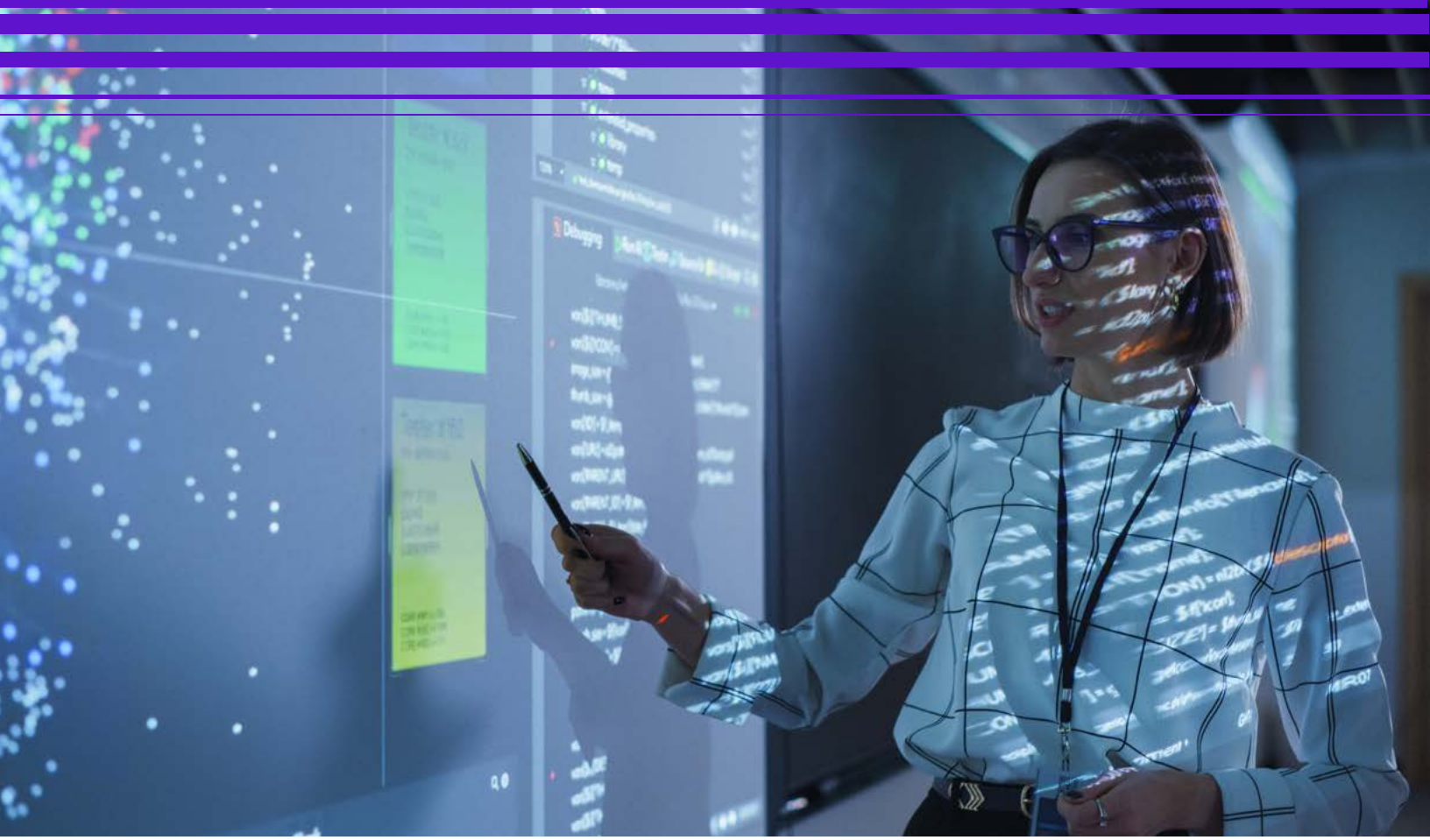
RESEARCH BRIEF

Will AI Reshape the Value Proposition of Higher Ed?



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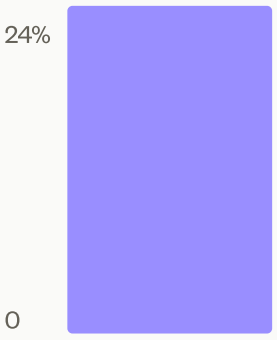
70% of higher ed is concerned that AI will reduce the perceived value of a traditional college degree.



Yet only 24% have taken action to reshape their future.

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Will AI Reshape the Value Proposition of Higher Ed?

By Michael Anft

Contact CI@chronicle.com with questions or comments.

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As they continue on with an often-turbulent rollout of generative artificial-intelligence (AI) tools, colleges are taking a fresh look at the value they offer students. Administrators and faculty members surveyed by *The Chronicle* say the technology is forcing institutions to re-examine what makes them essential.

Colleges are discussing or implementing changes in academic programs because of AI. Within the next five years, employers will demand AI literacy, but most institutions are unlikely to remake their academic programs for an AI-driven world or reduce their tuition.

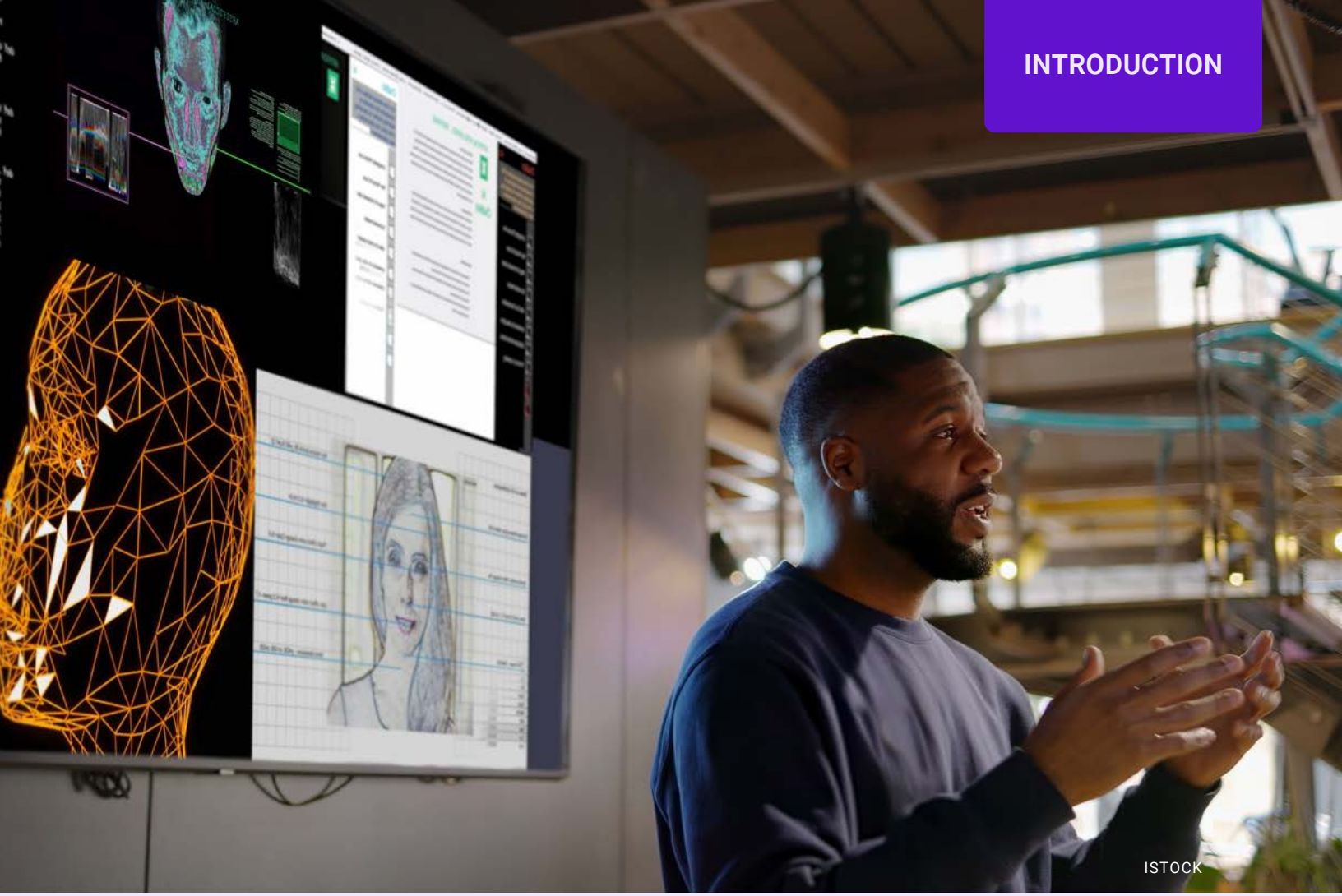
At the same time, the advent of AI has given rise to many fears about the future of higher education. College officials and faculty members are concerned that a traditional college degree is losing some of its luster.

Even as colleges reconsider their value propositions due to generative AI, it will be important to preserve in-person learning.

Wide differences in views exist between college leaders and faculty members. Administrators are much more likely to see faculty's role as preparing students for an AI-driven work force than faculty members themselves, while many more administrators see themselves as a guiding force in developing AI strategy than their faculty do.

