid learning rather than to enhance it [1].
- **Shift to Oral Exams:** In response to AI-assisted cheating and perfect take-home assignments, a growing number of university professors are turning to oral exams and in-person assessments to evaluate critical thinking and ensure students are actually learning the material [2].
- **AI for Constructive Dialogue:** Institutions are experimenting with AI-powered platforms to foster civil dialogue and address student polarization. While AI coaches show promise in building dialogue skills, using AI as a mediator or debate partner presents significant risks [3].
- **Workforce Readiness Gap:** A Pearson and AWS report highlights that 53% of employers struggle to find graduates with the right AI skills, and only 28% believe universities are keeping up with AI-driven changes in the workforce [4].
- **Positive Impact of AI Teaching Assistants:** Empirical research indicates that AI teaching assistants significantly improve student learning outcomes, particularly for low- and mid-performing students, when combined with knowledge-reflective questioning strategies [5].
- **New National Legislative Framework:** The White House has proposed a national AI legislative framework aimed at establishing uniform federal standards, preempting state regulations, and incorporating AI skills training into education and workforce programs [6].
- **Enterprise AI Platforms:** Ellucian launched “Ellucian Student,” a unified AI-native SaaS platform designed to automate campus workflows and align

resources around student success, signaling a shift toward enterprise-wide AI integration in higher education [7].

Major News and Developments

Public Opinion on AI in Higher Education

A recent Quinnipiac University survey highlights a complex public sentiment regarding artificial intelligence on college campuses. The survey found that nearly 75% of Americans consider it important for students to be taught how to use AI. However, there is significant skepticism about its application; 47% of respondents believe students are more likely to use AI to avoid learning, compared to 42% who think it will be used as a learning aid. Interestingly, younger generations (18- to 34-year-olds) are the most skeptical, with 58% believing students will use AI to bypass learning, suggesting that those most familiar with the technology are also the most aware of its potential for misuse [1].

The Return of Oral Exams

As generative AI tools become increasingly sophisticated, producing flawless take-home essays and problem sets, educators are struggling to assess true student comprehension. In response, a growing number of professors at institutions like Cornell University, the University of Pennsylvania, and New York University are reviving oral exams. These face-to-face assessments, ranging from 20-minute “oral defenses” of written work to AI-powered voice agents conducting exams, aim to evaluate critical thinking and ensure students are not simply outsourcing their cognitive effort to chatbots. While some educators worry about student anxiety, many report that oral exams foster better engagement and accountability [2].

AI and Student Polarization

With college campuses experiencing heightened political polarization, some institutions are turning to AI to help foster constructive dialogue. Organizations like the Constructive Dialogue Institute (CDI) are piloting AI chatbots to coach students on active listening and perspective-taking in difficult conversations. A recent CDI white paper suggests that AI is most effective and least risky when used as a constrained “coach” to build individual skills. However, deploying AI as a mediator or debate

partner introduces significant risks, such as making false equivalencies or overly persuading students with misleading information [3].

The AI Skills Gap in the Workforce

A new report from Pearson and Amazon Web Services underscores a growing disconnect between higher education and employer needs regarding AI skills. While 78% of higher education leaders believe they are meeting employer expectations, only 28% of employers agree. Furthermore, 53% of employers cite finding graduates with appropriate AI skills as their main challenge. The report emphasizes that basic AI literacy is no longer sufficient; students need applied workplace capabilities. This highlights an urgent need for universities to integrate practical AI training into their curricula to ensure workforce readiness [4].

Institutional Implementations

Ellucian Launches Unified AI Platform

Ellucian, a major higher education technology provider, announced the launch of “Ellucian Student,” an AI-native SaaS platform that unifies student information systems, human capital management, and finance. Built with agentic AI, the platform aims to automate mission-critical workflows, identify student risk factors earlier, and provide intuitive digital experiences. This launch represents a significant step toward enterprise-wide AI adoption in higher education, moving beyond isolated tools to integrated, intelligent systems that support the entire student lifecycle [7].

Rasmussen University Adopts D2L Brightspace

Rasmussen University has selected D2L Brightspace to replace its previous learning management system. The transition aims to enhance content creation through AI and deliver more personalized learning experiences. Rasmussen will utilize D2L Lumi, an AI-native offering that provides personalized study recommendations for learners and helps educators build immersive content. This implementation highlights the growing trend of institutions leveraging AI-integrated platforms to improve both student support and instructional design efficiency [8].

