

# AI in Higher Education: Thought Leaders to Follow

Practical Voices on Using AI for Curriculum, Teaching, and Faculty Development

Compiled February 2026 | All URLs verified at time of publication

## About This Resource

This document profiles individuals who are actively writing, researching, and presenting on the practical use of generative AI in higher education. The focus is on people producing work that faculty can use right now: prompting techniques, curriculum design strategies, assessment approaches, policy frameworks, and honest assessments of what works and what does not.

The list prioritizes voices grounded in classroom experience and higher ed contexts. It is not exhaustive, and the landscape changes fast. Use it as a starting point for building your own network of sources.

## Thought Leader Profiles

### Ethan Mollick

*Associate Professor, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania; Faculty Director, Wharton Generative AI Labs*

**Focus:** Practical AI applications in education and work; AI as co-intelligence; research on how AI changes teaching, learning, and entrepreneurship.

**Why they matter:** Mollick is arguably the most widely read voice on AI in education. His Substack has 398K+ subscribers. His book *Co-Intelligence* (2024, NYT bestseller) is a foundational text for anyone thinking about AI and education. He and Lilach Mollick co-developed frameworks like "Seven Approaches for Students" that give faculty concrete ways to assign AI use. TIME named him one of the most influential people in AI (2024). His writing is accessible, experiment-driven, and consistently practical.

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| Substack     | <a href="https://www.oneusefulthing.org/">https://www.oneusefulthing.org/</a>   |
| X / Twitter  | <a href="https://x.com/emollick">https://x.com/emollick</a>   |
| LinkedIn     | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/emollick/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/emollick/</a>   |
| Wharton GAIL | <a href="https://gail.wharton.upenn.edu/">https://gail.wharton.upenn.edu/</a>   |
| Book         | <a href="https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/741805/co-intelligence-by-ethan-mollick/">https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/741805/co-intelligence-by-ethan-mollick/</a> |

### Lilach Mollick

*Co-Director and Senior Research Fellow, Wharton Generative AI Labs*

**Focus:** AI-driven pedagogy, simulation-based learning, instructional design with AI, faculty training.

**Why they matter:** Lilach Mollick co-authored several of the most cited papers on assigning AI in education, including "Assigning AI: Seven Approaches for Students, with Prompts" and "Instructors as Innovators." She brings deep expertise in pedagogy and game-based learning. She and Ethan Mollick co-developed a free Coursera course on AI in education with OpenAI. Her work focuses on empowering instructors to build their own AI-driven learning experiences without needing technical skills.

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| Wharton GAIL | <a href="https://gail.wharton.upenn.edu/about-us/">https://gail.wharton.upenn.edu/about-us/</a> |
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| <b>Coursera Course</b>  | <a href="https://www.coursera.org/learn/wharton-ai-in-education-leveraging-chatgpt-for-teaching">https://www.coursera.org/learn/wharton-ai-in-education-leveraging-chatgpt-for-teaching</a> |
| <b>Key Paper (SSRN)</b> | <a href="https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4475995">https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4475995</a>   |

## Bryan Alexander

*Higher Education Futurist; Senior Scholar, Georgetown University*

**Focus:** AI's impact on higher education futures; institutional strategy; horizon scanning of AI trends across academia.

**Why they matter:** Alexander has been tracking AI and education since the 1990s and brings a futurist's perspective that most voices in this space lack. His Substack provides regular, detailed scans of how AI is playing out across different types of institutions. He teaches a graduate seminar on AI and higher ed at Georgetown, co-leads the AAC&U AI Institute, and authored *Peak Higher Education (2025, Johns Hopkins)*. His work is especially valuable for understanding the broader institutional and political context in which AI adoption is happening.