The Chronicle's survey, conducted with support from CollegeVine, asked U.S. college leaders and faculty to assess how their institutions are adapting to AI and the role technology will play in the college economy and the future of higher education. More than 800 individuals — college administrators (431) and faculty members (412) — responded.

In addition, *The Chronicle* interviewed 10 college officials, faculty members, and thought leaders, and included their insights and analysis in the report.



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Oh AI, tormentor of human souls. It's hard to imagine any other deliverer of disruption spurring such a wide spectrum of jaw-dropping scenarios. No innovation in recent memory, save the atomic bomb, has been weighted with as much peril — or has held as lofty a promise of trillions of dollars in new wealth.

Depending on whom you talk to, AI will either lead humanity to a golden age of higher productivity and achievement or, according to one of its inventors, possibly wipe out humanity.

Generative AI could supercharge the economy, plunge it into a depression, fall short of the many claims of transformation that companies have made for it, or take much longer to confirm them.

AI threatens entire classes of jobs. Or doesn't. Or won't for a good while yet.

At times, it seems as if the word "existential" was minted just to describe generative AI's all-encompassing effects — or potential effects — on people and institutions. It's not for nothing that writers and social scientists continue to

argue about whether AI's major transformative power thus far is to make people crazy. "Three years into the hype, it seems that one of AI's enduring cultural impacts is to make people feel like they're losing it," writes Charlie Warzel for *The Atlantic*.

Measured against this collective hysteria, higher education's response to generative AI, while anxiety-ridden and often uncomprehending, could be characterized as rational. As college seniors take their classroom seats this fall — the first cohort to spend its entire undergraduate career alongside generative AI — institutions are more likely to see the technology as a gateway to efficiency, lower costs, and better student services.

The technology's developers and enthusiasts envision a brave new world in which admissions officers, freed up as AI answers basic queries online, have more time for deeper conversations with students and prospective ones. Or enrollment offices that use AI to improve their models draw in more students, while advisers use a new generation of time-saving diagnostic tools to help them keep more students on campus.

AI also offers the promise of personalized learning. Bots and digital tutors might be capable of amping up student success, while AI-led classroom improvements may lead to deeper discussions and simulations that make teaching and learning more engaging and effective.

Yet, for all the spilled ink and endless story links, the generative-AI crystal ball is suffused with murk. In many ways, new iterations of generative AI have disappointed users with miniscule gains in functionality. Colleges — even now, as they await better evidence of the plusses and minuses of the technology — are stuck in a tough spot: to move forward or not?

Yet, for all the spilled ink and endless story links, the generative-AI crystal ball is suffused with murk.

There are concerns that AI tools may not lead to the productivity gains that tech companies have trumpeted. A recent MIT Media Lab/Project NANDA study discovered that 95 percent of the businesses that had made investments in generative AI — up to $40 billion, total — had received no returns from them.

Meanwhile, the potential of the latest AI tools has become intertwined with renewed concerns about readying students for the jobs of the future. College leaders and others — including politicians and the public — are more likely these days to wonder whether higher education will be able to provide the job-market edge graduates have come to expect from a degree and whether AI can help prepare them for those jobs.

Early indications are difficult to parse. Recent graduates are having a hard time finding work. This year, their joblessness rate was higher than that of the total U.S. work-force population. Some worry that AI is already taking over some bottom-rung jobs that college grads have traditionally counted on to gain a foothold in the national economy. One AI company's chief executive predicts that the technology could raise the national unemployment rate to 20 percent within the next five years.

Despite an ostensible threat to jobs, AI is popular with current students who, typically, have made up the vanguard of early adopters on campus. Many use it to make their work more complete or to do assignments more efficiently, giving them more time for other college activities, families, and outside jobs.

Estimates vary, but a recent study by the Primary Research Group found that nearly two-thirds of students at four-year colleges in the United States use generative AI. At the same time, many question whether the tools represent a handmaid to student thinking or an enemy. A separate MIT Media Lab study found that students using the technology for essay assignments didn't exhibit the same levels of brain connectivity as two non-AI-using groups. Some warn of "the illusion of competence," with generative-AI busywork replacing real learning.

Though some college leaders have mostly shunted concerns about students' ethical use of AI to faculty members, many experts continue to sound the alarm about AI-based cheating. They worry it could lead to devalued degrees, creating a crisis for higher education.

Faculty — who have their own existential concerns regarding generative AI — remain much more leery of the technology than college leaders who make the bulk of the decisions on tech purchases. A report by the American Association of University Professors decried a lack of "meaningful shared-governance mechanisms around technology" regarding the rapid advance of generative AI on campuses, as well as "implications for the future of teaching, learning, and job security."

Some faculty members question tech leaders' claims for generative AI, arguing that institutions should be skeptical of companies that essentially just see them as a sector with deep pockets.

Many question whether the tools represent a handmaid to student thinking or its enemy.

However, as generative-AI apps and platforms continue to evolve, some observers say, they will likely get better. No one can really predict the pace of their development, or the endpoint of their "scaling," or whether the technology will someday be able to genuinely reason, as its creators hope.

Despite this web of conflicting concerns and inconclusive knowledge, colleges continue to perform their diligence, working to understand the potential and peril of generative AI.

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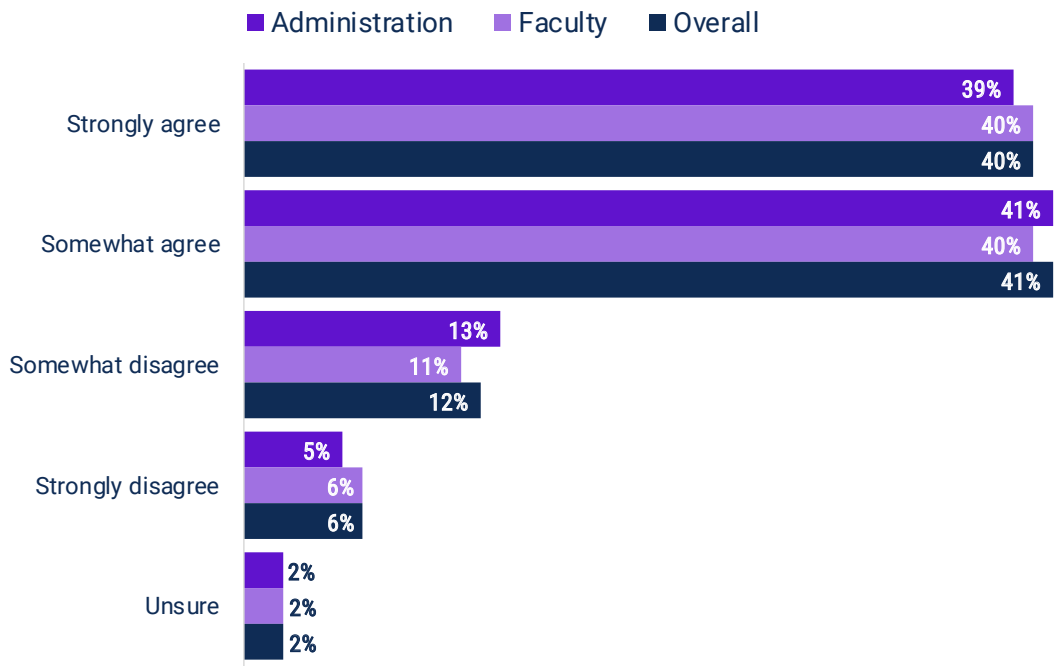
Emerging Views on the Value of College

In the *Chronicle* survey, responses clearly indicate that institutions are taking the emergence of generative AI very seriously. More than seven in 10 survey respondents say that AI is making them reconsider the value of college. Only 18 percent disagree.

Experts generally see that result as a sign colleges are looking toward the future at a time when a tangle of challenges — everything from an impending enrollment downturn to a growing negative perception by the public — currently threatens them.

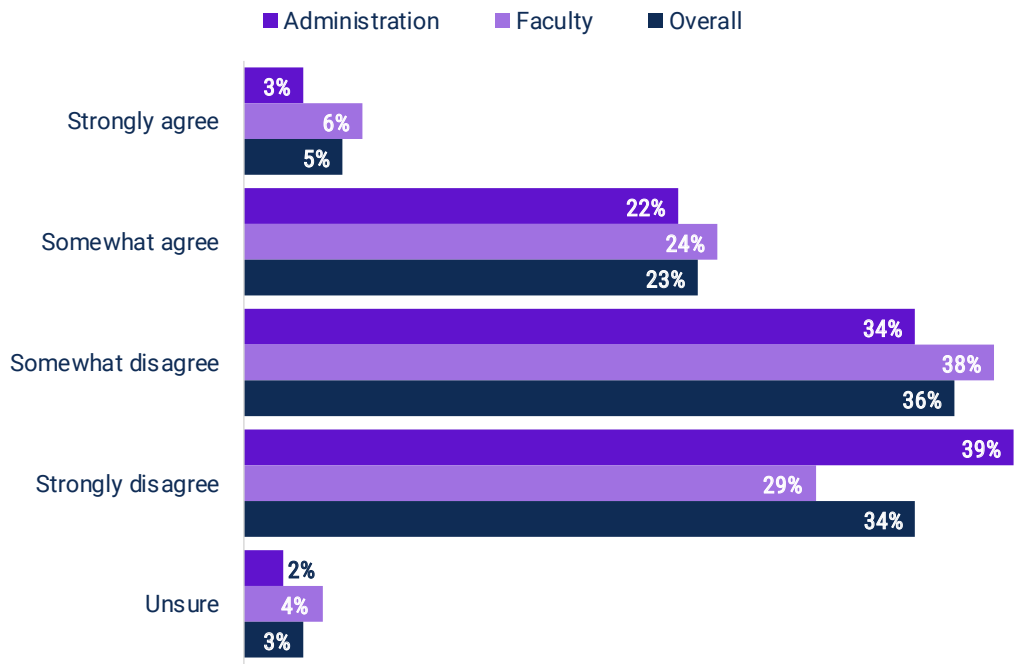
But some wonder if colleges are seeking out remedies to those threats in the wrong places. "It's surprising that so many people would put all their eggs in the AI basket when the technology that is presently available doesn't do the things tech companies say it can do," says Britt S. Paris, an associate professor of library and information science at Rutgers University. She also serves as chair of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Academic Professions at the American Association of University Professors.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"AI is forcing higher education to re-examine the value it offers to students."



