METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY℠

REPORT
JANUARY 2026

STATE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE @ MSU DENVER

KEY FINDINGS & STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At a glance

Conducted in Fall 2025, the "Artificial Intelligence at MSU Denver" survey examined AI adoption and attitudes across student learning and employee work contexts. The survey captured 1,954 student responses and 275 employee responses (149 faculty and 126 staff/administrators). Findings reveal a critical tension: high adoption paired with low trust and high perceived risk. Across all respondent groups, there is clear demand for institutional guidance, role-specific examples, and practical training.

Key quantified findings

- **Adoption is already mainstream**.Three-quarters of student respondents (73%) and the vast majority of employee respondents (84%) have used AI tools. Nearly half of both populations qualify as frequent users—44% of student respondents and 49% of employee respondents engage with AI tools weekly or daily. Daily usage shows notable intensity among staff/administrator respondents (28%) compared to faculty respondents (17%) and student respondents (13%).
- **Faculty respondents concentrate AI use on pedagogical workflows**. Among faculty respondents who used AI in the past month, 55% apply it to creating or revising teaching materials—signaling integration into core instructional responsibilities. This suggests faculty view AI as a productivity tool for course preparation rather than solely as a subject to address in the classroom.
- **Staff and administrator respondents prioritize operational efficiency**. In contrast, 73% of staff and administrator respondents use AI for writing tasks such as emails, reports, and documentation. This operational focus indicates AI has become embedded in administrative workflows, with potential for measurable time savings and productivity gains.
- **Trust represents the critical adoption barrier**. Six in ten student respondents (61%) distrust AI's accuracy and reliability. Faculty skepticism is even more pronounced, with 66% expressing distrust—a significant constraint given their gatekeeper role in shaping classroom AI norms.
- **Skill erosion concerns are pervasive and elevated among faculty respondents**. More than three-quarters of student respondents (77%) and faculty respondents (80%) believe AI reliance will weaken critical skills. This shared anxiety creates predictable resistance to integration, particularly in academic contexts where skill development is the core mission.
- **Policy ambiguity creates friction and inconsistency.** More than one in five student respondents (22%)cite uncertainty about permissible AI use, while 26% report experiencing active instructor discouragement or prohibition. This variance undermines equitable learning experiences and creates compliance anxiety.
- **Career preparedness lags far behind adoption**. Only 14% of student respondents feel well-prepared for workplace AI expectations, and 39% cannot identify which AI competencies will matter professionally—a troubling gap given 73% current usage and employer demand signals.

44%

of student respondents use AI weekly or daily for academic work

66%

of faculty respondents distrust the accuracy and reliability of AI outputs

77%

of student respondents fear AI will weaken critical

Critical strategic implications for MSU Denver

- **The institution is operating in an AI-saturated environment by default, not by design**. The strategic choice is no longer whether to engage with AI, but whether MSU Denver will standardize responsible practice or accept high variance in quality, equity, and outcomes across classrooms and units.
- **MSU Denver faces asymmetric risk exposure**. Unmanaged use creates integrity, privacy, equity, and quality vulnerabilities. Unmanaged prohibition creates lost learning value, uneven student experiences, and diminished career readiness. Both scenarios carry reputational and competitive consequences.
- **Low trust combined with high usage creates a predictable failure mode**. Users will continue deploying AI for speed and convenience without reliably verifying outputs, which threatens to elevate downstream quality risk and increase rework burden for faculty and staff while eroding academic standards.
- **Demand for clarity creates a differentiation opportunity.** The expressed need for guidelines and role-specific exemplars positions MSU Denver to lead on responsible AI literacy and materially strengthen student career outcomes, forging a potential competitive advantage in regional higher education.

High-Impact, Near-Term Opportunities

MSU Denver can capture immediate value and mitigate escalating risk through five foundational interventions. These are not multi-year transformation initiatives; they are executable within 90-180 days and address the most acute gaps revealed in the data.

1. **Amplify the existing MSU Denver Responsible AI Standards** (30 days): Guidelines, assignment taxonomy, syllabus-ready language, and student-facing guidance are in place. Minor refinements plus aggressive communication will eliminate much of the confusion affecting 22% of student respondents and resolve inconsistent instructor messaging (26% of student respondents report discouragement/prohibition). Low effort, high visibility impact.
2. **Drive enrollment and completion in existing AI literacy programs** (immediate): Professional development pathways for employees and students are live. However, only half of employees have enrolled in the Canvas course and completion sits at just 10%. The student program launched Spring 2026 with enrollment data pending. With 39% of student respondents unable to identify relevant AI skills despite 73% adoption, the gap isn't resource availability, but engagement and follow-through. Implement targeted outreach, incentive structures, and completion nudges to convert existing infrastructure into skill gains.
3. **Provide a secure, institution-supported AI toolset** (60-90 days): Expand the approved-tool list to include access beyond Microsoft Copilot, ensuring privacy guardrails and equitable access to higher-quality models where feasible. This eliminates shadow ITS risk, reduces cost barriers, and addresses trust concerns through vetted, supported solutions.
4. **Accelerate faculty adoption of AI-integrated assessment and course design resources** (immediate): Templates and support materials for AI-resilient assessments and AI-enabled learning activities are available, but uptake remains unclear. Given current low trust (61%) and high skill-erosion concerns (77%), faculty need both encouragement and evidence that these resources preserve academic rigor while capturing pedagogical value. Deploy targeted faculty outreach, showcase early adopter examples, and track usage to identify adoption barriers and scale what works.
5. **Formalize cross-functional AI governance and strategic planning** (in progress, target Q2 2026): A governance proposal is currently in development, with functional leads positioned to assess current capabilities and gaps across the institution. The goal: operational readiness for responsible AI scaling by fall 2026. Approval is the immediate milestone; rapid execution of capability assessments is the critical path. Embed measure-

ment (KPIs, incident tracking, periodic surveys) into the framework design to ensure the governance layer delivers accountability, not just coordination.