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| <b>Substack</b>     | <a href="https://aiandacademia.substack.com/">https://aiandacademia.substack.com/</a>                 |
| <b>Website/Blog</b> | <a href="https://bryanalexander.org/">https://bryanalexander.org/</a>                                 |
| <b>LinkedIn</b>     | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/bryannalexander">https://www.linkedin.com/in/bryannalexander</a> |

## Lance Eaton, Ph.D.

*Senior Associate Director of AI in Teaching and Learning, Northeastern University*

**Focus:** AI literacy for faculty and staff; AI policy creation in higher education; practical workshops for educators.

**Why they matter:** Eaton is one of the most visible voices helping faculty and staff navigate AI at a practical level. He created a widely used repository of AI syllabi policies and has facilitated EDUCAUSE's Teaching with AI program. His Substack (11K+ subscribers) features interviews with educators, practical workshop materials shared under Creative Commons licenses, and thoughtful reflections on what AI means for people working in higher ed. He published in *EDUCAUSE Review* on generative AI policy creation (2025) and is especially good at making complex issues feel approachable.

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| <b>Substack</b>         | <a href="https://aiedusimplified.substack.com/">https://aiedusimplified.substack.com/</a>       |
| <b>EDUCAUSE Profile</b> | <a href="https://members.educause.edu/lance-eaton">https://members.educause.edu/lance-eaton</a> |
| <b>LinkedIn</b>         | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/lanceeaton/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/lanceeaton/</a>   |

## Marc Watkins

*Assistant Director of Academic Innovation; Director, Mississippi AI Institute for Teachers; Lecturer of Writing and Rhetoric, University of Mississippi*

**Focus:** Critical AI literacy for faculty; AI's impact on writing, reading, and student learning; faculty AI training at scale.

**Why they matter:** Watkins brings a healthy skepticism to AI in education that is grounded in hands-on faculty training, not theoretical opposition. He has led multiple university-wide AI institutes at Ole Miss, training 60-90+ faculty at a time. His Substack (7.4K+ subscribers) and *Chronicle of Higher Education* column address real classroom concerns: what happens when students use AI for reading, writing, and notetaking. He is co-authoring *The Norton Guide to AI-Aware Teaching* (W.W. Norton, 2026) with Derek Bruff and Annette Vee. His work has been profiled in *The Washington Post*.

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| <b>Substack</b> | <a href="https://marcwatkins.substack.com/">https://marcwatkins.substack.com/</a> |
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| Website  | <a href="https://marcwatkins.org/">https://marcwatkins.org/</a>                                   |
| LinkedIn | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/marc-watkins/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/marc-watkins/</a> |

## Derek Bruff

*Educator, Author, and Higher Ed Consultant; Associate Director, UVA Center for Teaching Excellence; Former Director, Vanderbilt Center for Teaching*

**Focus:** Intentional use of educational technology; AI-aware teaching strategies; faculty development.

**Why they matter:** Bruff approaches AI through the lens of intentional pedagogy: technology should serve learning goals, not the other way around. His Intentional Teaching podcast and newsletter are go-to resources for faculty development professionals and instructors. He is co-authoring *The Norton Guide to AI-Aware Teaching* (2026) with Marc Watkins and Annette Vee. His books *Intentional Tech* (2019) and *Teaching with Classroom Response Systems* (2009) established him as a leading voice on educational technology well before the generative AI era. He holds a PhD in mathematics and has taught at Vanderbilt and Harvard.

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| Website/Blog | <a href="https://derekbruff.org/">https://derekbruff.org/</a>                                 |
| Podcast      | <a href="https://derekbruff.org/podcast/">https://derekbruff.org/podcast/</a>                 |
| Newsletter   | <a href="https://derekbruff.ck.page/subscribe">https://derekbruff.ck.page/subscribe</a>       |
| LinkedIn     | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/derekbruff/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/derekbruff/</a> |

## Nick Potkalitsky, Ph.D.

*AI Implementation Consultant; Language Arts Instructor; Academic Researcher*

**Focus:** AI-responsive instructional methods; AI literacy programs; curriculum redesign for the AI era.

**Why they matter:** Potkalitsky's Educating AI Substack (11K+ subscribers) publishes deeply researched essays on AI's impact on education, covering everything from assessment design to the political economy of AI in schools. He works across both K-12 and higher ed, bringing cross-sector perspectives that most voices in this space miss. His work on AI implementation frameworks and his curation of research makes his newsletter especially useful for faculty who want to go deeper than surface-level takes.