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"AI is overhyped and won't dramatically change the value of a college education."



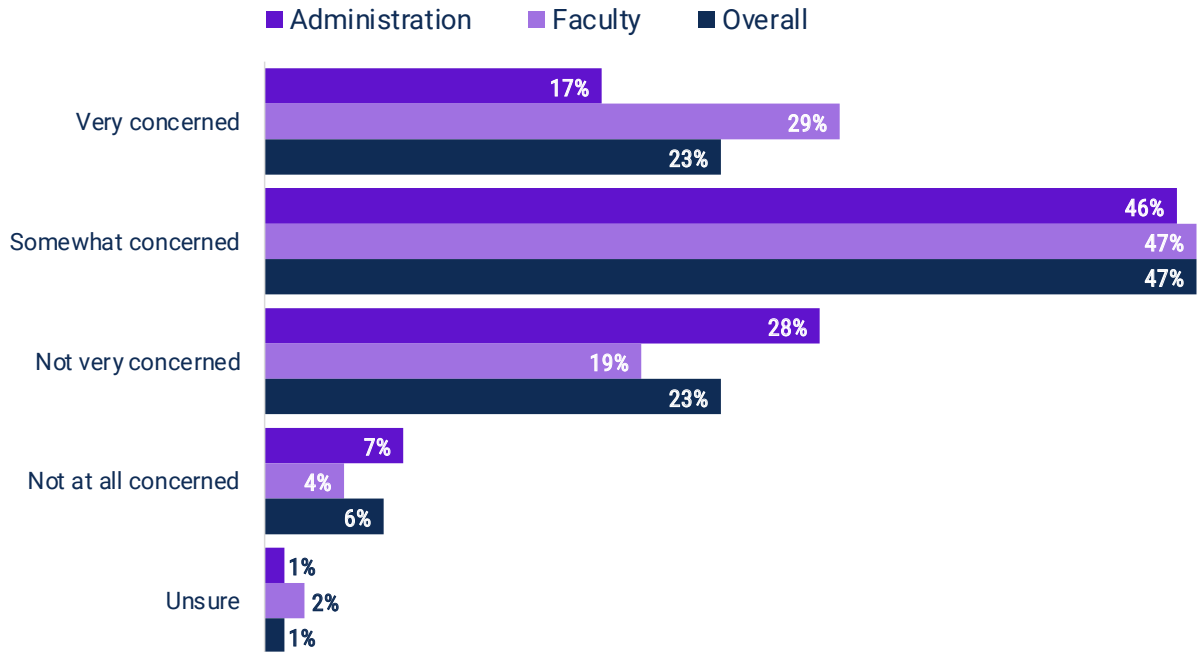
Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

"A lot of this follows the same pattern we've seen as other technologies have been rolled out," she adds. "There's too little regulation, a divide between the haves and have-nots, and too little consideration of the financial issues that affect colleges and their workers. Tech companies are looking to capitalize on that strain in higher education."

Only 28 percent of respondents agreed with that assessment, saying that AI is overhyped and will not dramatically alter the value of a college education. (Seven in 10 responded that AI is *not* a product of hype.)

But generative AI's emergence has many people on campus concerned. Most surveyed college administrators and faculty members (70 percent) are worried that the technology will reduce the perceived value of a degree. Observers say that result reflects ongoing concerns about the ways generative-AI apps and platforms make it easier for students to cheat their way through coursework.

How concerned are you that AI tools will reduce the perceived value of a traditional college degree?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
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"Colleges really have had no answer," says Bryan Alexander, a senior scholar in learning design and technology at Georgetown University. "Over time, as word gets out that colleges have no handle on AI cheating, the value of a degree will plummet. Right now, colleges aren't matching the threat with meaningful policies. They're whistling past the graveyard."

Institutions need to rethink how they grade student work, Alexander says, which would mean creating entirely new assessment tools and reconsidering some types of education that may become more rife with AI-related cheating, such as asynchronous online learning.

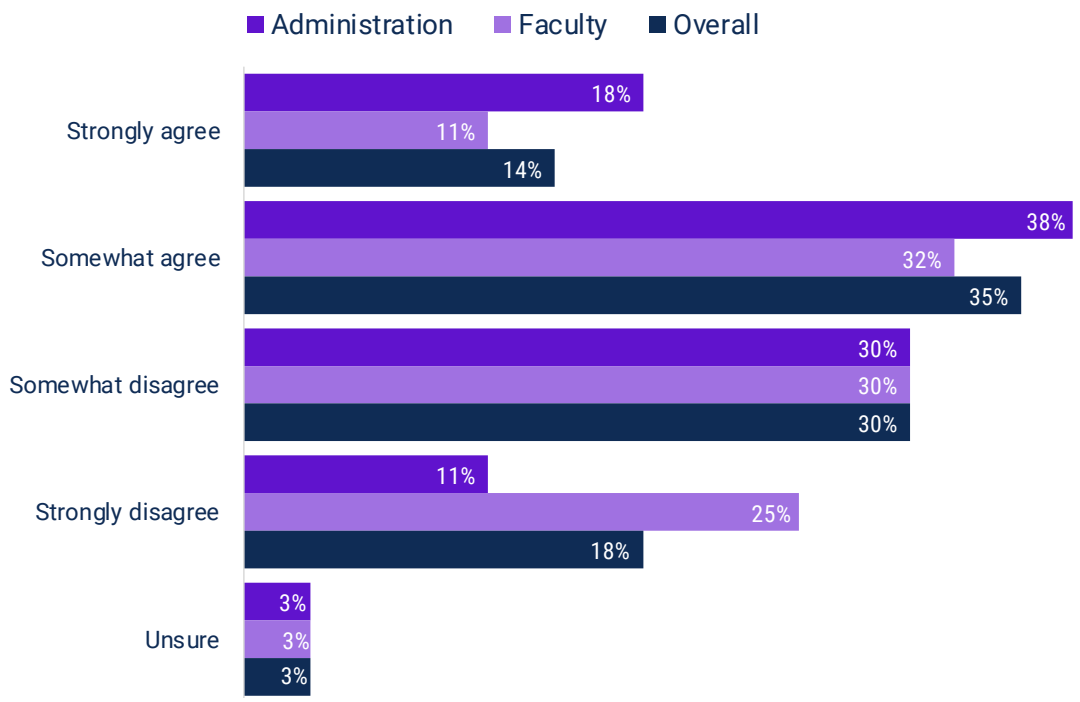
"Over time, as word gets out that colleges have no handle on AI cheating, the value of a degree will plummet. Right now, colleges aren't matching the threat with meaningful policies."

José Antonio Bowen, former president of Goucher College and now a consultant who advocates for using AI in teaching, says colleges that encourage the use of generative AI should raise their assessment standards. "If a student hands in an assignment that is little more than AI-generated, I give them an F," he says. "I tell them, 'No one will hire you if all you can do is what AI can do.' It gets their attention."

Though he'll slam students who overly rely on generative AI with bad grades, Bowen believes the tools can be a great aid to learning. "We need to focus less on policing students and make sure our pedagogy is better," he says. "Technology can help us make lessons more compelling. AI can generate additional classroom-discussion participants — say, an Israeli or a Palestinian character, or a member of a political party elsewhere — who can make those discussions much richer. AI can also raise standards, just as calculators and spell-checkers have."