Bottom line: These five actions are tractable, collectively address the core failure modes identified in the survey data, and position MSU Denver ahead of peer institutions still debating whether to engage. Delay increases risk exposure and widens the career readiness gap. The window for proactive leadership is narrow.

METHODOLOGY & DATA QUALITY

Sample Profile

The analysis draws on two concurrent surveys conducted in October–November 2025:

- **Student survey** (October 7–31, 2025): 1,954 completed, comprising 1,692 undergraduate students (90%) and 201 graduate students (10%).
- **Employee survey** (October 6–November 10, 2025): 275 completed, comprising 149 faculty (54%) and 126 staff respondents/administrators (46%).

The survey focused on usage patterns and attitudes; it did not measure actual performance outcomes, skill retention, or academic integrity incidents—metrics that should be tracked through a governance framework.

Segmentation Approach

Employees were classified as Faculty (including chairs) or Staff/Administrators (staff plus administrative leadership). This segmentation is applied throughout where sample sizes permit.

Data Preparation and Cleaning

Standard cleaning was applied: removed Qualtrics metadata, filtered to completed responses, standardized Likert scores (1-5 scale), parsed multi-select questions, and tagged open-ended responses using keyword-based theme identification.

Statistical Approach

Analysis is descriptive: response distributions, cross-tabulations, and mean comparisons. Between-group differences are reported as percentage-point gaps. Open-ended responses are summarized thematically.

Confidence Levels and Margin of Error

This observational study has a response rate of 10.7% for students and 11.1% for employees. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is 2.1% for students and 5.6% for employees. Note that responses represent a voluntary, self-selected sample. Findings should be interpreted as directional indicators of attitudes and usage patterns within the MSU Denver community, not as statistically representative population estimates. The data provide robust insight into trends and user sentiment while acknowledging inherent limitations in generalizability.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Sample Composition

Undergraduates comprise 90% of the student sample (Exhibit A). Among employee respondents, faculty represent 54% of completed responses, with staff and administrators comprising the balance.

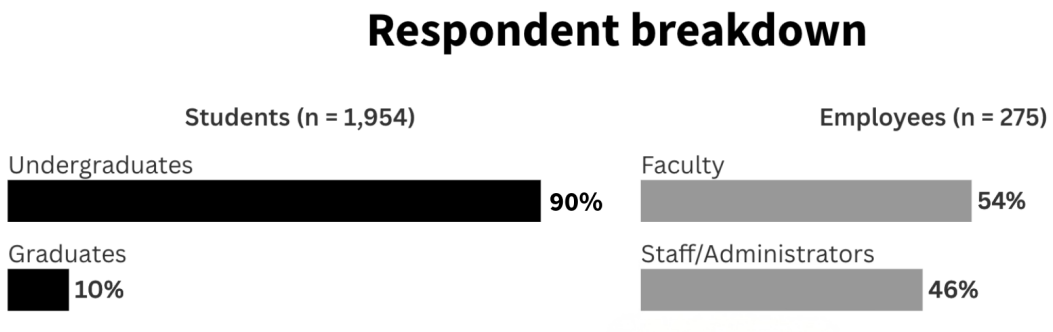

Exhibit A. Response volumes by respondent type.

Adoption and Usage Frequency

AI adoption has reached mainstream levels across MSU Denver (Exhibit B). Nearly three-quarters of student respondents (73%) report at least occasional use, with 44% using AI weekly or daily. Among employee respondents, adoption exceeds 80% across both segments, but usage intensity differs: staff and administrator respondents are nearly twice as likely as faculty respondents to report daily use (28% vs. 17%).

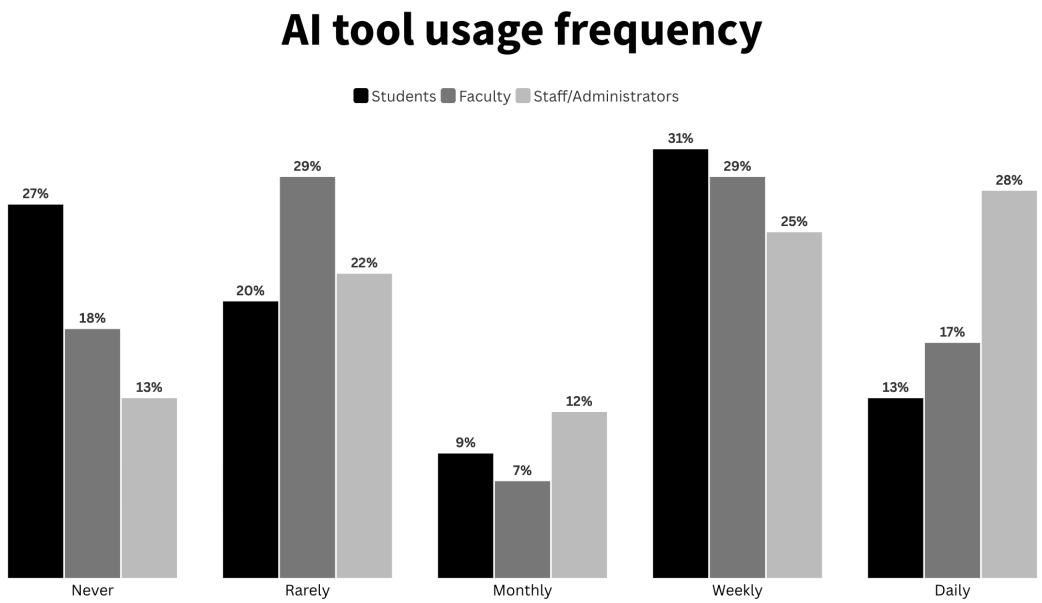

Exhibit B. Staff/administrator respondents and student respondents are more frequent users of AI tools than

Use Cases and Task Patterns

AI adoption at MSU Denver has moved beyond experimentation to workflow integration, but application patterns vary significantly across populations and roles. Students and employees deploy AI for fundamentally different purposes, and within the employee population, faculty and staff demonstrate distinct use case profiles that reflect their core responsibilities.