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| Substack | <a href="https://nickpotkalitsky.substack.com/">https://nickpotkalitsky.substack.com/</a> |
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## Maha Bali, Ph.D.

*Professor of Practice, Center for Learning and Teaching, The American University in Cairo*

**Focus:** Critical AI literacy; equity and social justice in AI-enabled education; compassionate learning design; open educational practices.

**Why they matter:** Bali brings an essential global and equity-focused perspective to AI in education. Her work challenges the assumption that AI adoption is uniformly beneficial and centers questions about who is served and who is harmed. She co-authored a widely cited paper on responding to generative AI through open educational practices and published *GenAI in Higher Education: Redefining Teaching and Learning* (open access, with Rachel Forsyth). Her digital literacies toolkit at AUC is a practical resource for any faculty member thinking about critical approaches to AI.

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| AUC Faculty Page | <a href="https://www.aucegypt.edu/fac/maha-bali">https://www.aucegypt.edu/fac/maha-bali</a>                 |
| Blog             | <a href="https://blog.mahabali.me/">https://blog.mahabali.me/</a>   |
| LinkedIn         | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/maha-bali-3b51615/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/maha-bali-3b51615/</a> |

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| Digital Literacies Toolkit | <a href="https://learnhub.aucegypt.edu/digitaltoolkit/">https://learnhub.aucegypt.edu/digitaltoolkit/</a> |
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## Lily Lee and Aditya Syam

*Student Editors, AI x Education Newsletter; Lily Lee is a Stanford University student*

**Focus:** Curating AI and education news with a student-centered perspective; research digests; webinars connecting researchers with practitioners.

**Why they matter:** AI x Education brings something most other resources in this space lack: the student perspective. Lee and Syam curate AI developments in education, host webinars with Stanford researchers and others, and synthesize academic research into accessible formats. Their newsletter covers both K-12 and higher ed and includes global perspectives. Especially useful for faculty who want to understand how students are actually experiencing and thinking about AI.

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| Substack            | <a href="https://aixeducation.substack.com/">https://aixeducation.substack.com/</a>     |
| LinkedIn (Lily Lee) | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/lily-lee">https://www.linkedin.com/in/lily-lee</a> |

## Stephen Fitzpatrick

*History Teacher and Director of Debate, Hackley School (Tarrytown, NY); AI-Aware Education Consultant*

**Focus:** AI's impact on teaching, assessment, and academic integrity from a classroom practitioner's perspective; AI professional development for K-12 and independent school faculty.

**Why they matter:** Fitzpatrick is a 30-year classroom veteran who writes from the intersection of daily teaching and AI disruption. His Substack, Teaching in the Age of AI (7.5K+ subscribers), documents what's actually happening when AI meets real students and real assignments. He positions himself as a middle ground between AI evangelists and skeptics, which makes his writing especially useful for faculty who are skeptical but curious. He also runs AI-Aware Education Consulting, offering workshops and advisory services for schools. His post "The Real AI in Education Debate Is Happening on Substack" is a useful map of the broader conversation. Note: Fitzpatrick's primary context is K-12 independent schools, but his observations about assessment, academic integrity, and professional development translate directly to higher ed.

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| Substack | <a href="https://fitzyhistory.substack.com/">https://fitzyhistory.substack.com/</a> |
| Website  | <a href="https://stephenfitzpatrick.co/">https://stephenfitzpatrick.co/</a>         |

## Michelle Kassorla, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of English, Georgia State University, Perimeter College; EDUCAUSE AI Expert Panel Member; AAC&U AI Institute Mentor*

**Focus:** Teaching with AI in composition courses; AI-informed pedagogy for writing instruction; AI literacy frameworks for higher education.