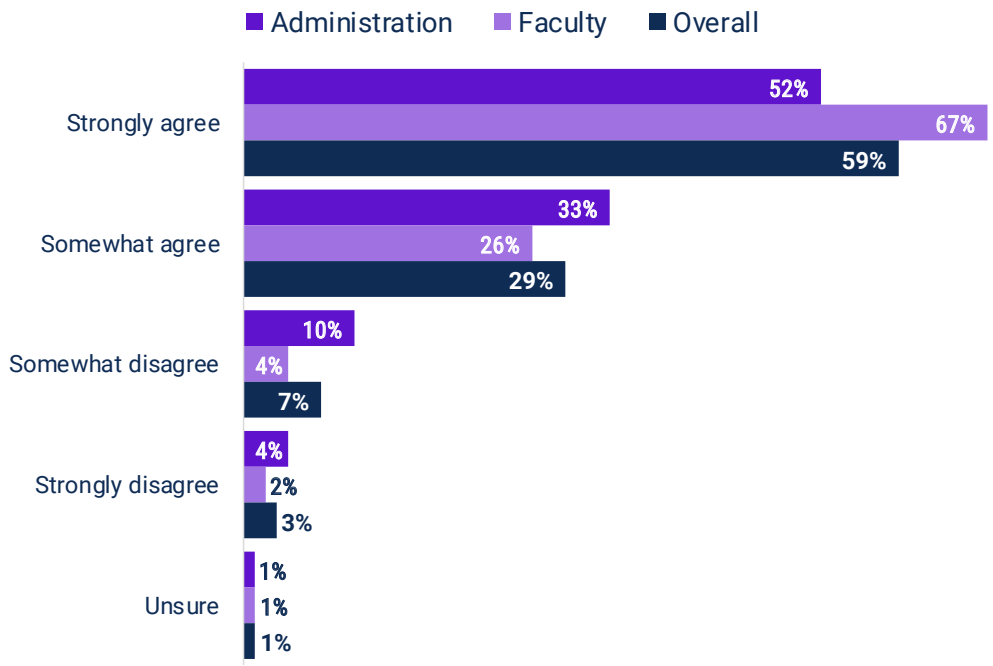
Slightly less than half of survey-takers (49 percent) agreed that colleges should fundamentally restructure their academic programs with AI in mind.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"Institutions should fundamentally restructure academic programs for an AI-driven world."



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"It is important to preserve traditional models of in-person learning even as AI advances."



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

A vast majority (88 percent) favor preserving the traditional, in-person model of learning, even as generative AI moves forward. Some observers say that survey result shows higher education with at least one foot firmly planted in the past.

"There's a disconnect there," says Van Davis, executive director of the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technology (WCET), a national organization that conducts research on technology at colleges. "AI will force colleges to change. But for now, there's a lot of energy out there for maintaining in-person learning. It's a surprising result."

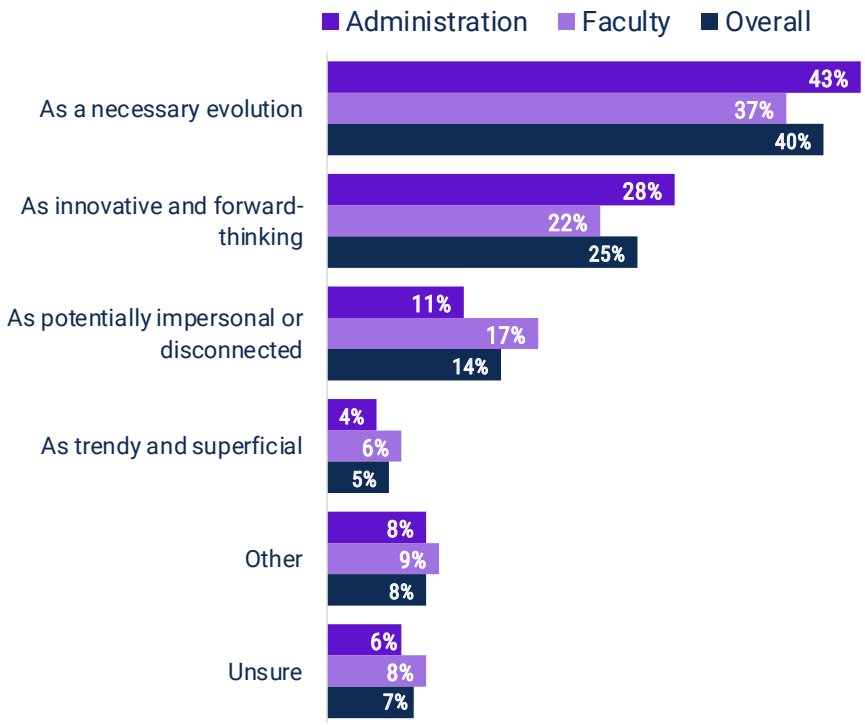
Some experts don't see any contradiction between the two views. "Gen AI is basically just a better way to use the internet — and not something that necessarily competes with traditional learning," says Melody

"Gen AI is basically just a better way to use the internet — and not something that necessarily competes with traditional learning."

Buckner, associate vice provost for digital learning and online initiatives at the University of Arizona. "College leaders see AI tech as valuable, but they don't want us to lose the human touch that we lacked during the pandemic. As far as I can tell, no one is seeing AI as another way to do distance education."

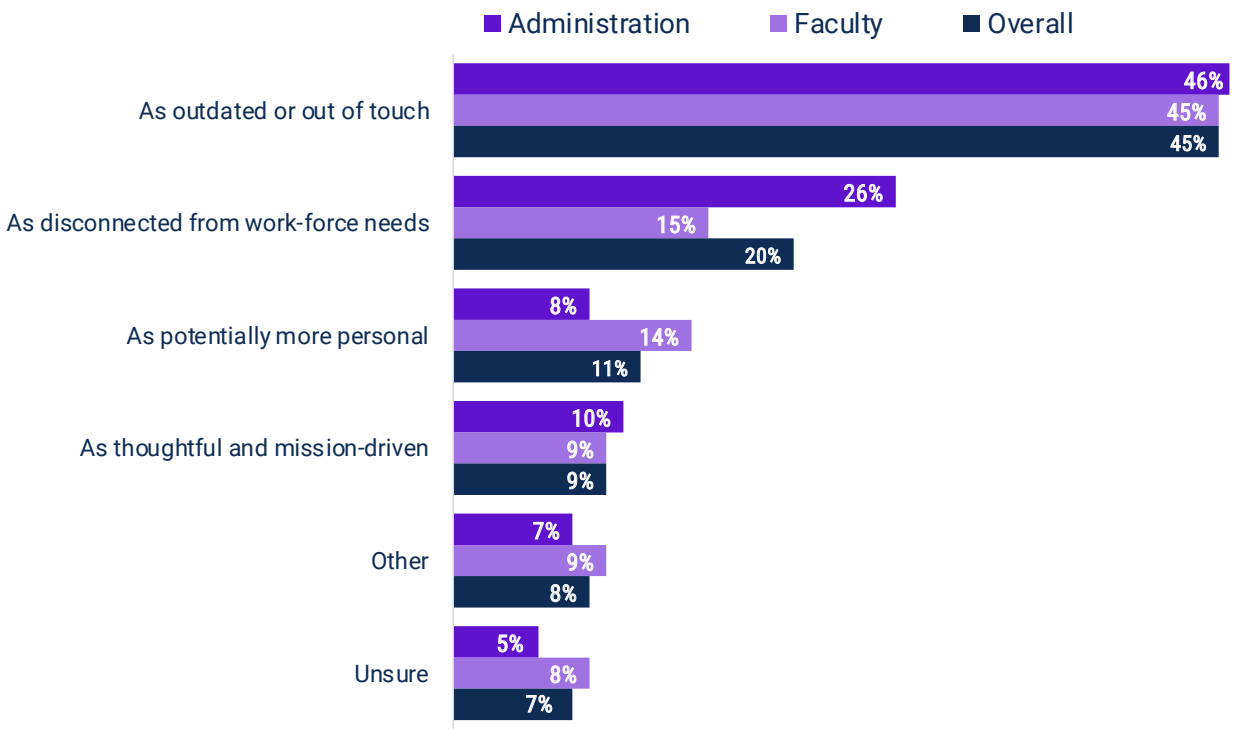
Survey respondents say that prospective students will see more value in colleges that have incorporated AI into academics and operations. Four in 10 said that students would see such integration "as a necessary evolution," while an additional one-quarter said students would view a strong move toward AI "as innovative and forward-thinking."

How do you think prospective students will view a campus that heavily integrates AI into academics and operations?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

How do you think prospective students will view a campus that limits the use of AI in academic programs?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

On the other hand, campuses that limited AI use would be perceived by students as "outdated or out of touch" (45 percent) or "disconnected from work-force needs" (20 percent).

As colleges work to reassert their merit in the public eye, responding to perceived student views on technology is necessary, says Scott Latham, a professor of strategy at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell: "Higher education once held a monopoly on the licensure of the middle class. That's gone. The gap in value between having a college education or not having one has closed. Colleges are recognizing that their whole value proposition needs to be rethought."

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New Strategies Around AI

As they reconsider their role in a tech-saturated world, institutions are also pondering which steps to take to make their academic programs and operations more efficient, responsive, and vital with the help of generative AI.