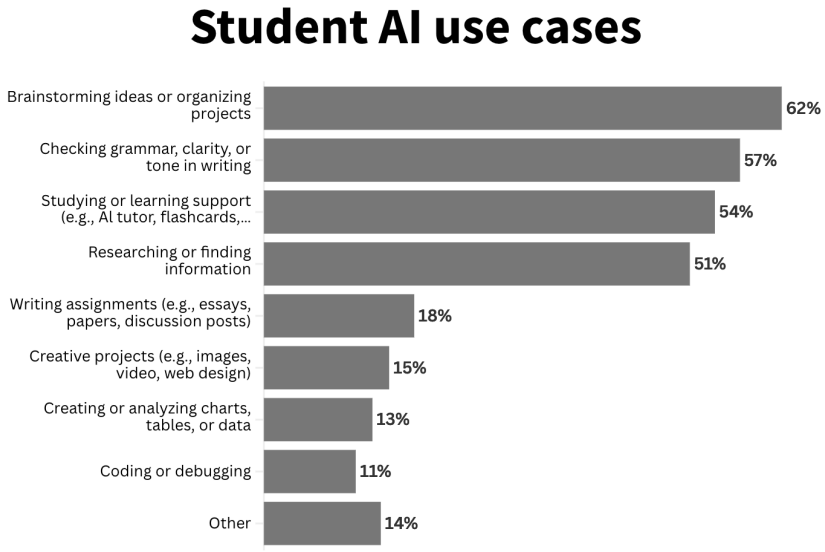

Exhibit C. Student AI use concentrates on ideation, writing refinement, and study support—not full assignment generation.

Students concentrate AI usage on core academic workflows (Exhibit C). Among past-month AI users, the dominant applications are brainstorming and project organization (62%), checking grammar and writing clarity (57%), study support such as AI tutoring and flashcards (54%), and researching information (51%).

Notably, only 18% report using AI to write complete assignments—suggesting students primarily deploy AI for ideation and refinement rather than content generation. Additional use cases include creative projects (15%), data analysis (13%), and coding (11%).

Employee use cases diverge sharply by role, revealing distinct AI integration patterns. Both faculty respondents and staff/administrator respondents use AI for brainstorming at similar rates (60% and 64% respectively), but applications diverge significantly beyond ideation. Faculty respondents concentrate AI use on pedagogical tasks—55% create or revise teaching materials, compared to just 19% of staff/administrator respondents.

Conversely, staff and administrator respondents leverage AI heavily for operational efficiency: 73% use it for writing tasks such as emails and reports (versus 41% of faculty respondents), and 39% apply it to administrative functions like note-taking and meeting summaries (versus 19% of faculty respondents). This role-based specialization signals fundamentally different AI value propositions across employee segments.

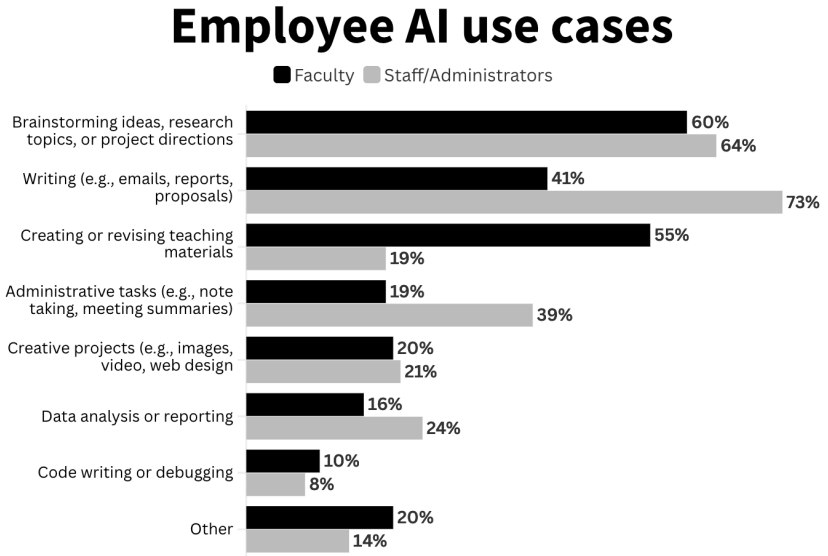

Exhibit D. Employee use cases by role: pedagogical focus (faculty respondents) versus operational efficiency (staff/admin respondents).

Time Savings and Productivity Signals (Employees)

AI usage translates to measurable self-reported time savings among employee respondents, with notable variation by role. Staff and administrator respondents report more substantial productivity gains than faculty respondents: they are less likely to report zero time savings and more likely to report multi-hour gains per task. These patterns signal near-term operational ROI potential, particularly in administrative workflows, provided usage is coupled with appropriate governance, training, and workflow optimization.

However, productivity metrics alone provide an incomplete picture of AI value and risk. Self-reported time savings require validation through observed performance to confirm actual gains rather than perceived efficiency. More critically, a narrow focus on speed and output volume misses essential dimensions of AI impact in higher education contexts: quality of student learning outcomes, preservation of critical thinking and writing skills, faculty workload sustainability, equity of access and outcomes, and alignment with MSU Denver's mission and values.

