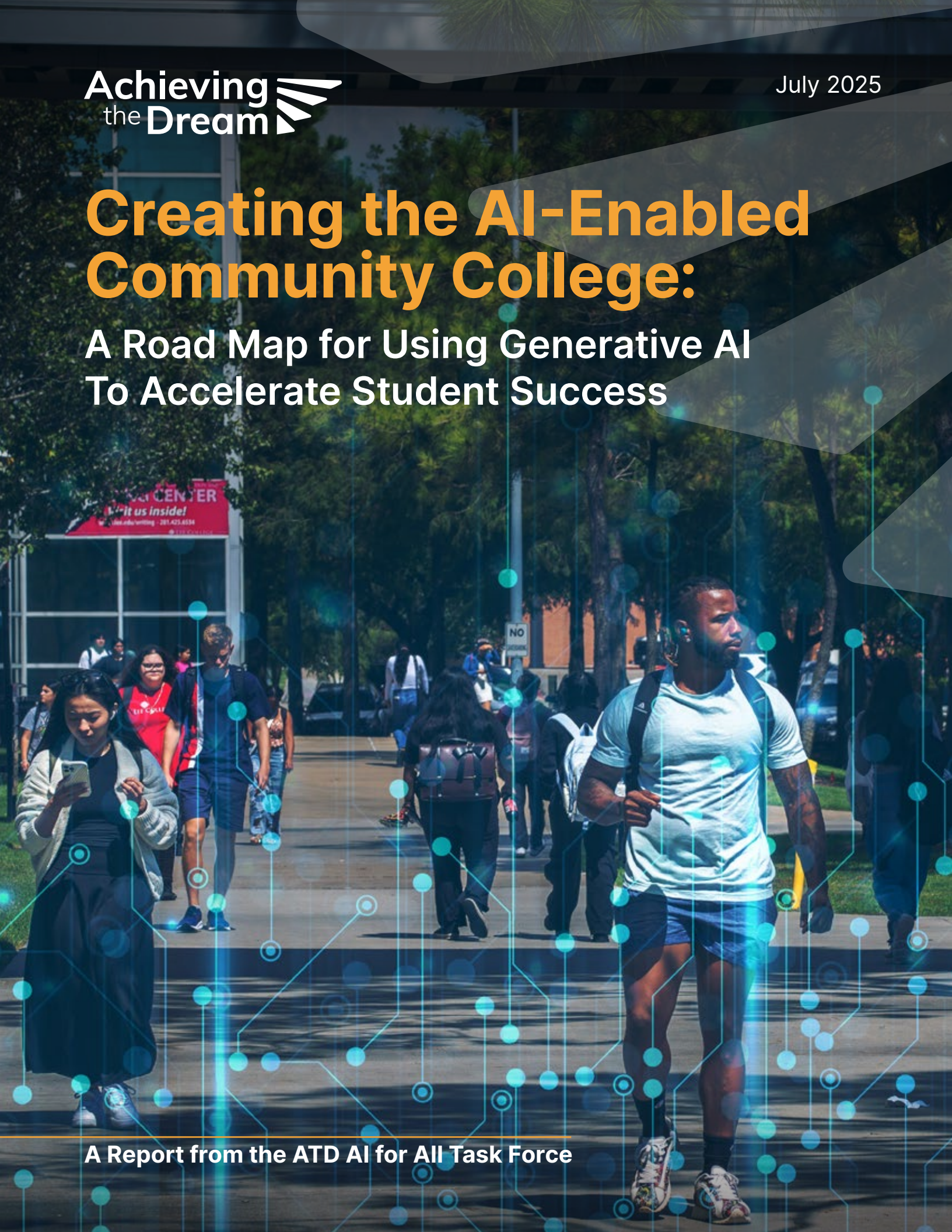
Achieving the Dream

July 2025

Creating the AI-Enabled Community College:

A Road Map for Using Generative AI To Accelerate Student Success



A Report from the ATD AI for All Task Force

Abstract

The following report from the Achieving the Dream AI for All Task Force outlines the challenges and opportunities that generative AI presents for community colleges. The report provides a framework for integrating generative AI intentionally across college operations and using it as a potential force multiplier to help more students succeed in college and beyond and strengthen the communities that colleges serve. To achieve that potential, community colleges need to ensure that all students (including those in degree and non-degree pathways) have competence in digital and AI literacy and develop the knowledge and skills to be "AI-agile" (demonstrating fluency in applying AI to desired challenges and able to grow with the technology as it changes) as they prepare to continue their education, enter the workforce, or develop new skills for career advancement. This report outlines eight action areas — from demonstrating strategic leadership to investing in student success through AI — the Task Force believes colleges should strategically consider to become an AI-enabled college.

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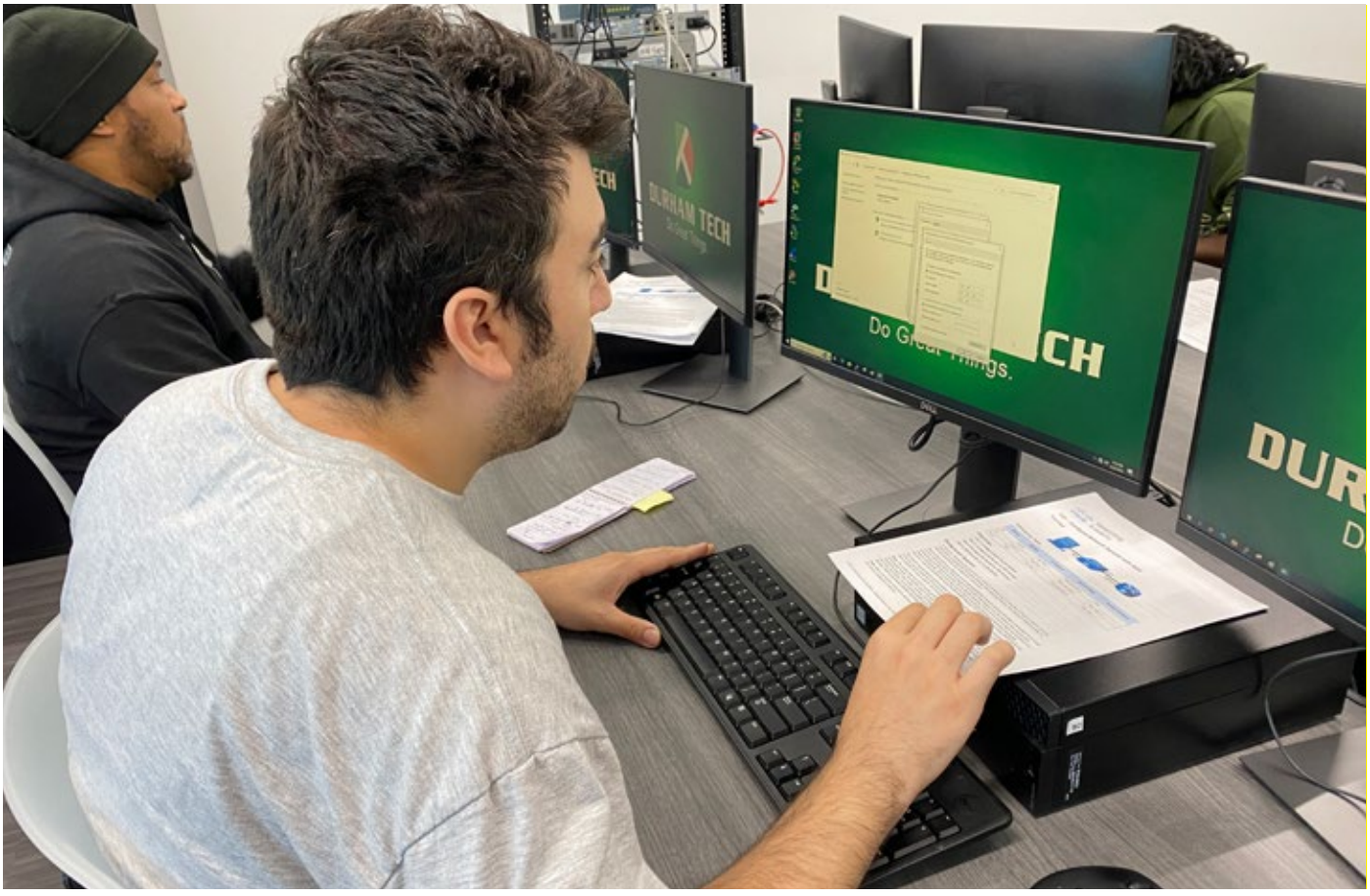
Achieving the Dream AI for All Task Force