**Why they matter:** Kassorla is one of the few faculty members who has integrated AI into every assignment in her courses since Fall 2023 and writes about what that looks like in practice. She led the EDUCAUSE AI Literacy Working Group and was principal author of their "AI Literacy in Teaching and Learning: A Durable Framework for Higher Education." With colleague Eugenia Novokshanova, she developed the Multimodal AI Project and co-authored Serious Play, a practical guide to teaching writing with generative AI. Her Substack, The Academic Platypus (1.3K+ subscribers), provides assignment-level detail that most other voices in this space don't

offer. She teaches at a large public university's community college campus, which means her work addresses access-focused student populations rather than elite contexts.

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| <b>Substack</b>          | <a href="https://michellekassorla.substack.com/">https://michellekassorla.substack.com/</a>                     |
| <b>LinkedIn</b>          | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/mkassorla/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/mkassorla/</a>                     |
| <b>EDUCAUSE Profile</b>  | <a href="https://members.educause.edu/michelle-kassorla-1">https://members.educause.edu/michelle-kassorla-1</a> |
| <b>AAC&amp;U Profile</b> | <a href="https://www.aacu.org/people/michelle-kassorla">https://www.aacu.org/people/michelle-kassorla</a>       |

## Michael G. Wagner, Ph.D.

*Professor of Digital Media and Department Head, Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design, Drexel University*

**Focus:** AI literacy in education; the relationship between human and machine cognition; educational uses of digital media and generative AI.

**Why they matter:** Wagner brings 30+ years of higher education experience across institutions in the U.S. and Europe (Vienna University of Technology, Arizona State University, Danube University Krems) to questions about AI and learning. His Substack, *The Augmented Educator* (834+ subscribers), and his published work challenge common assumptions about AI literacy, arguing that most educational approaches to AI are too narrow. His 2025 paper "Beyond Cheating: Rediscovering Dialogue and Authentic Learning" (*Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*) argues that AI detection is philosophically flawed and pedagogically counterproductive, advocating instead for dialogic models grounded in Socratic inquiry. His LLRX article on AI literacy contends that the goal should not be making students better at using AI but empowering them to be more discerning thinkers.

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| <b>Substack</b>         | <a href="https://substack.com/@michaelgwagner">https://substack.com/@michaelgwagner</a>                   |
| <b>Website</b>          | <a href="https://michaelgwagner.com/">https://michaelgwagner.com/</a>                                     |
| <b>LLRX Author Page</b> | <a href="https://www.llrx.com/author/michael-g-wagner/">https://www.llrx.com/author/michael-g-wagner/</a> |

## Josh Brake, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Engineering, Harvey Mudd College*

**Focus:** Technology, education, and human flourishing; critical perspectives on AI in education drawing from 20th-century technology critics; prototyping mindset for teaching.

**Why they matter:** Brake is an engineering professor whose Substack, *The Absent-Minded Professor* (5.8K+ subscribers, named a Substack Featured Publication in 2024), offers something rare in the AI-in-education space: a philosophically grounded perspective from someone who actually builds technology. He draws on thinkers like Neil Postman, Jacques Ellul, Ursula Franklin, and Ivan Illich to ask hard questions about what AI means for education and human development. His writing resists both uncritical adoption and reflexive rejection, consistently centering the question: "What is education actually for?" His essay "We Are Teaching Humans" and "Augmenting Ourselves to Death" are good starting points. He also gave an invited talk at MIT's Teaching + Learning Lab on AI through the lens of technological criticism.

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| <b>Substack</b> | <a href="https://joshbrake.substack.com/">https://joshbrake.substack.com/</a>         |
| <b>Website</b>  | <a href="https://joshbrake.com/">https://joshbrake.com/</a>                           |
| <b>LinkedIn</b> | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/jbrake/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/jbrake/</a> |

## Steven Mintz, Ph.D.

*Professor of History, University of Texas at Austin; Former Executive Director, UT System Institute for Transformational Learning*

**Focus:** Systemic reform of higher education in the AI era; assessment redesign; the crisis of credentialism and student disengagement.