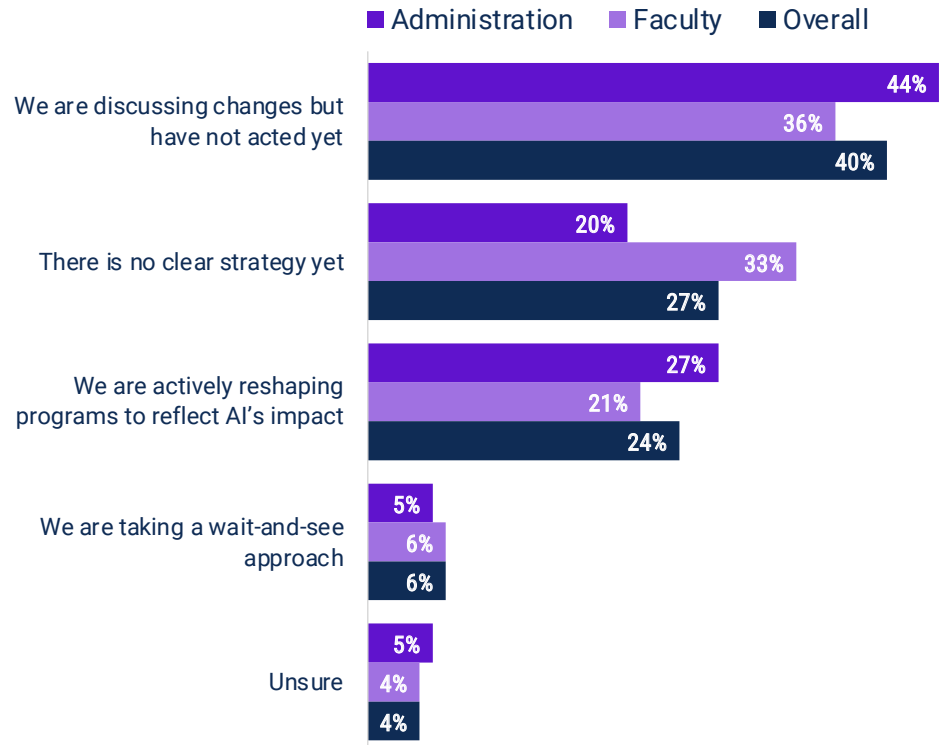
Relatively few (24 percent) are taking action to develop strategies to deal with technology's impact, college leaders and faculty members said. Four in 10 institutions are discussing which changes to make, while 27 percent have no clear AI strategy.

Though a majority are at least planning to adapt to AI, they often lack solid information to aid them, or are being driven forward by the winds of change without understanding their direction, some observers say.

"Colleges are way behind the ball on the one hand, and yet they're working to get out in front without weighing all the factors," says Paris, from Rutgers. "I worry that many are preparing to swallow tech companies' snake oil."

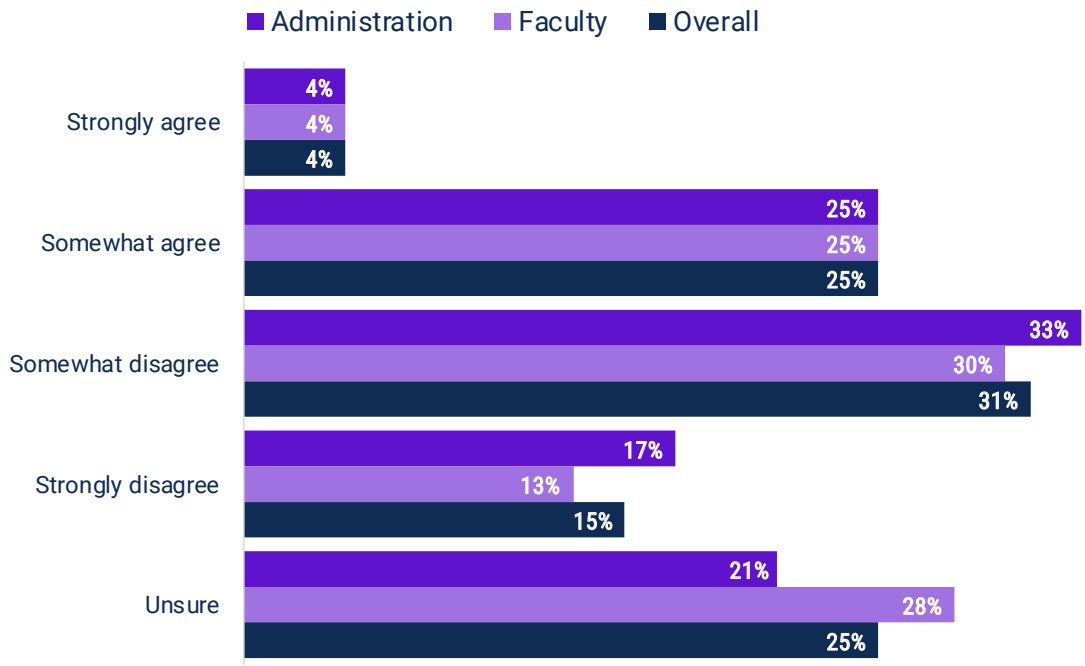
Some point to a lack of AI expertise among college officials. To get a better handle on emerging technology, some institutions are creating new positions. The University of Arizona has hired a new AI officer to monitor tech developments and help form policy, Buckner says.

How would you describe your institution's current strategy regarding AI and academic programs?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"Institutions will face growing pressure to lower tuition because of AI."



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
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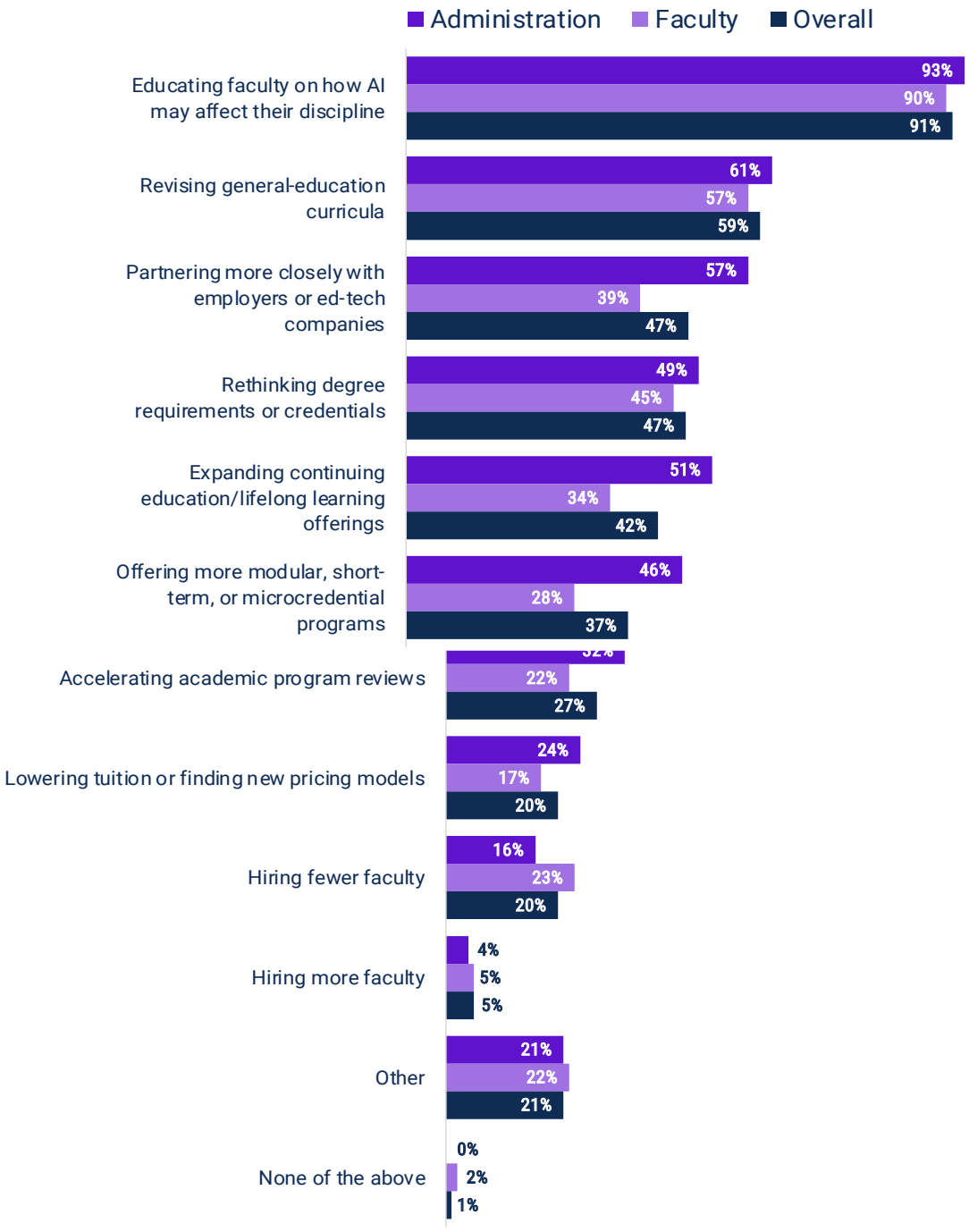
Still, college leaders are flying blind concerning products that, often, have created more smoke than light, others say. And many of their employees are suffering. "Every college has a document called something like, 'A Guide for Using AI,'" says Latham, from UMass Lowell. "Yet, there's very little about helping staff adapt to AI or about adopting ethics. If I was a trustee or stakeholder and had been included among the 40 percent in the survey that are merely discussing changes, I would not be happy. Those colleges will fall behind very quickly."