Recognizing the pressing need for community colleges to build the capacity to effectively integrate AI across their institutional operations, ATD President and CEO Dr. Karen A. Stout conceived and established the ATD AI for All Task Force. Dr. Stout first selected ATD Senior Fellow Gregory Haile to serve as the chair, and then the two identified a group of distinguished ATD Network presidents, AI experts, and national business and industry leaders. The Task Force's charge was to develop a strategic framework for colleges in the ATD Network and beyond to deploy artificial intelligence in a way that strategically aligns with their missions to accelerate student learning outcomes and student completion of programs of value.



Recognizing that the recommendations of the Task Force should be focused on AI policies and practices that benefit all students — especially those often left behind by the design of our systems and programs — the Task Force adopted the name AI for All Task Force to represent that priority.

Task Force Members

- **Gregory Haile**, **Chair** / senior fellow, Achieving the Dream; chair, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta; senior fellow, Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government, Harvard Kennedy School
- **Susan Adams** / associate director of teaching and learning, Achieving the Dream
- **Dr. Michael Baston** / president, Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C)
- **Diane Cheng** / vice president of research and policy, Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP)
- **Dr. Meghan Hughes** / head of workforce development arts and heritage, Bank of America
- **Todd McLees** / cofounder, humanskills.ai
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- **Dr. Monte Randall** / president, College of the Muscogee Nation
- **Dr. Alexander (Alex) Ruder** / community and economic development director and principal adviser, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta
- **Mary Sauer** / tech entrepreneur; senior advisor, Harvard Project on Workforce
- **Derrick Semeneh** / executive director, information technology & digital transformation, Achieving the Dream
- **Dr. Randall (Randy) VanWagoner** / president, Mohawk Valley Community College
- **Dr. Karen A. Stout** / president, Achieving the Dream, ex-officio

Affiliations are for identification purposes only, and do not reflect an institutional endorsement.

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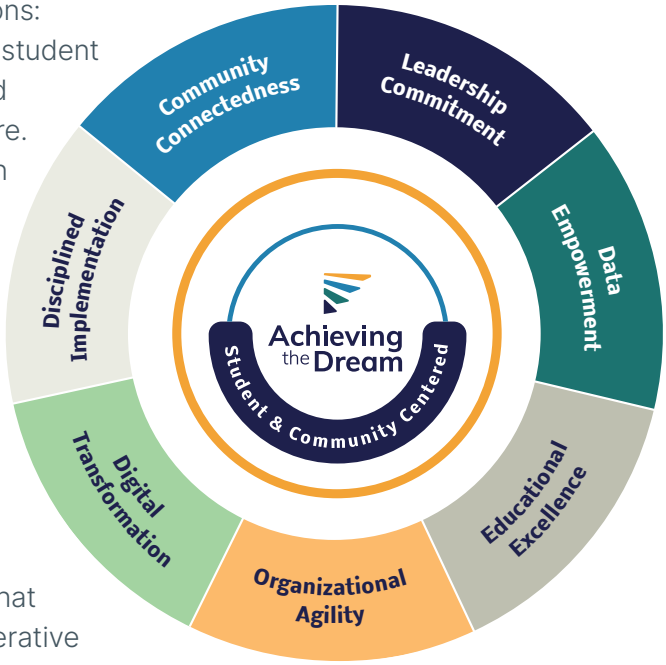
Foreword: Seizing the Opportunity To Thrive

In his book *Change: How Organizations Achieve Hard-to-Imagine Results in Uncertain and Volatile Times*, John Kotter, Konosuke Matsushita Professor of Leadership, Emeritus at Harvard Business School, outlines the growing gap between the rate, amount, and complexity of change and the capacity of human beings and organizations to navigate those forces. The gap, Kotter argues, presents a danger but also an opportunity for those who are agile and can adapt (Kotter et al., 2021).

The recent rapid development of technologies (from personal computers to big data and mobile technologies) has created significant change for organizations, with generative AI now being a leading driver of change. Generative AI — a type of artificial intelligence that, when prompted, learns from vast amounts of data to generate text, code, images, music, and other content — offers unique advantages for making college operations more efficient and productive and accelerating how students learn and demonstrate workforce-desired skills. At the same time, college leaders, faculty, and staff need to be wary of the potential misuse of AI and its effect on academic integrity and ensure that AI is both widely accessible and used ethically to improve student learning and outcomes without compounding existing inequities. This is a big and pressing challenge.

Paul LeBlanc, former president of Southern New Hampshire University, advises college leaders to "buckle in" because this is a time of experimental frenzy that will likely lead to a period of massive upheaval that will reorder education, work, and the economy. Only after this period of turmoil and dislocation will higher education reach a mature stage of AI adoption in which this emerging technology will play a major role in reinventing college for a new age (LeBlanc, 2024).

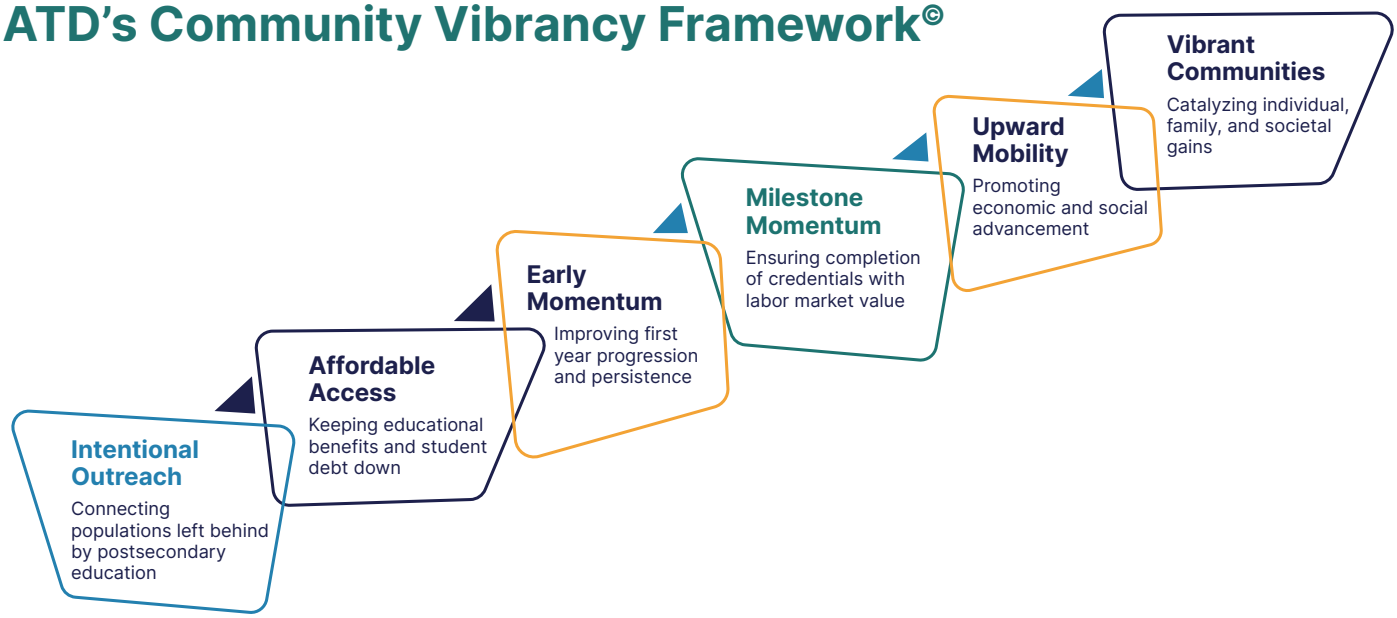
Generative AI touches all aspects of a college's operations: recruitment and marketing, enrollment and onboarding, student support services, advising and counseling, teaching and learning, career exploration, data management, and more. To varying degrees, generative AI will have an impact on all the fundamental capacities ATD works with colleges to develop, especially digital transformation as part of ATD's Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (ICAT) (Achieving the Dream, 2025). Generative AI will be a central force in bolstering a college's digital transformation capacity to enhance learning and student support. It will also help institutions function more strategically and efficiently across all operations.