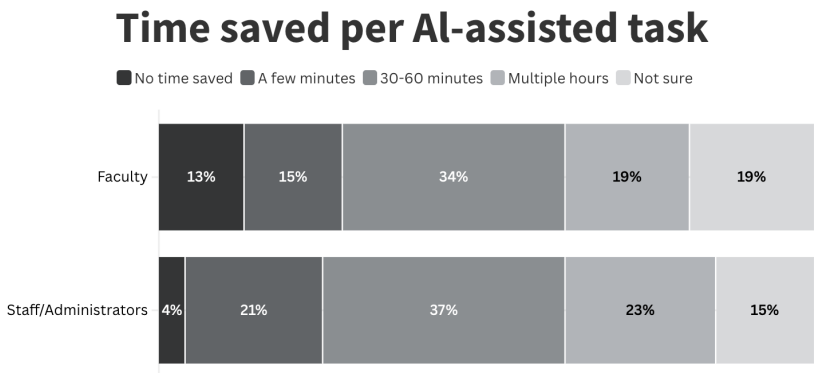

Exhibit E. Self-reported time savings per AI-assisted task vary by employee role

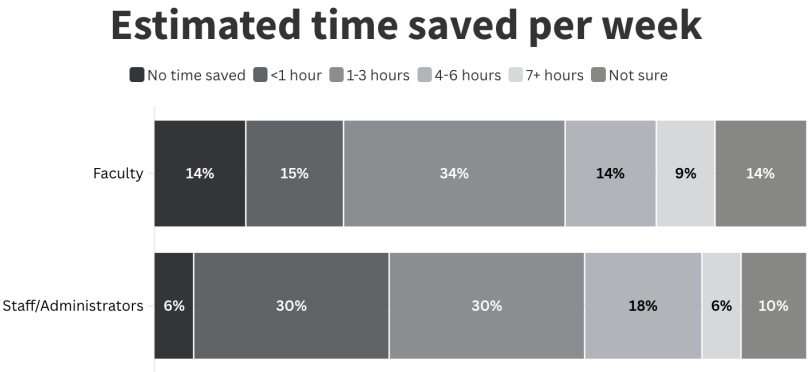

Exhibit F. Estimated time saved per week among employee respondents who used AI in the past month.

A university is not a factory optimizing for throughput. Thus, success metrics must encompass student development, pedagogical integrity, and workforce capability-building alongside operational efficiency. MSU Denver's measurement framework should therefore track not only time saved, but also skill development, quality indicators, equity gaps, and user confidence in verification practices. This holistic approach positions the institution to capture productivity benefits while safeguarding academic values and student outcomes.

Attitudes, Sentiment, and Trust

Trust in AI accuracy represents the critical constraint to effective adoption. Across all populations and usage frequencies, trust scores remain low—hovering around 2.0-2.8 on a 5-point scale, with only the most frequent users (daily) reaching moderate trust levels (students: 3.05; faculty: 2.52; staff/admin: 2.83). This creates a predictable failure mode: users deploy AI for speed and convenience but do not reliably verify outputs, elevating quality risk and increasing downstream faculty and staff workload.

A self-reinforcing pattern emerges: attitudes vary systematically by usage frequency. Among all populations, frequent users (weekly/daily) report higher perceived efficiency (students: 3.86-4.31; faculty: 3.77-4.52; staff/admin: 4.00-4.31) and creativity benefits (students: 3.41-3.83; faculty: 3.56-4.00; staff/admin: 3.66-4.06) compared to non-

users or rare users. Conversely, skill erosion concerns decrease with usage frequency—non-users express the highest anxiety about AI weakening important skills (students: 4.65; faculty: 4.61; staff/admin: 4.35), while daily users show notably lower concern (students: 3.36; faculty: 3.52; staff/admin: 3.51). This pattern indicates that experience reduces anxiety, individuals with lower risk perception self-select into higher usage, or both mechanisms reinforce each other.

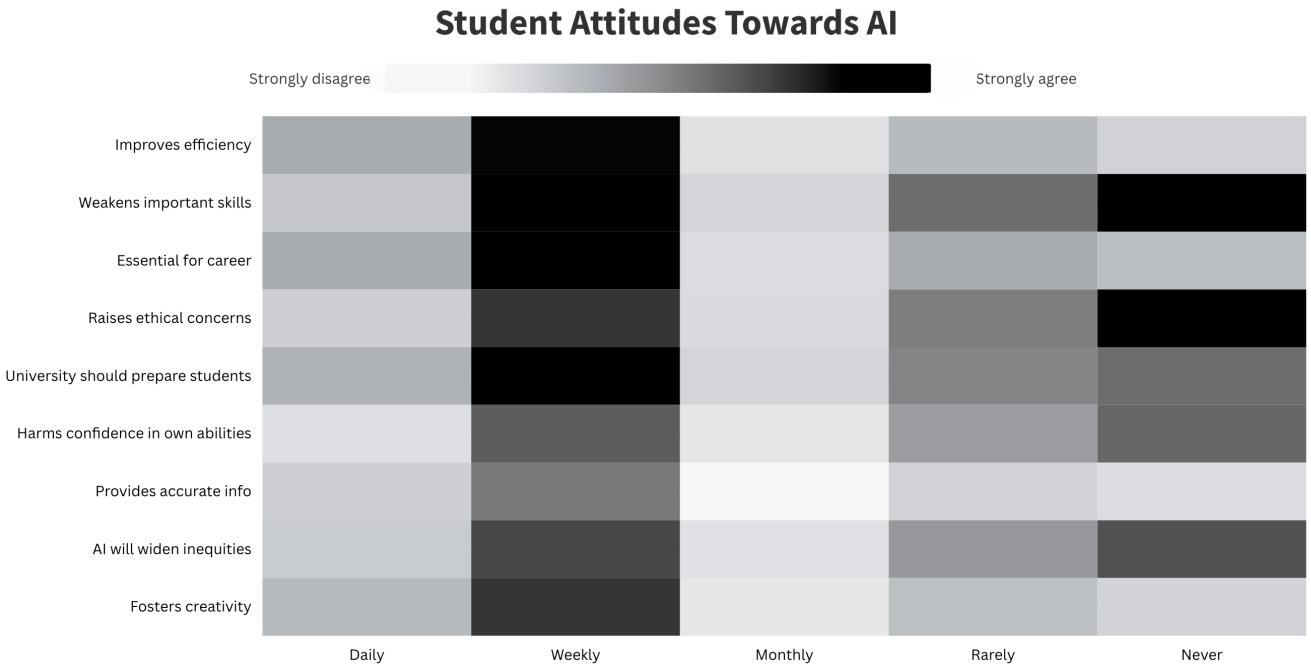

Exhibit G. Student respondents' attitudes toward AI by usage frequency

Despite low trust, institutional responsibility scores are uniformly high across all segments. Students, faculty, and staff/administrators consistently agree (scores 3.9-4.8) that universities have a responsibility to support responsible AI use, with consensus strengthening among more frequent users. This widespread demand for institutional guidance creates a strategic opportunity for MSU Denver to differentiate on responsible AI literacy.