Innovation is starting to pop up on a few campuses, says Davis, from WCET. Arizona State University assembled a team of faculty and staff to use generative AI to redesign workflows.

"There are opportunities to leverage AI to create efficiencies that would reduce tuition," adds Davis. "Colleges have yet to tease out how to do that." Only 29 percent of survey respondents said that AI will place greater pressure on institutions to lower tuition.

Which of the following shifts do you believe AI will force institutions to consider in the next five years?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Tech strategies that employ AI to increase efficiency will need to re-engineer how campus tasks are done, says Bowen, the college-AI consultant. College officials should look beyond campus-office functions for ways to improve their ledgers.

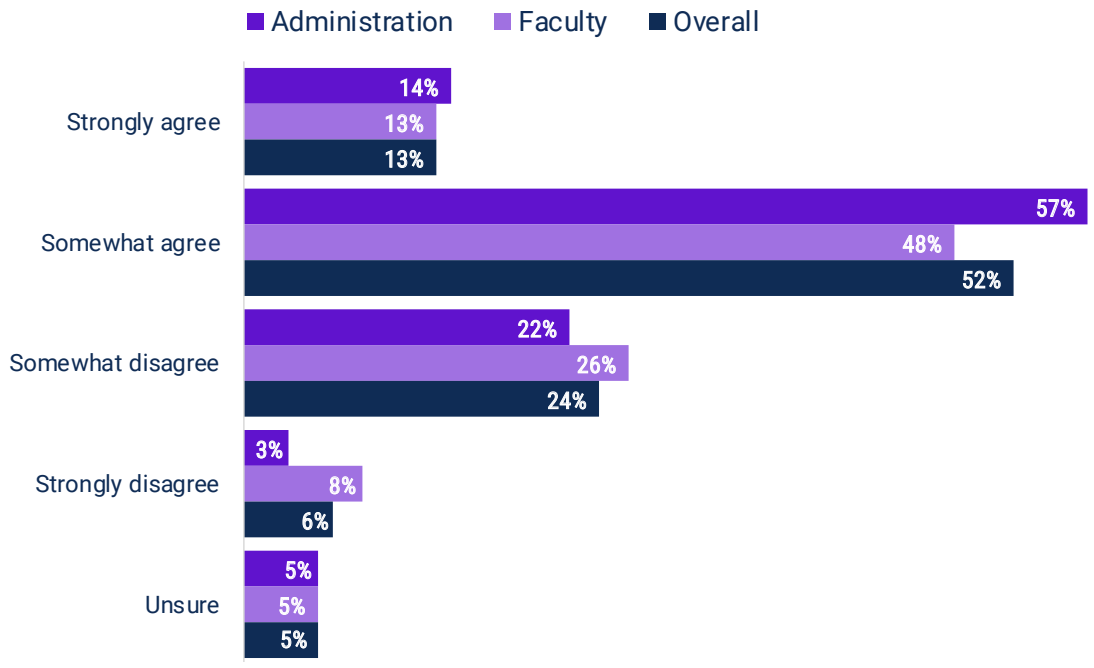
Generative AI, in a best-case scenario, could increase revenue streams. If AI can reduce the workload for faculty — for instance, by providing grading services — they will have more time to teach more tuition-paying students, Bowen adds.

When asked a multiple-response question about which AI-related changes colleges are most likely to make within the next five years, survey takers most often cited educating faculty on how AI will affect their disciplines (91 percent) and revising gen-ed curricula (59 percent).

Two-thirds also say that students expect faculty members to be AI-savvy.

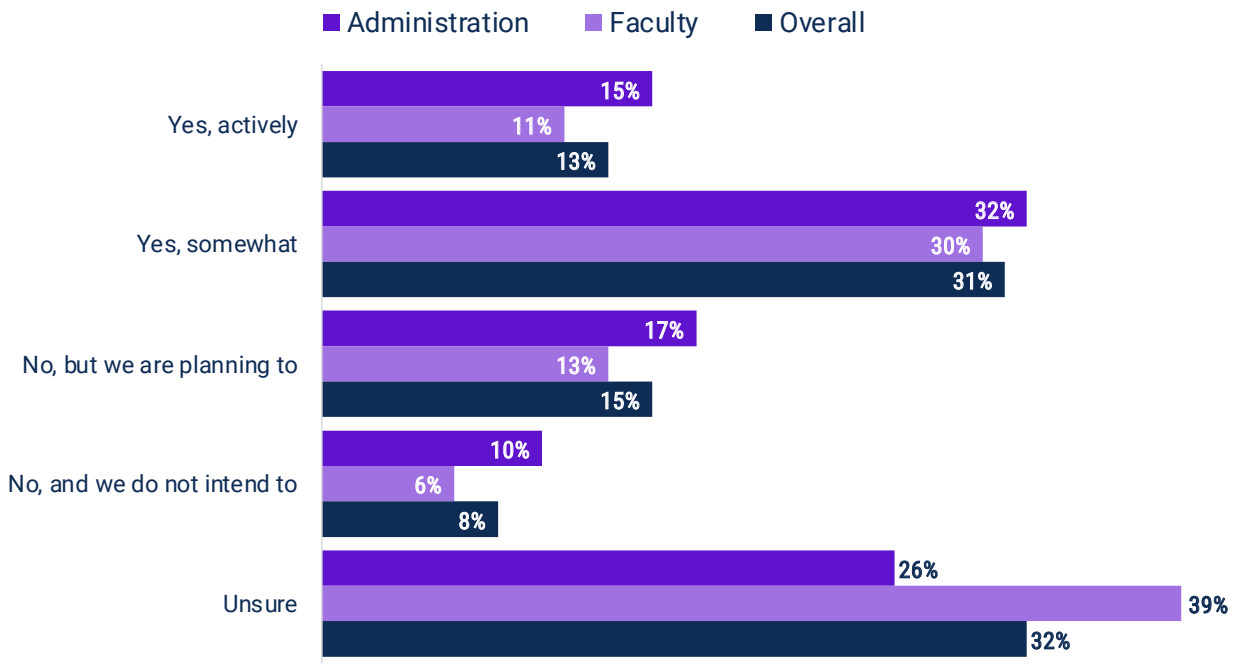
Tech strategies that employ AI to increase efficiency will need to re-engineer how campus tasks are done.

How much do you agree with the following statement?
"Students expect faculty members to be well-versed in AI."



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Has your institution marketed or promoted its use of AI in teaching, research, or operations?

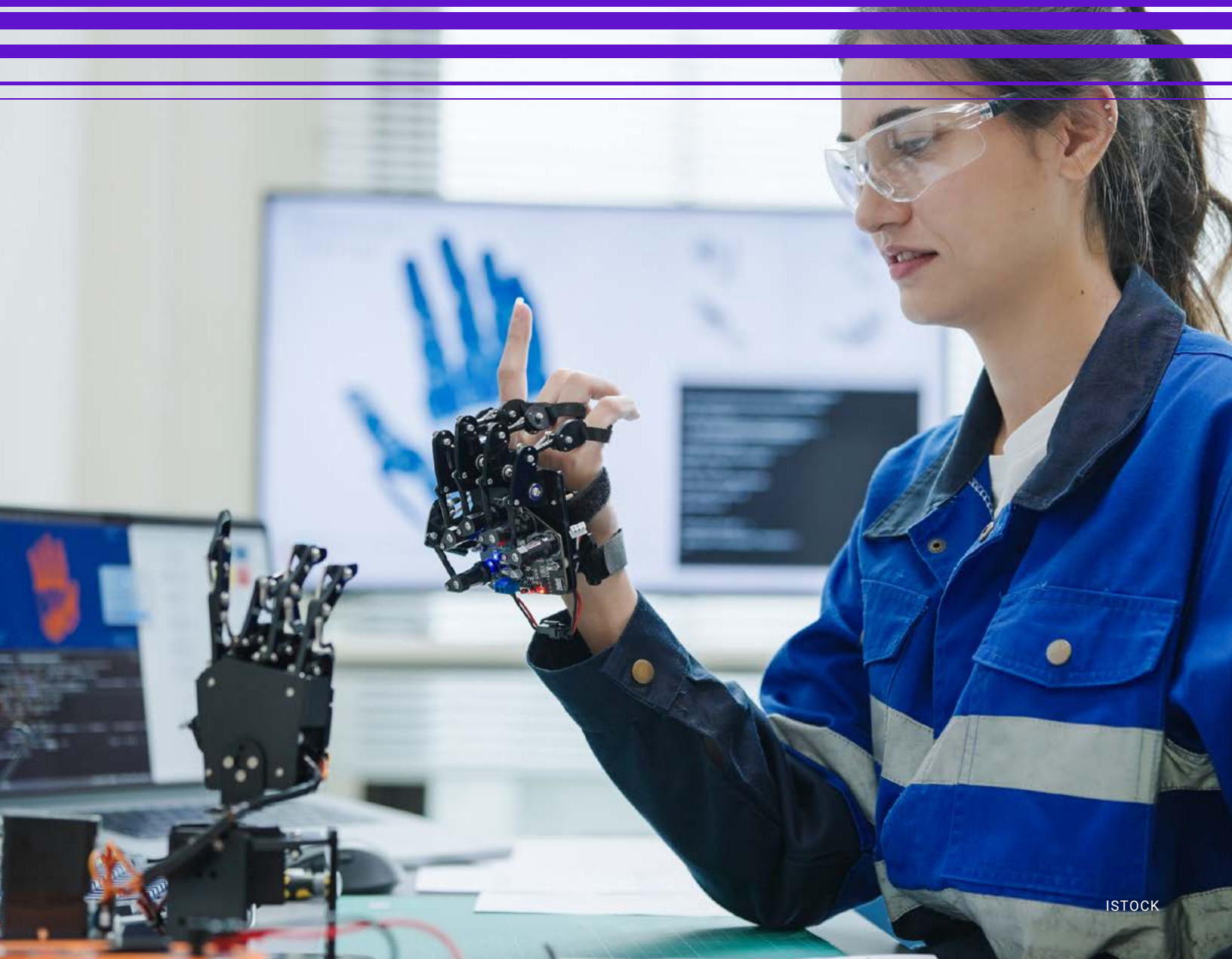


Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members

Less than half (44 percent) of institutions are marketing or promoting their use of AI in operations, research, or teaching, per the survey, though another 15 percent of respondents said their institution is planning to. Nearly one-third said they are "unsure" about their institution's marketing efforts.