Widespread use of AI is pushing colleges to develop new strategies for oversight and adaptation at a pace that challenges many of higher education's traditional deliberative decision-making processes. Institutional AI literacy and adoption lags behind individual student AI literacy and adoption (McMurtrie, 2025), in part because the most popular AI tools such as ChatGPT are marketed directly to individual users.

As the Task Force report notes, the positive aspects of AI implementation and potential as a force multiplier for student success outweigh its potential negative consequences if ethical and equity concerns are attended to. The question cannot be whether or not to adopt AI, but rather how colleges can embrace AI in an ethical and equitable way that strengthens their institutional capacity to help more students and communities thrive. AI is a particularly valuable tool that can catalyze implementation of ATD's Community Vibrancy Framework to help colleges build programs aligned with labor market needs and pursue next-generation metrics for student success that not only address traditional outcomes of persistence and completion but also take into consideration post-graduation outcomes (such as earning family-sustaining wages and achieving upward mobility in careers) and the impact a college has on the broader community.

ATD's Community Vibrancy Framework©



For more on ATD's Community Vibrancy Framework, see *Connecting Access and Credential Attainment to Economic Mobility and Community Vibrancy: Fifteen Colleges Test ATD's New Transformational Framework* (Achieving the Dream, 2025), which provides an overview of the lessons learned from the inaugural Community Vibrancy Cohort.

To that end, AI can help community colleges:

- **Identify students and communities that have been left behind** by postsecondary education.
- **Create systems to track and support student momentum and persistence**, including tools to intervene when students are struggling to maintain that momentum and help them reach their goals.
- **Transform courses and curricula to connect students to necessary knowledge and skills in ways that they learn best**, through active learning and linking key content with students' lived experiences, thus hitting key early and milestone momentum metrics that support student achievement of a high-value credential.
- **Identify the labor market value of college programs and credentials** to promote upward economic and social mobility.
- **Plan for outreach campaigns and strategic partnerships** that advance community vibrancy and bring key players together to address community challenges.

AI has the potential to support the pursuit of all these outcomes more efficiently and cost-effectively if approached intentionally and strategically.

This paper, produced by the ATD AI for All Task Force — a working group of 12 higher education, business, and community leaders formed and appointed by ATD President and CEO Dr. Karen A. Stout and chaired by ATD Senior Fellow Gregory Haile — serves as a strategic framework that community college leaders, faculty, and staff can use as they integrate AI into their mission and work.

The report identifies why this is a crucial moment to integrate AI into the student success agenda, what institutions can do to help students become not just "AI-literate" but "AI-agile," and how they can double down on the new technology to accelerate institutional transformation. It presents eight crucial areas for institutional readiness and action and identifies potential strategic directions for ATD to support comprehensive AI integration within the 300-plus ATD Network colleges and beyond.

Recognizing that community colleges are already sorting through myriad AI resources and may already have begun to implement new strategies, this document focuses on AI's place in whole-college transformation because that is where ATD has focused its capacity-building supports for its Network of colleges since its founding in 2004.

As with all technological changes that transform how we live, learn, and work, there is so much that seems unsettling and unknown. John Kotter suggests that being agile and able to adapt requires that organizations be relentless in pursuing opportunities, taking time to think and discuss the ramifications and approaches they can take while minimizing the focus on problems. This is also the purpose of ATD's ICAT, which now emphasizes organizational agility as a new fundamental capacity for its college. To fully leverage their localness, community colleges must be relentless in pursuit of the opportunity presented by AI for students and communities. As ATD DREAM scholar Diego Perez Lopez of San Jacinto College (Texas) reminded us at DREAM 2025, "The unknown is nothing but opportunity."

INTRODUCTION: Realizing AI's Potential

To understand the potential of generative AI for colleges, consider how AI compares to other technologies that have changed how we think, work, learn, and live our lives.

Comparisons reveal that generative AI is a much more powerful transformational tool than, for example, the introduction of the calculator in mathematics education (Anderson, 2024). The calculator is a transactional tool that, while disruptive, performs singular computational functions with human direction. Even comparisons to the invention of the printing press that led to shared knowledge, religious debate, and scientific discovery — or the power of the personal computer that has streamlined tasks and equipped individuals with tools for learning and creativity — fall short of where we are heading.

Generative AI is more akin to the advent of the internet or the smartphone in terms of access to information but operates at a whole new level because of its cumulative and compounding effects. Generative AI is not just a tool that puts countless resources at one's fingertips: The technology curates and applies knowledge by using information to analyze and then create and problem-solve across disciplines with minimal guidance.

The adoption of AI is also occurring at a faster clip than other transformative technology. The advent of the PC and the internet was slow enough to allow society to gradually anticipate and adapt to the changes they introduced. But the Real-Time Population Survey (RPS) recently found that generative AI is being adopted at twice the pace or more than PCs or the internet. The study shows that AI has "a 39.5 percent adoption rate after two years, compared with 20 percent for the internet after two years and 20 percent for PCs after three years" (Bick et al., 2024).

AI is changing the nature of work and transforming workplaces. In the same national survey, researchers found that 26% of working-age adults use generative AI on the job for a range of work-based tasks, such as writing and communication, performing administrative tasks, generating new ideas, and coding software (Bick et al., 2024). The impact of AI on hiring is testimony to the need for colleges to establish AI literacy as a new core competency for all students. In May of last year, Microsoft's annual Work Trend Index surveyed over 30,000 people across 31 countries to learn how AI has influenced employment decisions. The findings are stark for both employers and employees:

- "66% of business leaders wouldn't hire someone without AI skills, and 71% of leaders would prefer to hire a less experienced candidate with AI skills than a more experienced candidate without them."
- "76% of professionals [say] they need AI skills to remain competitive in the job market, 69% [suggest] AI can help them get promoted faster, and 79% [share] AI skills can broaden job opportunities." (Ortiz, 2024)

If colleges do not take immediate steps to integrate AI across the institution, students without this exposure and educational opportunity are at risk of falling further behind, but at an even faster pace. While there is an urgent need to address this challenge, colleges need a framework to organize and guide this integration.

The following sidebar identifies opportunities to make that happen in our institutions.

Opportunities and Responsibilities of Generative AI and Community Colleges

Generative AI provides institutions of higher education with a host of opportunities to strengthen their operations and serve their students and communities more fully. This is a particularly potent opportunity for community colleges and the diversity of students and communities they serve.

Personalized Learning

For a working parent juggling responsibility, AI adapts to create personalized study sessions during available time slots. For a recent high school graduate struggling with calculus, AI generates explanations matching their unique learning preferences, improving mastery and retention rates. Generative AI platforms dynamically adjust learning paths, providing real-time feedback and fostering deeper engagement. For example, AI can generate customized practice problems, provide explanations at appropriate levels of complexity, and recommend supplemental resources aligned with individual learning preferences.