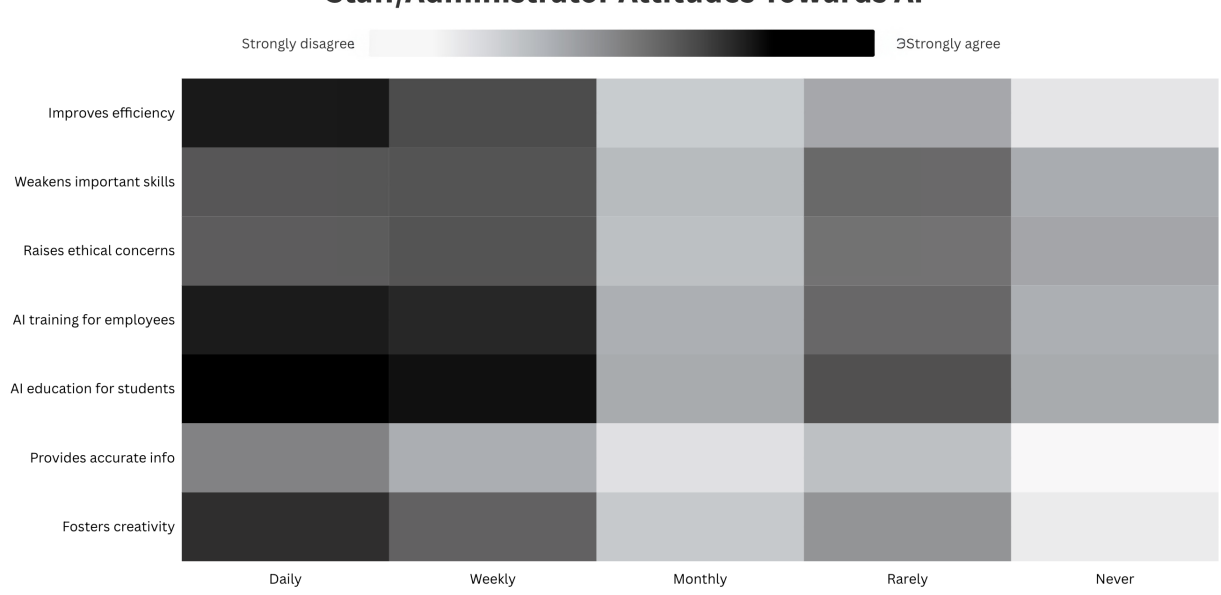

Exhibit H. Staff/administrator respondents' attitudes toward AI by usage frequency

Faculty exhibit distinct attitudinal patterns compared to staff/administrators. Faculty respondents express significantly higher ethical concerns (mean scores 3.52-4.19 across usage levels vs. 3.43-4.59 for staff/admin), particularly among moderate users. Faculty skill erosion concerns also remain elevated even among daily users (3.52 vs. 3.51 for staff/admin). These patterns reflect faculty's gatekeeping role in academic integrity and their core instructional mission, creating predictable resistance that requires targeted change management rather than generic training approaches.