"Institutions aren't all that great at marketing to begin with," says Davis. "Until college officials have gotten a true handle on how AI will affect their programs, they won't be able to market it."

Changing Attitudes About Work-Force Prep



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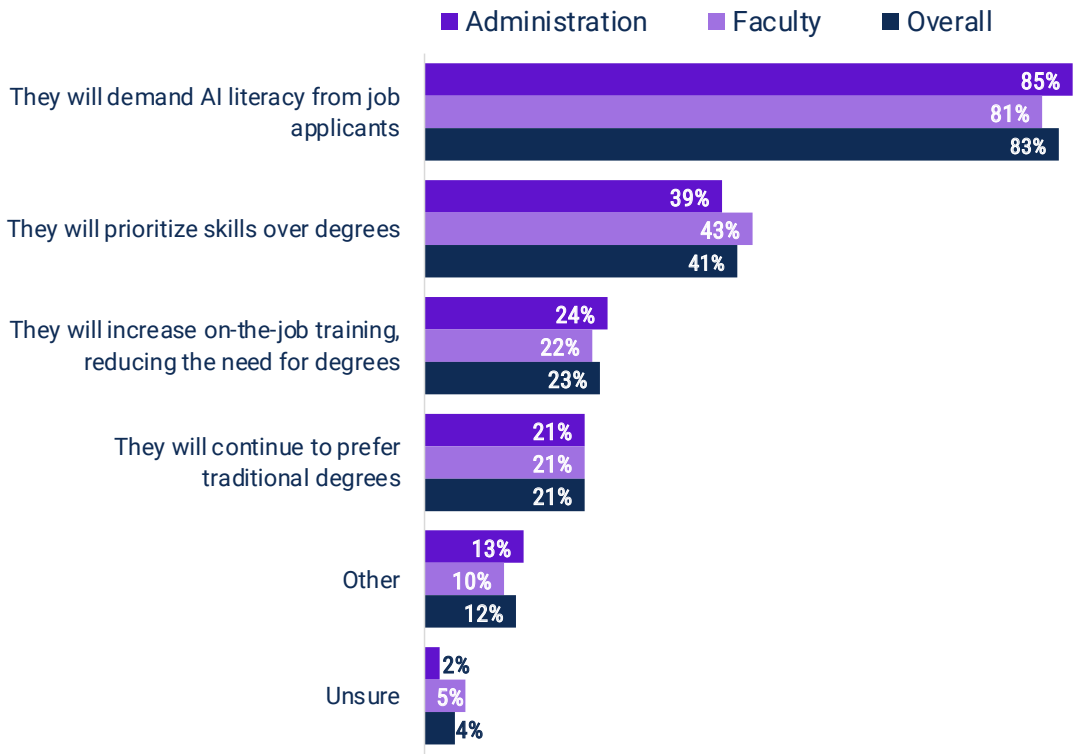
Eighty-three percent of the college officials and faculty members who responded to the survey strongly believe that employers, over the next five years, will demand AI literacy from job applicants.

About half of them appear ready to learn more about both AI companies and employers who might require AI knowledge from their workers: Forty-seven percent of institutions will join partnerships with employers or ed-tech companies within the next five years, survey-takers said.

In your view, how will employers' expectations shift in response to AI over the next five years?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

A significant minority (41 percent) said that employers will value job skills over a college degree, while 23 percent said they will likely increase on-the-job training, reducing the need for degrees. (*See chart, p. 23*) Nearly half (47 percent) predicted that AI will lead colleges to rethink degree requirements. *(See chart, p. 19)*

Some colleges have demonstrated flexibility in how to deal with the job prep-vs.-traditional education conundrum. At the University of Minnesota at Rochester and elsewhere, leaders are rolling out three-year degrees — some of them steeped in work-force skills — as part of a pilot program called "College-in-3 Exchange." Some colleges are eliminating several general-education requirements to make way for skills development and a lower tuition total.

"It's a concept that's been kicked around for a while because of student cost concerns," says Latham, from UMass Lowell.

Some degrees are typically earned after a student completes 90 credit hours, as opposed to the traditional 120. Northwood University, in Michigan, recently rolled out a bachelor of applied science in cybersecurity degree that can be completed in 90 hours.

In the survey, 37 percent of survey-takers said institutions will be forced by AI to consider shorter-term, lower-cost programs, including ones that offer microcredentials. *(See chart, p. 19)*

Graduates of shorter, skills-centered programs will also be more likely to get a job in the market that their 90 credits of coursework has trained them for, Latham adds, though they will be more likely than other grads to rely on continuing education over the succeeding decades to upskill or retrain. A significant minority (42 percent) of survey respondents said that AI will force institutions to expand continuing education in the next five years. (*See chart, p. 19*)

"I don't think the answer is to teach more AI skills. How do you keep your curriculum up to the speed of AI?"

Though some experts advocate for more lower-cost, work-focused programs, others point out that four-year colleges might not be the best places to teach those skills.

"Whenever we've tried to be a work-force-training provider, we haven't been the best at it," says Anne Trumbore, chief digital-learning officer at the University of Virginia. "I don't think the answer is to teach more AI skills. How do you keep your curriculum up to the speed of AI?"

> **“Practitioners from the shop floor can come to colleges and supplement the more generalized teaching that faculty offer with lessons on specific skills.”**

Those who study how college learning translates to the work world agree. “Things are moving so fast that you can’t predict which skills will still be viable by the time a student graduates,” says Jeff Strohl, director of the Center for Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University. “Teaching generalized AI skills in the context of a curriculum makes sense. Faculty are correct when they say we’ll lose if we chase the bouncing ball of changing job types and skills.”

As is the case at many two-year colleges, “Practitioners from the shop floor can come to colleges and supplement the more generalized teaching that faculty offer with lessons on specific skills,” Strohl adds.

Generative AI presents colleges — and employers — with a strange problem, he says. If people use AI and stop thinking as they attend college, then they’ll lose the ability to think. Even though employers (and respondents to the survey) value AI literacy, businesses often require creative employees who can do more than use tech tools — people who can think through complex problems and then collaborate with others to solve them.

“You can get all of the learning you want outside of college,” says Clancy Martin, a professor of philosophy at the University of Missouri at Kansas City, and a digital-humanities pioneer who has created a website that leans on generative AI. “And that’s fine, but what employers want are people with a lot of intangibles — maturity, communication skills, solid work habits, the ability to collaborate. They want people with professional skills. And people develop those in college.”

Gaps in Perspectives Regarding Tech

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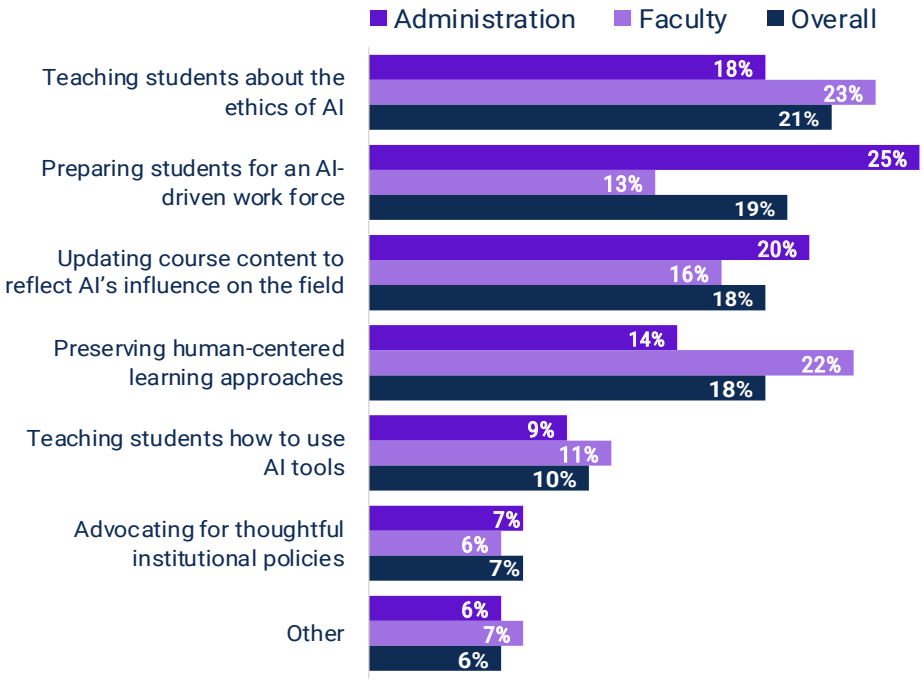
The survey exposed divisions in the opinions of faculty members and administrators — ones that perhaps owe something to the difference in the existential concerns each has, experts say. College officials, particularly top ones, worry about the fate of their institutions should they fail in putting generative AI to work.