**Why they matter:** Mintz is a prolific public intellectual who has written extensively about higher education for over a decade through his Inside Higher Ed column "Higher Ed Gamma" (which he ended in 2025) and now through his Substack (1.8K+ subscribers) and LinkedIn. His viral 2025 post about receiving 400 identical AI-generated student essays reframed the conversation from "students are cheating" to "the assignment was the problem." He argues AI didn't break higher education but exposed how broken it already was. The author of 17 books (including *The Learning-Centered University*, 2024), he advocates for eliminating outside-of-class graded assignments in favor of observable, in-person assessment. Featured in Business Insider, his work provides the institutional and historical context that most AI-in-education writing lacks. 2025 AAC&U President's Award recipient.

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| <b>Substack</b>                 | <a href="https://stevenmintz.substack.com/">https://stevenmintz.substack.com/</a>   |
| <b>LinkedIn</b>                 | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevenmintz1">https://www.linkedin.com/in/stevenmintz1</a>                           |
| <b>UT Austin Faculty Page</b>   | <a href="https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/shm654">https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/history/faculty/shm654</a> |
| <b>Inside Higher Ed Archive</b> | <a href="https://www.insidehighered.com/node/7185">https://www.insidehighered.com/node/7185</a>                           |

## James Genone, Ph.D.

*Senior Vice Chancellor for Learning Strategy, Northeastern University*

**Focus:** Learning strategy and AI integration at the institutional level; agentic and self-directed learning; educational technology and learning science; AI-driven pedagogy and curriculum design.

**Why they matter:** Genone brings an unusual combination of philosophy, learning science, and startup experience to questions about AI in higher education. Before joining Northeastern, he helped build Minerva University (one of the most cited examples of education innovation) and launched Atypical AI, a startup focused on deploying generative AI in educational settings. His newsletter, AI in Learning (hosted on beehiiv), is published through Northeastern's Division of Learning Strategy and features practical faculty spotlights alongside substantive essays on topics like agentic learning and self-directed curriculum design. He led Northeastern's partnership with Anthropic as the first university design partner for Claude for Education, and has spoken at the ASU+GSV Summit and Stanford Digital Education events. His academic background is in philosophy of mind and cognitive science (Ph.D., UC Berkeley; postdoctoral work at Stanford), which gives his writing on human-AI cognition a depth that most institutional voices lack.

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| <b>Newsletter</b>           | <a href="https://ai-in-learning.beehiiv.com/">https://ai-in-learning.beehiiv.com/</a>   |
| <b>Northeastern Profile</b> | <a href="https://chancellor.northeastern.edu/about/james-genone/">https://chancellor.northeastern.edu/about/james-genone/</a> |
| <b>LinkedIn</b>             | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/jgenone">https://www.linkedin.com/in/jgenone</a>   |

## Eric Hudson

*Education Consultant and Strategic Advisor; Former Chief Program Officer, Global Online Academy; ATLAS Board Member*

**Focus:** Human-centered AI in schools; AI literacy and professional development for educators; learner-centered assessment design; strategic planning for AI adoption in schools.

**Why they matter:** Hudson is a former classroom English teacher (12 years) turned consultant who has become one of the most trusted voices helping schools navigate AI at a practical level.

His Substack, Learning on Purpose (thousands of subscribers), has been featured in The Marshall Memo, The Chronicle of Higher Education, and The International Educator. He launched the newsletter in August 2023 and has built a reputation for writing that is grounded, human-centered, and genuinely useful for educators at any experience level. Before going independent, he spent a decade at Global Online Academy (GOA), a nonprofit consortium of schools, where he worked with educators worldwide on technology-enabled learning. He currently serves on the board of the Association of Technology Leaders in Independent Schools (ATLIS) and leads workshops and multi-month cohort programs on AI for schools, including partnerships with NAIS and the California Teacher Development Collaborative (CATDC). His writing consistently centers student voice and the importance of building a "culture of learning" around AI rather than a culture of fear. He holds an M.A. from UC Berkeley and a B.A. from Cornell. Note: Hudson's primary context is K-12 and independent schools, but his work on professional development, assessment design, and institutional AI strategy translates directly to higher education.