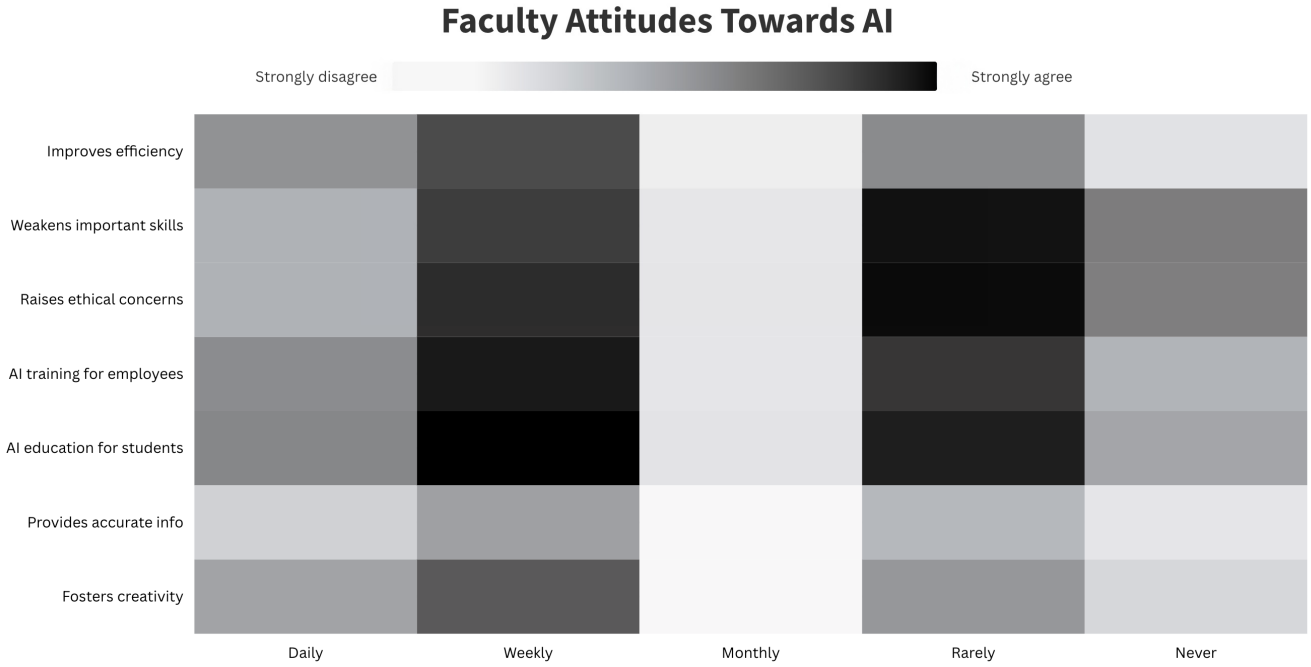

Exhibit I. Faculty respondents attitudes toward AI by usage frequency

Barriers and Support Needs

Adoption barriers reveal a paradox: users want AI, but don't trust it. For student respondents, the primary obstacles are accuracy concerns (61% cite distrust in AI quality), fear of academic integrity violations (46% worry about cheating perceptions), and environmental impact concerns (44%). Policy-related friction is substantial. 26% report instructor discouragement or prohibition, and 22% cite uncertainty about when AI is permitted.

Among employee respondents, accuracy concerns dominate (56%), followed by ethical issues including fairness, bias, and privacy. However, barriers diverge by role: staff/administrator respondents cite lack of training (32% vs. 18% faculty respondents) and cost/access constraints more frequently, while faculty respondents express higher concern about relevance to their roles and are more likely to report having no barriers, a pattern consistent with their elevated skepticism.

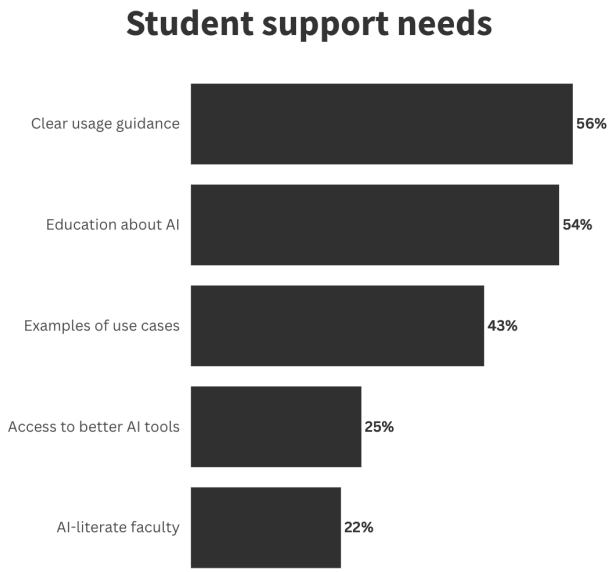

Exhibit J. Top support needs identified by student respondents.

Expressed support needs point to immediate, actionable interventions. Student respondents overwhelmingly request clear guidance on permissible AI use (56%), a direct response to the policy confusion and instructor variance identified as barriers. They also prioritize practical examples of successful use (45%) and self-paced tutorials (39%).

Employee needs similarly center on role-specific best practice examples (faculty respondents: 64%; staff/administrator respondents: 70%), institutional guidelines (faculty respondents: 48%; staff/administrator respondents: 56%), and hands-on workshops (faculty respondents: 41%; staff/administrator respondents: 51%).

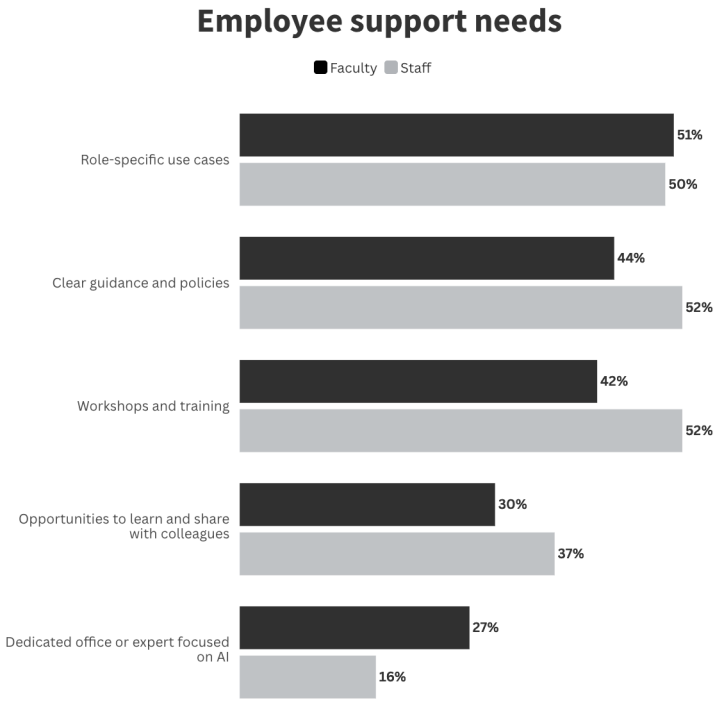

Exhibit K. Top support needs identified by employee respondents.

Faculty resistance signals a change management challenge requiring targeted engagement. Faculty are significantly more likely than staff/administrator respondents to report not wanting additional resources (18% vs. 6%), consistent with their higher ethical gains. This is not a training gap, rather, it's skepticism about value and fit. Treating it as a knowledge problem will fail; addressing it requires demonstrating pedagogical value and protecting academic freedom.

Student Career Readiness and Capability Gaps

Career preparedness lags far behind adoption, revealing a critical institutional gap. Only 14% of student respondents report feeling very prepared for AI expectations in their future careers, while 39% are unsure which AI skills will matter professionally and an additional 20% feel unprepared. This uncertainty exists despite 73% current AI usage—students are experimenting with tools but lack strategic clarity about which competencies translate to workplace value.