Faculty members worry about being replaced by the technology, or at least having much of their academic autonomy dashed by it. Faculty were much more likely to say that institutions should not restructure their academic programs to reflect a world driven by AI (55 percent) than administrators (41 percent). (*See chart, p. 12*)

What's more, 71 percent of college officials said they are either currently reshaping their strategy regarding AI and academic programs or discussing changes, while only 57 percent faculty agreed. (*See chart, p. 17*)

More than three-quarters of faculty said they are concerned that AI will reduce the perceived value of a college degree, but only 63 percent of college officials echoed faculty's answer. (*See chart, p. 11*) Two-thirds of faculty strongly believe that preserving traditional, in-person learning is important, while only 52 percent of officials did. (*See chart, p. 13*)

What is the primary responsibility of faculty members in responding to AI?



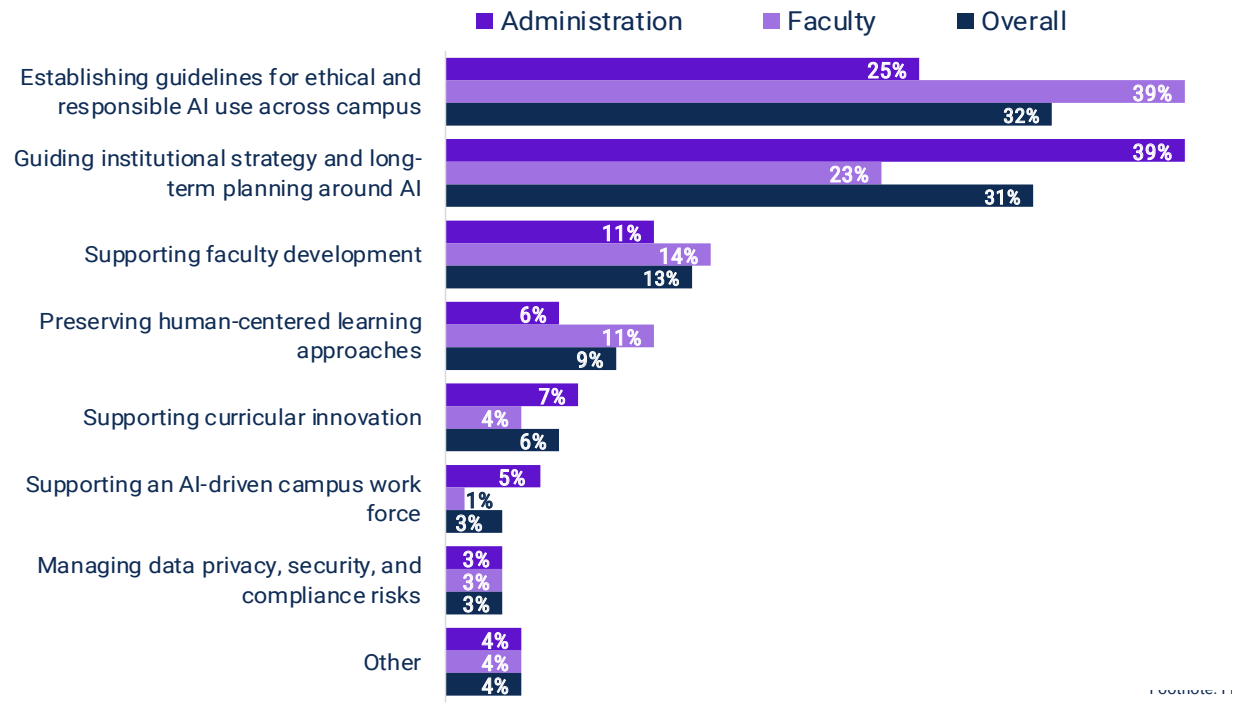
Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

The two groups represented in the survey had diverging ideas about the responsibility each has in the AI era. In a multiple-response question, 25 percent of administrators said that preparing students for an AI-driven work force is faculty's prime responsibility; only 13 percent of faculty said the same. Twenty-two percent of faculty members said that preserving human-centered learning approaches is their prime responsibility; only 14 percent of administrators agreed.

Concurrence on the prime role of administrators was also hard to find. Nearly four in ten officials said their main response to AI is to guide strategy and make long-term plans around it, but only 23 percent of faculty agreed. Nearly four in 10 faculty respondents saw college leaders' main focus as establishing campuswide AI guidelines — something only 25 percent of administrators cited as their top responsibility.

"There's no real surprise that the two groups have different perspectives," says Paris, from Rutgers. "Administrators are trying to make ends meet. Faculty worry that administrators are racing to get involved with tech companies

What is the primary responsibility of administrators in responding to AI?



Source: *Chronicle* survey of 843 academic and administrative leaders and faculty members
Note: Figures might not total 100 percent due to rounding.

to replace recently withheld grant money and ongoing government support. There's a good bit of suspicion about the role of AI in the college economy right now."

Some see the gulf between faculty and officials as a lost opportunity for collaboration.

"We're at our best when we're working as a community," says Robert L. Manuel, president of DePaul University. "Is there a bridge we can cross to connect these people? AI is an opportunity to develop our capabilities in higher education together — as long as we don't let it roll over us."

Creating campus committees capable of deliberating about AI policies and uses might be one way to narrow the gap, says Davis, from WCET. Including many different tech users — faculty, staff, students, tech leaders — along with administrators in such groups raises the chances that colleges will develop thoughtful and widely accepted approaches to AI.

Some colleges, including the University of Arizona and the University of Hawaii, have moved beyond initial working groups to newly formed AI teams.

Others say that institutions' most persistent AI skeptics should now hold the reins.

"I'd love to see faculty take the lead on AI now," says Latham, from UMass Lowell. "We've had students driving this and administrators have been moving things forward. But it will be faculty and staff who will adopt these tools that improve learning and put difference-making efficiencies in place. Administrators should be providing them the space and support to do it."

"Is there a bridge we can cross to connect these people? AI is an opportunity to develop our capabilities in higher education together — as long as we don't let it roll over us."

The *Chronicle* survey suggests that emerging AI tools will force colleges to revamp the value proposition institutions make to students, their families, and the public.

As institutions carefully navigate their way toward AI-driven campuses — and through thickets of conflicting messages, hype, and gaps in knowledge about how AI may change how they do things in the coming years — they will be much more likely to get their faculty up to speed about the technology, revise their general curriculum, form partnerships with employers and tech companies, and rethink how they shape degrees and credentials.

Yet few institutions have developed strategies for reshaping programs in the AI era.

Though four-year colleges tend not to see themselves as vocational trainers, fewer people will be willing to pay the often high price of college if they believe they might flounder in the job market upon graduation. Colleges must adapt to the reality that a traditional liberal-arts education may not be enough to prepare the workers of tomorrow — many of whom will have AI as a workplace partner.

As they work to figure out their role in the emerging world of work, more colleges will likely consider shifting their emphasis away from the four-year degree and toward workplace-centered credentials that take fewer years to complete.

Along with creating the anxiety that comes with change, AI-aided cheating has college administrators and faculty very concerned. They worry about its effect on the value of a degree. Both strongly support continuing traditional in-person learning, even as AI wends its way into more parts of campus.

As they grapple with those deep concerns, institutions must also contend with both the current shortcomings of AI and its potential to displace human critical thinking. And they must find better ways to engage faculty members in campuswide AI efforts.

Though no one can predict how exactly generative AI will play out on the nation's campuses, if it can live up to tech industry promises, colleges will be able to run themselves more inexpensively, teach more engagingly, and better prepare even more students for the world — an outcome that might just silence higher education's most persistent critics.

METHODOLOGY

The Chronicle asked U.S. college leaders and faculty members to assess how their institutions are adapting to AI, the role technology will play in the college economy, and the future of higher education. More than 800 individuals, nearly two-thirds of whom were from public two- and four-year institutions, responded to a 15-question online survey in July 2025.

Slightly more than half were college administrators (431), while faculty members numbered 412. Nearly all (96 percent) of total respondents work full-time at a higher-ed institution.

Among administrators, directors made up 16 percent of the survey sample; department heads, 10 percent; deans (including assistant, associate, or vice deans), nine percent; provosts (including assistant, associate, or vice provosts), six percent; vice presidents, four percent, and presidents or chancellors, two percent.

Faculty were most represented by tenured professors (29 percent) and tenure-track professors (10 percent). Nontenured instructors made up 11 percent of the total.

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