Accessibility and Belonging

Generative AI has the potential to democratize access to educational resources that can provide personalized support to all students through capabilities such as:

- Multilingual translation and content generation
- Adaptive accommodations for disabilities
- Student-centered content development
- 24/7 accessibility to support services

Proactive Student Support

Predictive analytics can identify students at risk of falling behind or dropping out, enabling proactive intervention before challenges escalate. AI-driven early alert systems provide precise, timely recommendations for advising and support services. These systems can detect subtle patterns in student engagement and performance data that might otherwise go unnoticed, with studies showing early alert systems can improve retention rates by 3% to 15% (“How predictive analytics and AI boost student retention rates,” 2024).

Enhanced Student Engagement

When a student hesitates to ask questions in class, their AI study companion maintains engagement by prompting deeper thinking through personalized messages, reminders, and gamified learning environments. This support connects abstract concepts to the student's specific interests and career aspirations, boosting motivation and persistence when human support isn't available. Generative AI can create these tailored learning activities while incorporating evidence-based teaching approaches, such as metacognitive reflection techniques, into its design.

Improved Workforce Alignment

AI-driven labor market analysis ensures curricula remain relevant by continuously scanning employer needs and emerging skill requirements. This helps students graduate with skills that match employer demands in real time, increasing employability and economic mobility.

Operational Efficiencies

Automating administrative tasks — from scheduling to financial aid processing to enrollment management — frees up resources for deeper student engagement. By handling routine inquiries and processes, AI allows staff to focus on complex cases requiring human judgment and empathy.

Associated Responsibilities

At the same time, these opportunities require corresponding responsibility. Unchecked AI systems can perpetuate biases, undermine equity, and erode trust. To harness AI's potential while safeguarding institutional values, leaders must prioritize transparency, ethical deployment, and continuous human oversight. Artificial intelligence should not be siloed into a standalone strategy but woven into the broader fabric of institutional goals and technology-forward initiatives. Community colleges, especially those with limited resources, can leverage AI as part of a cohesive strategy to enhance competitiveness, equity, and student success.

The Urgent Need for Strategic and Intentional Integration of AI

Recent data indicate a clear disconnect between the frenetic rate of adoption of AI by students and the far slower movement to use AI by faculty and colleges. A 2024 Cengage survey of almost a thousand recent graduates revealed that 70% of recent graduates felt AI should be integrated into courses, and 55% believed that their degree programs "did not prepare them to use the new technology tools in the workforce" (Zajac, 2024). Findings like this are not surprising when one considers the June 2024 survey by Ithaka S+R, which reported that "two out of five faculty members are familiar with AI, but only 14 percent said they are confident in their ability to use it in their teaching" (Coffey, 2024).

With constant advances in the development and use of AI, colleges that fail to act risk continuing to prepare students for a world that is quickly fading away. AI offers transformative opportunities for community colleges to rapidly transition to educational models that reflect the future our students will inhabit rather than the one in which they were born.

Equally important, the pace of change has the potential (like previous technologies) to exacerbate existing educational inequities unless it is implemented intentionally to strengthen student success and increase social and economic mobility and community well-being.

For community college leaders, AI represents both an urgent challenge and a strategic call to action: How can we create the conditions for faculty, staff, and students to embrace and effectively harness AI to advance student success, streamline operations, and future-proof our graduates for an AI-integrated workforce?

The answer lies in cultivating healthy institutional habits that integrate AI as a force multiplier for human potential. Strategic implementation of AI amplifies the impact of educators and advisors while freeing up time for high-value human interactions, ultimately enhancing connections, relationships, learning, and success. By fostering a culture that intentionally and ethically leverages AI, community colleges can lead the way in innovation, equity, and student success.

The framework presented in this paper clarifies key components of organizational strategy for community college leaders to consider in providing the necessary guidance and parameters to help their campus cultures evolve in the emerging age of AI. Institutions that embed AI into their organizational culture and strategic direction will become more responsive, resilient, and student-centered; position themselves as leaders in the evolving educational landscape; and, most importantly, maintain relevance for the students and communities they serve.

From AI Literacy to AI Agility: What Community College Learners Need

As generative AI transforms industries and occupations, traditional students and adult learners need skills that power immediate employability, career advancement, and lifelong career adaptability. This requires that colleges double down on achieving the first step: ensuring that digital literacy in general is integrated into the curriculum and learning of all students. Institutions then need to build on that foundation so that students become AI literate — that is, knowing what AI can do and being able to perform the basic functions. But ultimately, the goal is to move students from literacy to fluency and toward AI agility.

AI agility is the capacity to evolve with AI. It builds on AI literacy but goes further, equipping learners to continuously adapt their skills, workflows, and decision-making as AI capabilities expand. It enables ongoing engagement with AI tools and active learning that prepares students not only to fill today's entry-level roles, but also to grow with the technology throughout their careers. To that end, institutions need to assess where they are in AI adoption, determining what level of implementation and integration they have achieved and, more importantly, assessing what learners need to become AI-agile. This includes preparing students to be career-ready and responsive to the needs of local and regional employers, while accelerating learning through hands-on engagement with AI that leads to meaningful student outcomes.

This section provides an overview of those needs, although each college will need to assess and customize these characteristics to match local needs.

AI agility for community college learners focuses on three practical skill pairings (McLees, 2025):

1. **Practical AI Tools & Prompt Design → Ability to Create Workplace Value:** Learning to use AI tools common in local industries and designing effective prompts that solve real workplace problems and create value. This transforms classroom learning into employable skills for local job markets.
2. **Collaborative AI Partnerships → Career Advancement:** Creating human–AI workflows that enhance productivity in entry-level positions while building the collaboration habits, ethical discernment, and decision-making skills needed for supervisory and leadership roles.
3. **Building on Uniquely Human Skills → Enhanced Job Security:** Developing the interpersonal, creative, and critical thinking capabilities that complement AI rather than competing with AI and risk being trumped by it. This includes elevating the role of the humanities with AI and requires colleges to think about stronger learning outcomes in ethics, logic, and critical analysis. These changes will help learners, assisted by AI, to ask better questions that lead to better answers and showcase their human advantage as they use AI to assist them in a broad range of tasks.

Community college programs can integrate AI agility by:

- Connecting with local employers to identify industry-specific AI applications
- Providing practical, hands-on experience with AI tools used in target industries
- Creating portfolios of AI-assisted work relevant to local employers
- Creating microcredentials that demonstrate practical AI skills
- Helping students learn to leverage AI to balance work, education, and personal responsibilities

AI agility forms the foundation of career resilience, enabling students to launch strong careers, incumbent workers to pivot successfully, and lifelong learners to continuously reinvent themselves in an AI-integrated economy. By fostering true AI agility rather than just basic literacy, institutions can ensure all learners are prepared not just to survive but to thrive in an AI-integrated workplace.

Higher education must prepare people to adapt for an uncertain future, Lumina Foundation President and CEO Jamie Merisotis said at the Celebrating and Accelerating Attainment: 2025 & Beyond event. “That’s a fundamental part of this idea of higher ed as an engine of economic progress and social stability,” he said. “It’s about preparing people for the now and the next” (Lumina Foundation, 2025).

AI Capabilities Employers Are Seeking

Employers increasingly seek candidates who demonstrate AI agility through these key capabilities (see Appendix A for underpinning research on each area):

Human–AI Collaboration

- **Prompt Design:** Crafting effective instructions to generate valuable AI output.
- **Effective Partnerships:** Working seamlessly with AI as a collaborator.
- **Task Delegation:** Assigning appropriate tasks to AI while ensuring human judgment is applied for appropriate decisions.
- **Critically Evaluating and Elevating AI Outputs:** Enhancing AI-generated content with human creativity and contextual understanding.

Strategic AI Application & Value Creation

- **Purposeful AI Integration:** Using AI strategically to address specific business challenges, deliver measurable outcomes, and create value aligned with organizational goals.
- **Innovative Experimentation:** Cultivating curiosity and adaptability by exploring new AI tools and imagining creative use cases beyond transactional applications to drive transformative impact.
- **Augmented Productivity:** Leveraging AI to enhance human capabilities, improve the quality of work, and elevate well-being through collaboration rather than competition.
- **Systems Thinking:** Positioning oneself strategically within AI-enhanced organizations, identifying high-value roles that complement rather than compete with automation.