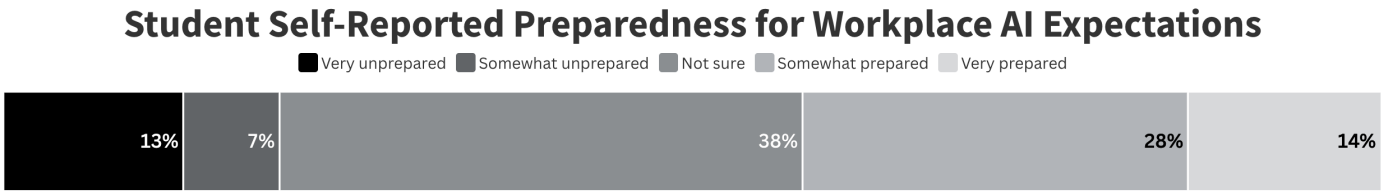

Exhibit L. Only 14% of student respondents feel very prepared for workplace AI expectations; 39% are unsure which skills will matter.

Students articulate specific learning needs that align with transferable AI literacy competencies. When asked what they need to learn about AI, student respondents prioritize practical skills over conceptual knowledge. The dominant themes are prompting and effective use (21%), understanding how AI works (52% combined when including related themes), and verification practices including accuracy checking and citation (5%). Notably, student respondents also surface ethics and academic integrity (9%) and privacy/data security (4%) as learning priorities—indicating awareness that responsible use requires more than technical proficiency.

39%

of student respondents cannot identify which AI skills will matter professionally

The readiness gap creates a clear institutional opportunity. Students want guidance, employers expect AI competency, and MSU Denver has existing advising, career services, and curriculum support infrastructure. Aligning these functions around a defined set of AI competencies—prompting, verification, ethical use, and domain transfer—positions the university to close the preparedness gap at scale while differentiating on career outcomes. This is not a new program build; it's strategic integration of AI literacy into existing student success pathways.

Perceptions of AI's Broader Impact

Across all populations, ambivalence dominates—most respondents believe AI will have mixed effects rather than purely positive or negative outcomes. When asked about AI's impact on society, the plurality of student respondents (frequent users: 75%; infrequent users: 43%), faculty respondents (frequent: 74%; infrequent: 48%), and staff/administrator respondents (frequent: 79%; infrequent: 70%) expect both positive and negative effects. Very few predict purely positive outcomes (student respondents: 2-10%; faculty respondents: 3-7%; staff respondents/admin: 0-12%), and skepticism about negative-only outcomes is similarly low across frequent users. This nuanced view suggests respondents recognize AI's complexity rather than adopting simplistic techno-optimism or pessimism.

Perceptions of AI's impact on higher education follow similar patterns but reveal slightly more uncertainty (Exhibits P,Q,R). Students, faculty respondents, and staff/administrator respondents again converge on mixed-effects expectations (students: 34-64%; faculty respondents: 32-66%; staff respondents/admin: 53-67%). However, concern about predominantly negative impacts is notably higher among less frequent users across all groups—particularly among students (56% of infrequent users vs. 13% of frequent users expect mostly negative effects) and faculty respondents (52% vs. 21%). This pattern reinforces the usage-attitude correlation: experience appears to temper catastrophic thinking, though it does not eliminate concern.

Frequent AI users consistently hold more positive (or less negative) views than infrequent users. Across both societal and higher education impact questions, weekly/daily users are substantially more likely to see potential benefits. For example, among student respondents assessing higher education impact,

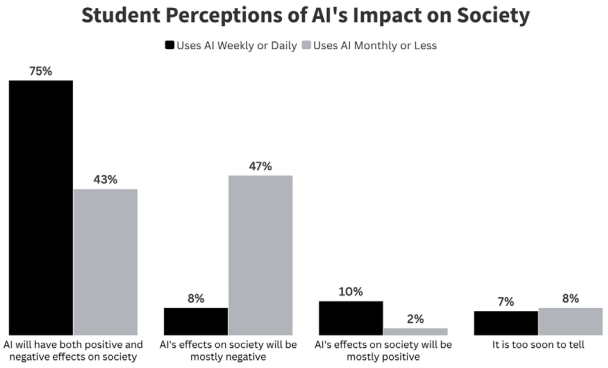

Exhibit M. Student respondents' perceptions of AI's societal impact.

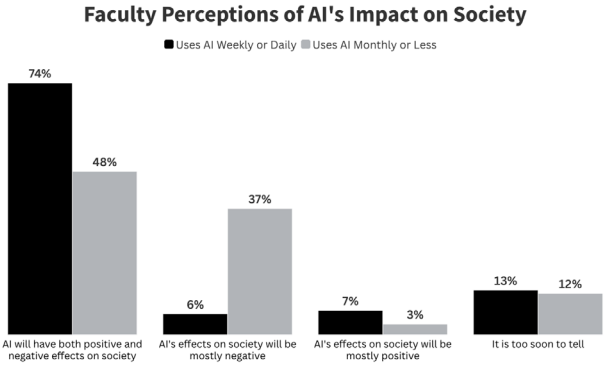

Exhibit N. Faculty respondents' perceptions of AI's societal impact.

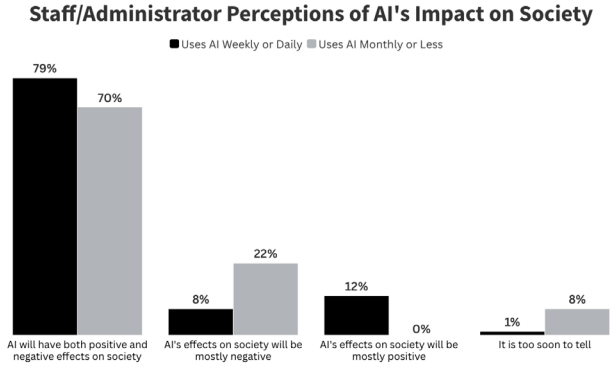

Exhibit O. Employee respondents' perceptions of AI's societal impact.

frequent users are four times more likely to expect positive effects (18% vs. 3%) and less than half as likely to expect negative effects (13% vs. 56%). This correlation suggests either that positive experience drives adoption, or that higher usage reduces anxiety through familiarity—or both.