Research and Studies

Impact of AI Teaching Assistants on Learning Outcomes

A recent empirical study published in *Education and Information Technologies* investigated the effects of AI teaching assistants on student learning. The results demonstrated that students using AI teaching assistants scored an average of 9.09 points higher than non-users, with a 36.04% reduction in grade variability. The positive impact was particularly notable among low- and mid-performing students. Crucially, the study found that the quality of interaction matters more than frequency; students employing “knowledge-reflective” questioning strategies saw significant benefits, whereas those using “copy-pasting” strategies did not [5].

Institutional Approaches to Generative AI Management

A systematic literature review published in *Frontiers in Education* examined how higher education institutions govern and implement generative AI. The review of 50 studies found that effective adoption relies on mature governance, including coherent multi-unit oversight, clear academic integrity standards, and risk-based data governance. While evidence shows operational gains and improved student learning when supported by pedagogical scaffolding, challenges persist. These include risks of academic misconduct, privacy concerns, and inequitable access, emphasizing the need for embedded governance structures and sustained faculty development [9].

Policy and Guidelines Updates

White House Proposes National AI Legislative Framework

The White House released a national policy framework for artificial intelligence, outlining legislative recommendations aimed at establishing uniform federal standards. For higher education, key aspects of the framework include a call for Congress to incorporate AI skills training into education and workforce programs. The framework also seeks to preempt state AI laws to prevent a patchwork of regulations, while emphasizing child safety, intellectual property rights, and American technological competitiveness. This federal push could significantly influence how universities develop AI curricula and manage AI-related research and data [6].

AI Reshaping Higher Ed Workplaces

An EDUCAUSE report on the impact of AI in higher education workplaces reveals a gap in policy awareness and training. While 94% of surveyed higher ed employees have used AI tools for work recently, only 54% are aware of their institution's AI policies. Furthermore, 80% of institutions encourage self-directed AI skill development, but only 71% offer formal professional learning opportunities. The report recommends that institutions better communicate AI strategies, provide formal training, and collect data on employee AI usage to mitigate risks associated with unapproved tools [10].

Emerging Trends

- **Shift from Detection to Assessment Redesign:** Rather than relying solely on AI detection tools, which are often flawed, faculty are increasingly redesigning assessments. The resurgence of oral exams, in-class writing, and project-based evaluations reflects a broader movement to assess the *process* of learning rather than just the final artifact.
- **AI as a Coaching Tool:** The use of AI is expanding beyond content generation to personalized coaching. Whether it's guiding students through constructive dialogue exercises or providing tailored feedback on problem sets, AI is being leveraged to simulate one-on-one tutoring and mentorship at scale.
- **Enterprise-Level AI Integration:** Institutions are moving away from piecemeal AI adoption toward unified, enterprise-wide platforms. Solutions that integrate student data, financial systems, and learning management with embedded AI capabilities are becoming the new standard for campus operations.
- **Focus on Applied AI Skills:** Driven by employer demand, there is a growing emphasis on moving beyond basic AI literacy to teaching applied, discipline-specific AI skills. Universities are under pressure to ensure graduates can effectively and ethically use AI tools in professional settings.

Source Links

[1] Inside Higher Ed: [Survey: Americans Skeptical but View AI Use on Campus as Important](#) [2] WHY: [Why colleges are turning to oral exams to combat AI](#) [3] Inside Higher Ed: [College Students Are More Polarized Than Ever. Can AI Help?](#) [4] Higher Ed

Dive: [Employers say they struggle to find graduates with the right AI skillset](#) [5]
Springer: [How AI teaching assistant use affects students' learning outcomes: An empirical study on the differential effects of questioning strategies](#) [6] EDUCAUSE
Review: [White House Unveils National AI Legislative Framework](#) [7] Ellucian: [Ellucian Student Arrives — A Unified AI Platform Built for the Future of Higher Education](#) [8]
Yahoo Finance: [Rasmussen University Selects D2L Brightspace to Deliver Inclusive AI in Education](#) [9] Frontiers in Education: [Institutional Approaches to Generative AI Management in Higher Education: A systematic review](#) [10] EdTech Magazine: [AI is Reshaping Higher Ed Workplaces](#)