Ethical Responsibility and Risk Awareness

- **Ethical Discernment:** Building awareness of the alignment of AI usage with organizational values and ethical principles.
- **Bias Recognition:** Identifying and mitigating potential biases in AI-generated content.
- **Privacy Protection:** Safeguarding sensitive data when using AI tools.
- **Transparency Practices:** Documenting AI use and maintaining appropriate human oversight.

Continuous Learning

- **Skill Development:** Actively refining and expanding one's abilities to work effectively with evolving AI tools, ensuring adaptability in a rapidly changing technological landscape.
- **Multidisciplinary Expertise:** Building expertise across diverse fields and integrating this knowledge with AI capabilities to solve complex, novel problems that require cross-domain thinking.
- **Knowledge Integration:** Leveraging AI to bridge gaps between technical and domain-specific expertise, creating innovative solutions that address real-world challenges.
- **Self-Directed Learning:** Fostering a proactive mindset by seeking out opportunities to enhance AI-related skills through experimentation, research, and hands-on practice, ensuring continuous growth in the AI economy.

Core Principles for Creating the AI-Enabled Community College

Preparing students to be AI-agile requires institutions to be AI-agile as well. This means that AI is not a separate initiative or an isolated tool, but part of the institution's core infrastructure and its student success work. This holistic approach enables colleges to build on current infrastructures, promoting smoother integration and fostering a culture of adaptation to evolve in meaningful ways. For under-resourced colleges, this is a game changer — AI can level the playing field, providing tools that scale outreach, personalize learning, and optimize operations without the need for vast new groups of resources that can be assigned to particular users.

Strategic AI deployment in marketing transforms outreach to underrepresented communities through data-driven insights. Communication becomes more relevant and accessible. Similarly, AI analytics reshape enrollment and retention by directing resources toward interventions with measurable impact on student progression.

Finally, an integrated approach requires colleges to leverage AI to strengthen and elevate institutional research (IR) teams. IR is often dedicated to taking, prioritizing, and responding to requests for data. Often lacking are the tools allowing IR to proactively elevate insights that drive the college agenda. That opportunity exists now like never before.

Creating a data-informed and technology-forward culture is key to seamless AI integration. Institutions that embed AI into their broader strategic goals foster an environment where innovation thrives and resistance to change diminishes. This approach to establishing a cohesive culture for AI minimizes the danger of treating AI as a distinct and separate initiative. Rather, an integrated strategy centers AI development by empowering cross-functional teams to leverage AI in ways that align with institutional priorities for student success, operational excellence, and community impact.

ATD Network colleges have seen how professional learning flourishes in a data-informed and tech-forward culture in which AI can act as an accelerator. When colleges integrate AI literacy and agility into training and foster communities of practice, they extend AI's benefits across departments while faculty and staff gain practical skills to enhance student service.

Depending on the readiness of the institution, AI has the potential to fundamentally transform how community colleges educate, support, and prepare students. Institutional leaders ready to bridge vision and execution should focus on the following core principles:

1. **Institutional Culture:** Integrate AI effectively by taking a whole-college approach. Building out a college's AI capacity requires nothing less than a culture change that engages leadership, administration, faculty and staff.
2. **Strategic Alignment:** Prioritize AI initiatives that directly advance student success and workforce readiness goals.
3. **Operational Integration:** Systematically assess persistent operational challenges (e.g., enrollment bottlenecks, scheduling inefficiencies, high DFW courses, advising constraints) and prioritize AI-driven solutions to address them directly.
4. **Talent Development:** Equip faculty and staff with targeted resources and ongoing professional development that build practical, human-first AI competencies.
5. **Ethical Governance:** Establish clear frameworks that safeguard equity, privacy, and transparency in all AI applications.
6. **Continuous Experimentation:** Encourage faculty and staff to "play" with AI within the guardrails established by the institution to realize the full benefit of AI for students and the community.
7. **Ongoing Assessment:** Regularly assess AI adoption to identify strengths and gaps, informing strategic investments and capacity building.

Implementing a holistic AI approach to support college core goals of institutional transformation, student success, and community vibrancy carries inherent challenges, but institutional stagnation presents greater long-term risks. Community colleges that integrate AI through a principled, strategic process that cuts across institutional priorities and operations position themselves to navigate uncertainty while advancing innovation and equity in education.

Action Areas for an AI-Enabled College

Fundamentally, the ability of a college to help more students succeed is dependent on its ability to strategically strengthen institutional capacities that help students and communities thrive. AI will likely impact virtually every aspect of a college's operations to varying degrees depending on institutional priorities and timelines to shape that impact. An AI-enabled college should be more efficient and productive, but most importantly it should use AI to become even more student- and community-centered.

To maximize AI's transformative potential, colleges will need to consider how AI can be a force multiplier in bolstering eight key areas of action that are grounded in the core principles outlined above:

Action Area 1: Demonstrate Strategic Leadership

Action Area 2: Establish Ethical AI Governance

Action Area 3: Develop Assessments To Measure AI User Impact

Action Area 4: Build Staff Capabilities

Action Area 5: Support Professional Learning and Faculty Engagement

Action Area 6: Redesign the Curriculum

Action Area 7: Leverage AI for Workforce Alignment

Action Area 8: Invest in Student Success Through AI

The following strategic considerations review each of these action areas, which are foundational to AI integration across a college that is mission-driven but nimble enough to evolve as AI does.

Many of these actions will be addressed by institutions simultaneously as colleges will have different priorities. But the order of the eight action areas in this document reflects the notion that institutions should have a plan and governance to ensure that actions — including those that address high-priority needs such as faculty adoption and linking AI to student success — are consistent with that plan.

Action Area 1: Demonstrate Strategic Leadership

Students and faculty experimenting with AI are seeking more guidance and guidelines from their institutions on AI's use, rules of engagement, and integration into the workplace (Kelly, 2024; Ruediger et al., 2024). Managing the integration of AI into all aspects of the college cannot be left to a coalition of willing early adopters; it requires a strategic plan that signals the importance of integrating AI effectively and leadership that supports this work. To that end, colleges should consider the actions below:

- **Establish a comprehensive AI strategy.** Integrate AI initiatives directly into institutional priorities, explicitly aligning them with measurable goals for student success, workforce readiness, and operational effectiveness. Integration throughout the institution is critical; isolated AI strategy within one department would be incomplete and ineffective.
- **Assess financial impact and required strategic resourcing.** AI does have the potential to make institutions more effective, but it also requires investment. Assessing AI-related needs, costs, and financial return on investment in areas such as technology upgrades, data management systems, and support for professional development — and aligning the institution's budget with those needs — is an important part of an institution's overall AI strategy.
- **Equip leaders, faculty, and staff for informed AI decision-making.** Provide targeted training, case studies, and expert consultations to build AI agility and strategic insight.
- **Reinforce AI's transformative potential.** Clearly communicate the transformative magnitude of AI, emphasizing urgency to inspire institutional action.
- **Create evaluation frameworks for AI initiatives.** Design metrics aligned with institutional goals to measure both quantitative and qualitative outcomes.
- **Model ethical AI use and set institutional standards.** Demonstrate responsible AI practices through leadership actions, setting expectations for the entire institution.

For AI-supported institutional transformation to take root, each of these leadership action areas will need to be pursued collectively with faculty, staff, and students as well as business and community partners. The actions required for overall leadership of AI integration can serve as the foundation for other action areas, which is why it is critical that college leaders establish AI as a priority area that the institution will address and support.