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| <b>Substack</b> | <a href="https://erichudson.substack.com/">https://erichudson.substack.com/</a>         |
| <b>Website</b>  | <a href="https://www.erichudson.co/">https://www.erichudson.co/</a>                     |
| <b>LinkedIn</b> | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/ejudson/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/ejudson/</a> |

## **Robert Talbert, Ph.D.**

*Professor of Mathematics and Senior Faculty Fellow for Learning Futures, Grand Valley State University*

**Focus:** Alternative grading practices in higher education; assessment redesign in the AI era; flipped learning; teaching innovation and faculty development.

**Why they matter:** Talbert co-writes the Grading for Growth Substack (8.1K+ subscribers) with colleague David Clark, and their co-authored book of the same title (Routledge, 2023) has become a go-to resource for faculty rethinking assessment. His work is especially relevant now because AI has made traditional take-home assessment increasingly vulnerable, and Talbert has written directly about how alternative grading — built on feedback loops, clearly defined standards, and reattempts without penalty — offers a more durable and learning-centered response than detection-based approaches. He holds a Ph.D. in Mathematics from Vanderbilt and has 25+ years of classroom teaching experience. He pioneered flipped instruction at the college level and authored *Flipped Learning: A Guide for Higher Education Faculty* (Stylus, 2017). As Senior Faculty Fellow, he coordinates institution-wide teaching innovation projects through the GVSU President's Office and was Scholar-in-Residence at Steelcase. He is a frequent keynote speaker at institutions including MIT and Georgia Tech, and also publishes the Intentional Academia Substack on purposeful work in higher education.

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| <b>Substack</b> | <a href="https://gradingforgrowth.com/">https://gradingforgrowth.com/</a>                           |
| <b>Website</b>  | <a href="https://www.rtalbert.org/">https://www.rtalbert.org/</a>                                   |
| <b>LinkedIn</b> | <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/RobertTalbert/">https://www.linkedin.com/in/RobertTalbert/</a> |

## Key Institutional and Organizational Resources

In addition to individual voices, these institutional resources provide frameworks, research, and policy guidance.

### Wharton Generative AI Labs (GAIL)

Free prompts, research papers, and prototypes for education. Co-directed by Ethan and Lilach Mollick.

<https://gail.wharton.upenn.edu/>

### EDUCAUSE AI Resources

Research, landscape studies, and policy guidance on AI in higher education from the leading higher ed technology association.

<https://www.educause.edu/research-and-publications>

### UNESCO: AI and the Future of Education

Global frameworks for ethical AI in education, including the Guidance on Generative AI in Education and Research and AI competency frameworks for teachers and students.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/digital-education/artificial-intelligence>

### AAC&U AI Institute

The American Association of Colleges and Universities runs an AI Institute focused on AI, pedagogy, and curriculum, co-led by Bryan Alexander and others.

<https://www.aacu.org/>

### Anthropic Prompt Engineering Guide

Primary source documentation on effective prompting techniques for Claude.

<https://docs.anthropic.com/en/docs/build-with-claude/prompt-engineering>

### OpenAI Prompt Best Practices

Primary source documentation on effective prompting for ChatGPT.

<https://platform.openai.com/docs/guides/prompt-engineering>

## How to Use This Resource

- **Subscribe to 2-3 newsletters** that match your interests. Ethan Mollick's One Useful Thing and one of the more education-specific newsletters (Eaton, Watkins, or Potkalitsky) is a strong starting combination.
- **Follow on LinkedIn** for shorter-form updates and discussion threads. Many of these people are active there.
- **Save specific resources** as you find them. Bookmark the Wharton GAIL prompts library, the EDUCAUSE landscape studies, and any articles relevant to your discipline.
- **Listen to the podcasts.** Derek Bruff's Intentional Teaching podcast regularly features AI-in-education guests and is a low-effort way to stay current.
- **Check back periodically.** This field moves fast. People who are relevant today may shift focus, and new voices will emerge.

*Note: All URLs were verified as active at the time of publication (February 2026). Web addresses can change. If a link is broken, search for the person or organization by name.*