Action Area 2: Establish Ethical AI Governance

Perhaps the biggest concern about AI as an educational tool is how institutions can ensure that it is used ethically and upholds high standards of academic integrity. As such, a key piece of strategic leadership required at an early stage of implementation is establishing governance structures for responsible innovation. Institutions need to develop policies and frameworks that guide AI adoption, ensuring accountability and ethical use. To that end, colleges should consider the following actions:

- **Develop governance frameworks addressing data privacy, academic integrity, fairness, and transparency.** AI raises a host of institutional concerns, from the use of student data to the ethical use of AI to support learning and more. To build trust in the institution's adoption of AI requires transparency and clear guidelines for, among other things, the use of student data that meets FERPA requirements, establishing a culture of academic integrity, ensuring equitable access to unbiased AI platforms, and continuous human oversight to ensure student success.

- **Establish and clearly communicate expectations for use of AI to encourage dynamic uses and ensure academic integrity.** Establishing expectations should encourage faculty experimentation with AI while exposing students to ethics and the importance of citing sources, the best uses of AI, and its limitations. Establishing and maintaining a culture of academic integrity has always been critical for colleges and universities. AI requires that institutions strengthen that culture.

- **Assess for bias in AI systems and outcomes.** The human-based training data and algorithms that underpin AI mean that bias is an ever-present potential challenge. Colleges need to ensure they have processes in place to assess the AI algorithms used for various tasks such as recruitment, advising, placement, and predicting student success, avoiding those with clear bias and implementing a bias mitigation strategy that includes tools and trainings that help all stakeholders identify and address bias in AI systems and outcomes. A comprehensive 2019 paper from the Brookings Institution (Lee et al., 2019) identifies causes of bias and examples of best practices, which include:

  - Establishing a bias impact statement
  - Ensuring diversity within work teams
  - Regular audits for bias
  - Relying on cross-functional work teams and expertise
  - Increasing human involvement in the design and monitoring of bias mitigation efforts.

- **Ensure widespread access to AI benefits across all student populations.** If AI is to be part of the student experience, then all students need to have access to those tools. This includes access to reliable broadband and hardware to use AI tools as well as access to digital literacy skills so that AI adoption does not further widen the digital divide. Just as AI depends on knowledgeable interaction with the technology to prompt it to provide the greatest benefit, colleges need to ensure all students have the skills to effectively interact with AI tools to realize those benefits and not create greater stratification. This is important for community colleges serving a student body that comes to college with diverse exposure to quality curriculum and learning tools, including AI.

Action Area 3: Develop Assessments To Measure AI User Impact

To go beyond establishing governance rules of fairness, regular system assessments should examine the impact of AI tools on different student populations, with particular attention to struggling students, and on faculty workload. Assessment should be a consideration in the design phase of AI implementation, identifying what challenge AI is intended to help address, what success would look like, and how the college will assess that success with quantitative data and qualitative assessments.

Assessments should include critical evaluations of several key areas:

- **Impact on student outcomes:** Colleges should be able to quantify AI's impact on performance, specifically persistence, retention, completion, and workforce/income outcomes. Assessments should include data on specific interventions and how they are impacting different populations of students.
- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** Colleges should evaluate tool accessibility, particularly for students with disabilities and students with less familiarity with navigating AI tools.
- **Faculty and staff workload:** Colleges should analyze how AI affects workloads, both in terms of efficiencies gained by automating administrative work as well as increased workloads due to learning and implementing new systems and participation in necessary professional development.
- **Explainability:** Colleges should both document and assess their AI decision-making processes to ensure that there is a broad understanding of what has been, is being, and will be implemented, and why.
- **Scalability and adaptability:** Colleges should assess AI adaptability and scalability of AI use across diverse college settings to ensure effective strategies are adopted as widely as possible and not siloed by program or function.
- **Continuous improvement:** Colleges should incorporate user feedback and performance data to improve existing systems and sunset those that are proving to be inefficient or ineffective.

By integrating these elements into optimization reports, institutions can ensure that AI tools are deployed responsibly while maximizing their potential for improving educational outcomes across all student populations.

Action Area 4: Build Staff Capabilities

Integrating AI into the work of the college is more than simply expecting staff to learn a new technology. It requires identifying where AI can be most effective in strengthening student success, encouraging strategies to adjust systems and processes, and providing staff with significant training and support to effectively implement these changes. The following actions are examples to achieve this:

- **Train student services staff in AI-enhanced advising and support.** High caseloads for community college student advisors and support staff is a well-documented challenge (Lin et al., 2024), as is the ability of many students to meet with advisors and support staff (Ruediger et al., 2024). AI has the potential to address these challenges by augmenting the work of advisors and support staff to handle more routine questions students may have and providing students with greater access to resources. This requires working with staff to identify where and how AI could be implemented to better serve students and providing the necessary professional learning opportunities to ensure an effective balance of human and AI student supports.

- **Develop technical teams to support the institution's AI infrastructure.** Depending on the level of institutional access to AI a college provides its users and staff, generative AI poses new infrastructure issues for colleges. To support particular uses and access to AI, colleges should establish teams to assess and support the college's technical needs related to AI.

- **Create cross-functional teams to implement AI initiatives across departments.** Building staff capacity in different areas of the college is essential, but equally important is ensuring that those departments are working in concert. Adoption of AI strategies in advising and student supports will require IT help, new types of curricula, support of advisors and counselors, and so on. Creating cross-functional teams will ensure better coordination and will provide the foundation for building the capacity needed to integrate AI into operational workflows while maintaining human involvement.

Action Area 5: Support Professional Learning and Faculty Engagement

Faculty have the most direct impact on the student experience and are the scalers of many new innovations that support student success. Community colleges will not realize the full promise of AI until all faculty are comfortable with and fluent in using the technology.

A recent survey of instructors by Ithaka S+R found that "[o]nly 18 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understand teaching applications of generative AI, and only 14 percent agreed or strongly agreed they feel confident in their ability to use generative AI in their instruction." And "42 percent of instructors completely prohibit their students from using generative AI." (Ruediger et al., 2024). Successful implementation of AI will require overcoming these barriers to ensure that faculty are AI-agile, able to both continuously improve their own use of AI and ensure that students are evolving their AI skills and knowledge to be as prepared for the world of work as possible.

Successful implementation will also require that colleges consider and connect their AI professional learning strategy with ATD's four cornerstones of teaching and learning excellence that anchor adoption of any key faculty reform (Eynon & Iuzzini, 2020).

Colleges use many vehicles to engage faculty members in meaningful dialogue about change and in putting the support structures in place to support that change. Many ATD Network colleges, for example, use Centers for Teaching and Learning as that vehicle. Others use special task forces with specific charges. For example, half of college and university presidents say they have established an AI task force (Moody, 2025). No matter the vehicle, colleges should consider the following actions:

- **Provide hands-on training in effective AI tool utilization.** Offer practical workshops and resources to help faculty integrate AI into teaching and research.
- **Support the redesign of assignments and assessments.** Guide faculty in adapting assignments and assessments for an AI-integrated learning environment.
- **Create communities of practice for sharing strategies.** Foster collaborative networks where faculty can exchange effective implementation practices.
- **Teach faculty to foster AI agility in students.** Equip educators with tools to design curricula and classroom practices that prepare students to adapt to emerging AI technologies.

These professional learning strategies need to be ongoing so that best practice becomes everyday practice. They will also need to evolve with AI to ensure that colleges are meeting the academic and workforce preparation needs of students.

ATD's Four Cornerstones of Teaching and Learning Excellence:

1. Full-time and adjunct faculty use evidence-based instructional practices to foster student learning.
2. Collaborative partnerships link faculty and student affairs professionals in shared efforts to cultivate learning and support student success.
3. Educators join students as active learners in an accessible, empowering, personalized, and supportive academic community.
4. The institution embraces professional learning for continuous improvement, realigning related expectations in hiring, evaluation, and promotion.

Action Area 6: Redesign the Curriculum

To fully benefit from the technology, community colleges must update the college's curriculum to employ AI in the classroom and programs as well as to prepare students for the use of AI in their future careers. To that end, colleges should consider the following actions.

- **Launch a curriculum task force that has the status of a "blue ribbon" commission.** Led by the provost and faculty leaders who can engage in discussions with all faculty members, this group should take up the curricular implications of AI for the college, developing recommendations for campus-wide curriculum integration.

- **Create a prioritized process within the institution's program and course review process for updating curriculum specifically focused on incorporation of AI into the curriculum in appropriate ways.** To inform this process, colleges can follow industry AI trends (AI-Enabled ICT Workforce Consortium, 2024) to remain up to date on the AI skills required to perform jobs. Every discipline is or soon will be touched by the changes AI is ushering in, and students should be exposed to these changes, their promises, and their risks if they are to succeed in the years ahead. Disciplines ready to lead the way can suggest templates and effective home-grown exemplars.

- **Include faculty, students, and academic administrators in the development of an ethics-driven AI governance curriculum policy** that is clearly connected to the AI Ethics Governance effort described in Action Area 2. Establish an "ethics across the curriculum" approach that involves students, faculty, and leadership and situate AI in the context of other issues related to academic integrity and ethical behaviors in learning and in the workplace. Each department might have its own conversation. For example, a discussion among English department faculty might start with a discussion of plagiarism as it relates to AI, but go from there into a discussion about how to teach "voice" in writing by using the flattened AI voice to help students understand the difference between that and human creativity — and inspire their own writing voice at the same time.

Action Area 7: Leverage AI for Workforce Alignment

By 2030, up to 12 million occupational transitions may be required in the U.S., driven by automation and generative AI. Workers in lower-wage jobs are up to 14 times more likely to change occupations than those in higher-wage positions. In this environment, working adults are likely to look to community colleges to develop new skills to enter new careers and increase their potential earnings in an uncertain job market. Tools already exist to help workers analyze existing skills, match workers to emerging roles, and guide them through targeted microcredential programs that can be completed between shifts. By transforming potential job loss into career advancement, AI empowers workers to adapt to evolving labor demands.

In addition to upskilling, AI-driven career coaching can help ensure that learners and workers stay current with the latest skills and can play a crucial role in mapping personalized career pathways. These systems provide tailored guidance, helping workers identify long-term goals and navigate transitions into future-ready roles. Together, upskilling and career coaching foster adaptability and resilience, ensuring workers remain competitive in the labor market.

To help incumbent workers pursue reskilling and upskilling opportunities, colleges should consider the following actions that should become regular practice within the institution:

- **Examine curricula in collaboration with industry leaders.** Use insights from industry leaders to inform and update courses and programs, ensuring alignment with evolving industry standards and requirements.
- **Partner with industry leaders to co-develop AI-powered microcredentials** that correspond to real-time employer skill demands.
- **Offer personalized, AI-driven career coaching to incumbent workers.** Focus on facilitating tailored upskilling pathways aligned with individual career goals and market needs.
- **Create simulated workplace scenarios using generative AI** that develop practical, job-relevant skills through authentic problem-solving.

Action Area 8: Invest in Student Success Through AI

Each capacity area discussed above is ultimately about strengthening the college's student success agenda and outcomes. At the same time, AI provides a host of potential tools that can be deployed to directly impact students' educational success. Colleges should consider the following actions:

- **Deploy adaptive learning platforms** in foundational and gateway courses that traditionally have high withdrawal rates.
- **Use predictive analytics to identify at-promise students**, initiating timely, personalized interventions.
- **Integrate AI assistants** to extend advising, tutoring, career information, financial aid guidance, and mental health support beyond conventional hours.
- **Provide students with personalized AI learning companions** that support continuous learning, offer tailored resources, and adapt to individual learning patterns across courses.
- **Implement AI-powered early alert systems that trigger proactive interventions** when students:
  - Show signs of disengagement (decreasing or irregular attendance, missed or late assignment submissions, lack of participation in class activities, non-responsiveness to outreach efforts) and need encouragement to get back on track; and
  - Are successfully engaging and reaching important milestones to help motivate them to continue to excel.
- **Implement interactive, AI-driven learning tools and gamification techniques** to sustain student motivation and engagement.
- **Leverage AI tools to support multilingual capabilities and accessible content** to support diverse student groups. This includes developing and using AI tools and language models that preserve and revitalize Indigenous languages and cultural practices rather than erase them.
- **Create enhanced collaborative learning experiences** that develop teamwork and communication skills while leveraging AI as a resource.
- **Teach critical AI literacy skills** so students can recognize patterns of bias in AI outputs by comparing multiple responses, considering source data limitations, and examining how prompts are framed. (Debiasing prompt techniques should be considered.)

Implications for ATD: Supporting AI Agility

Just as colleges need to transform to integrate AI if they are going to help students prepare for the future of work, so must organizations that support colleges. The establishment of the ATD AI for All Task Force and this report is a first step to identify actions that colleges can take. The implications of the Task Force's report suggest that colleges can benefit from professional learning opportunities focused on integrating AI in teaching and learning and across the institution. That will include:

- **Strengthening the knowledge base about AI implementation in community colleges:** ATD coaches and staff work with hundreds of community colleges, open-access institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities each year, helping them build their capacity to better serve students and communities. ATD might consider strengthening the institutional knowledge base about AI by exploring how AI is being used to advance community vibrancy through research on the effectiveness of AI strategies and by integrating AI agility into its coaching and support services. To support this work, ATD could develop a funded AI initiative with support from foundations seeking to learn more about how colleges can maximize results across all aspects of the institution.

- **Elevating best practices:** Many ATD Network colleges are already working to integrate AI into their operations in each of the action areas recommended in this report. ATD could elevate the best practices of those colleges through a series of case studies connected to the eight action areas to be shared across the Network and beyond.

- **Ongoing professional learning:** Whether through our annual DREAM convening, our regular professional learning meetings such as the Data and Analytics Summit, or our ongoing webinar series on AI, ATD could provide timely and focused professional learning opportunities to help colleges build capacities in each of the action areas outlined above.

- **Partnership development:** While ATD's core focus is its work with colleges, ATD also has robust partnerships with other research, education, and policy-focused organizations and funders. These partnerships are key to ATD's ability to test new ideas, validate effective evidence-based practices, and support community colleges as engines of change. ATD should consider continuing to build out those partnerships with an eye toward building greater knowledge of AI and supports for colleges as they work to integrate AI.

ATD's commitment to this work is driven by its central focus to ensure that our educational institutions and policies are focused squarely on increasing student success and helping communities thrive. As leading AI scholar Dr. Ethan Mollick, a plenary speaker at ATD's 2025 DREAM conference, has written:

> *The integration of AI in education is not a future possibility — it's our present reality. This shift demands more than passive acceptance or futile resistance. It requires a fundamental reimagining of how we teach, learn, and assess knowledge. As AI becomes an integral part of the educational landscape, our focus must evolve. The goal isn't to outsmart AI or to pretend it doesn't exist, but to harness its potential to enhance education while mitigating the downside. The question now is not whether AI will change education, but how we will shape that change to create a more effective, equitable, and engaging learning environment for all.* (Mollick, 2024)

Community colleges are in the early stages of a multiyear AI phenomenon but need to take action now to secure their future by leveraging AI to increase student success, institutional productivity, and equity. Failing to take advantage of the positive aspects of generative AI will risk leaving more students behind, sending students to work unprepared, and further eroding confidence in higher education.

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Appendix A: Research on AI Capabilities Employers are Seeking

The following research informed the list of AI capabilities employers are seeking (p17) and was compiled by AI Task Force member Todd McLees.

Human–AI Collaboration

1. **Prompt Design:** McKinsey's latest AI survey reports that roles in prompt engineering have "recently emerged" as generative AI adoption surges, with 7% of AI-adopting organizations hiring prompt engineers in the past year.
   Chui, M., Hall, B., Yee, L., Singla, A., & Sukharevsky, A. (2023). The state of AI in 2023: Generative AI's breakout year. McKinsey & Company.

2. **Effective Partnerships With AI:** According to a survey of more than 1,000 global employers conducted by the World Economic Forum, by 2030 77% of employers plan to prioritize reskilling/upskilling their workforce to enhance human–AI collaboration. This highlights strong employer demand for employees who can work effectively in tandem with AI systems.
   The future of jobs report 2025. (2025). World Economic Forum. (Survey of 1,000+ global employers.)

3. **Task Delegation With Human Judgment:** A global study of AI in management found that increased AI adoption raised demand for managers, because "AI, while quick and powerful, still needs human judgment ... understanding the most important things to do." In other words, organizations seek professionals who can wisely delegate tasks to AI and oversee its outputs.
   Giné, M. (2024, Nov 14). AI is increasing demand for managers — and changing their skill sets. IESE Insight. (Research analyzing 375 million job postings, showing AI adoption drives hiring of managers for oversight.)

4. **Critical Evaluation and Enhancement of AI Outputs:** A Reuters analysis concludes that even as companies automate work with AI, "many businesses ... will nonetheless still need to employ human workers to oversee AI outputs." Employers recognize the need for staff who can critically evaluate AI-generated results and improve or correct them for accuracy and quality.
   Markel, K. A., Lipson, J. L., & Smolow, A. M. (2024, March 15). AI and wage and hour laws: What employers need to know. Reuters. (Thomson Reuters commentary on maintaining human oversight of AI.)

Strategic AI Application & Value Creation

5. **Purposeful AI Integration:** Deloitte research emphasizes that mastering certain technical skills "enable[s] workers to efficiently integrate AI into their workflows to bring value and impact, from automating tasks to improving decision-making processes." Employers are seeking talent that can strategically implement AI solutions to drive business value.
   Preparing students for an AI-driven workforce and the future of work. (2023). Deloitte Insights. (White paper highlighting the need for AI integration skills.)

6. **Innovative Experimentation:** The World Economic Forum notes that creative thinking and traits like curiosity, agility, and flexibility are among the fastest-rising workplace skills. This reflects a premium on employees who will experiment with emerging AI tools and innovate new solutions.
   Future of jobs report 2025. (2025). World Economic Forum. (Employers identify creativity and curiosity as growing in importance.)

7. **Augmented Productivity:** A 2024 Mercer survey found that over one-third of employers expect AI to boost employee productivity by more than 30%, yet 74% of executives worry about their workforce's ability to adapt. As one Mercer executive observes, organizations have "a real need to address skilling ... based on AI. Being proactive in this space will be key to unlocking productivity and ensuring [employers are] fit for the future." This underscores employer demand for employees who can leverage AI to augment their productivity.
   Staff (Mercer). (2024, Mar 14). Survey finds Canadian employers looking at AI to enhance worker productivity, but concerns remain. Benefits Canada. (Summary of Mercer's global survey on AI and talent.)

8. **Systems Thinking in AI-Augmented Organizations:** As AI becomes embedded in business, companies increasingly value systems thinking — the ability to see the big picture and interdependencies. For example, futurist Jeremy Kahn argues that many roles will evolve to overseeing AI-driven processes, "making critical/systems thinking and contextual judgment even more vital." Professionals who can align AI initiatives with overall business systems and workflows are in high demand.
   Kahn, J. (2024). Mastering AI. Simon & Schuster. (Book emphasizing the need for holistic, systems-level thinking when integrating AI in organizations.)

Ethical Responsibility and Risk Awareness

9. **Ethical Discernment:** New workforce analyses show a rapid rise in demand for AI ethics skills. A 2023 study of millions of job ads found "more than 100,000 job postings per year now request AI ethics or governance skills," with employers seeking candidates who understand how to use AI responsibly. This indicates companies are actively recruiting professionals who can discern ethical issues and guide AI use ethically.
   Wiese, L. J., Rathinam, S. S., Oschinski, M., DeWitt, B., & Schiff, D. (2025). AI ethics and governance in the job market: Trends, skills, and sectoral demand. IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society. (Empirical study showing ethics/governance skills becoming core hiring criteria.)

10. **Bias Recognition:** Along with ethics, organizations are creating specialized roles to ensure AI fairness. For instance, companies are appointing "bias remediation specialists" to detect and correct algorithmic biases. This trend reflects employer demand for experts who can recognize biases in AI systems and uphold diversity, equity, and inclusion in AI-driven decisions.
    Grobbelaar, S. (2025, Jun 1). The AI job revolution: Why Mark Cuban is right about employment's future. LinkedIn. (Post discussing emerging AI roles such as bias auditors to guarantee fair AI outcomes.)

11. **Privacy Protection:** With data-driven AI on the rise, businesses seek talent adept in data privacy and security. Deloitte identifies privacy protection as a key competency for responsible AI deployment, grouping it with ethical reasoning and risk assessment as essential "ethical skills" for the AI era. Employers are prioritizing professionals who can safeguard personal data and ensure compliance while implementing AI.
    Preparing students for an AI-driven workforce and the future of work. (2023). Deloitte Insights. (Article highlighting privacy and security skills as critical in an AI-enabled workplace.)

12. **Transparency and Oversight in AI Use:** Organizations are also emphasizing AI governance and transparency. The IEEE 2023 job market study noted that AI ethics and oversight skills are "no longer niche — they're becoming central to how organizations manage AI." Employers want people who can establish transparent AI practices and oversight frameworks (e.g. audit trails, accountability measures) to ensure AI is used responsibly.
Wiese, L. J., Rathinam, S. S., & Oschinski, M., DeWitt, B., & Schiff, D. (2025). AI ethics and governance in the job market: trends, skills, and sectoral demand. IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society. (Finds that companies across industries are now integrating AI governance roles to oversee and guide AI use.)

Continuous Learning

13. **AI Skill Development:** Employers explicitly value employees who continuously develop their AI competencies. In one recent survey, 66% of business leaders said they would favor hiring a candidate with strong AI skills over one with more experience but no AI skills. Nearly 70% of companies plan to adopt AI by 2030, so they are looking for workers who proactively learn new AI tools and techniques.
Grobbelaar, S. (2025, Jun 1). The AI job revolution: Why Mark Cuban is right about employment's future. LinkedIn. (Citing surveys of business leaders on the importance of AI skills in hiring decisions.)

14. **Multidisciplinary Expertise:** The ability to draw on knowledge from multiple domains is increasingly in demand. Employers "are not just seeking technical talent. They want people who can bridge across domains — combining knowledge of AI with regulatory, legal, organizational, and ethical competencies." Such multidisciplinary experts can collaborate across teams and apply AI in context, making them highly valuable in the modern workforce.
Wiese, L. J., Rathinam, S. S., & Oschinski, M., DeWitt, B., & Schiff, D. (2025). AI Ethics and governance in the job market: Trends, skills, and sectoral demand. IEEE Transactions on Technology and Society. (Reveals that hybrid skill sets — tech + domain expertise — are being actively sought by employers.)

15. **Knowledge Integration:** In a world of abundant information, top organizations prize those who can synthesize and integrate knowledge. As one expert noted, "Our greatest strength is ... the ability to integrate broadly." Rather than narrow specialists, employers foresee a need for polymath employees who can connect the dots across disciplines and innovate at the intersections. This skill of integrating diverse knowledge streams is seen as crucial for problem-solving and innovation in the future of work.
Smith, C. (2024, Dec 1). The future of expertise is synthesis in a world of abundant information. Training Journal. (Discusses the rising importance of knowledge synthesis and broad integration over narrow specialization.)

16. **Self-Directed Learning:** Finally, lifelong learning has become a core expectation. The Future of Jobs 2025 survey shows "curiosity and lifelong learning" are among the top 10 rising skills. Employers want self-directed learners who continuously update their skills as technology evolves. Being able to independently learn new AI systems, adapt to change, and "learn how to learn" is itself a critical skill for staying relevant in the workforce.
Future of jobs report 2025. (2025). World Economic Forum. (Finds that employers emphasize continuous learning ability — curiosity, adaptability, and self-driven skill development — as critical for future-proof careers.)

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