Despite widespread use, few respondents express strong confidence in AI's net benefit to higher education or society. Even among the most engaged users, outright optimism remains rare. The dominant sentiment is cautious engagement: AI is being used, but trust is low, concerns are multidimensional, and expectations are mixed. This creates both a challenge (users won't advocate for AI internally) and an opportunity (MSU Denver can shape perception through demonstrated responsible use and visible safeguards).

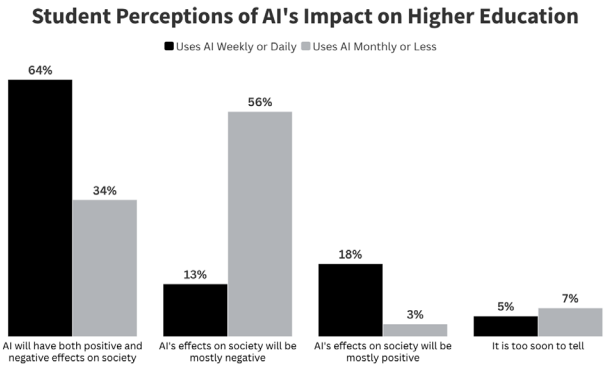

Exhibit P. Student respondents' perceptions of AI's impact on higher education.

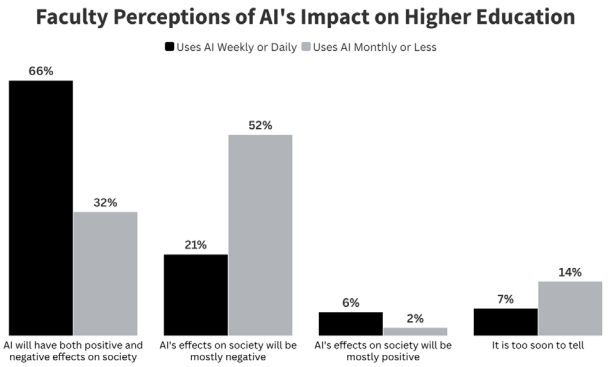

Exhibit Q. Faculty respondents' perceptions of AI's impact on higher education.

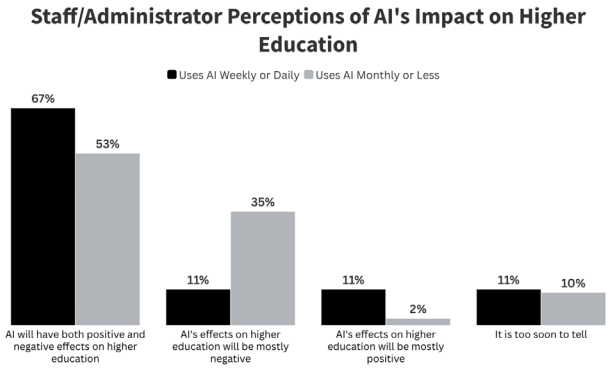

Exhibit R. Faculty respondents' perceptions of AI's impact on higher education.

These perception patterns underscore a critical institutional imperative: MSU Denver operates in an environment where AI adoption has outpaced trust, and usage has not resolved fundamental ambivalence about impact. The gap between behavior (widespread use) and belief (low confidence in benefit) creates predictable risk—users deploy tools they don't fully trust, elevating quality concerns and integrity vulnerabilities. However, this uncertainty also creates strategic opportunity.

By demonstrating responsible AI integration through visible safeguards, transparent policies, and measurable outcomes, MSU Denver can shift institutional perception from anxious ambivalence to informed confidence. The question is not whether the campus community will use AI—they already are—but whether the institution will lead the transition from unmanaged experimentation to evidence-based practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings from the Fall 2025 AI usage survey reveal MSU Denver at an inflection point. AI adoption has reached mainstream penetration across students and employees, but this widespread use has emerged organically rather than strategically. The institution now operates in an AI-saturated environment characterized by high adoption (73% student respondents, 84% employee respondents), low trust (61-66% distrust AI accuracy), elevated risk perception (77-80% fear skill erosion), and significant uncertainty about appropriate use (22% of student respondents unsure when AI is permitted).

This combination creates a precarious equilibrium. Users continue deploying AI for productivity and convenience despite fundamental distrust in its reliability, creating predictable quality and integrity vulnerabilities. Faculty express heightened ethical concerns yet receive inconsistent institutional guidance. Students experiment with AI tools but cannot identify which competencies will matter professionally. Staff and administrators realize measurable time savings while lacking formal verification protocols. Without coordinated institutional response, these patterns will calcify into persistent problems: uneven student experiences, academic integrity erosion, widening career readiness gaps, and reputational risk.

However, the data also reveal clear pathways forward. Across all populations, respondents overwhelmingly agree that universities have a responsibility to support responsible AI use (scores 3.9-4.8 on a 5-point scale). Students explicitly request clear guidance, practical examples, and skill-building opportunities. Employees prioritize role-specific training and institutional policy clarity. This expressed demand creates a strategic window for MSU Denver to lead rather than follow—to move from reactive accommodation to proactive governance.

The five recommended interventions address the most acute gaps identified in the survey while leveraging existing infrastructure and resources. They are designed for speed of execution (30-180 days), minimal resource requirements, and maximum institutional impact. Collectively, they position MSU Denver to:

- **Reduce policy confusion and compliance anxiety** through amplified communication of existing guidelines and standards
- **Close the career readiness gap** by driving engagement with established AI literacy programs
- **Mitigate quality and security risks** through vetted, institution-supported toolsets
- **Preserve academic rigor** while capturing pedagogical value through faculty adoption of AI-integrated assessment resources
- **Enable evidence-based scaling** through cross-functional governance and continuous measurement

Most importantly, these actions signal institutional commitment to responsible AI integration—addressing the fundamental trust deficit not through prohibition or uncritical enthusiasm, but through demonstrated competence, visible safeguards, and transparent accountability.

The choice facing MSU Denver is not whether AI will be part of the educational experience—that question has been answered by faculty and student behavior. The choice is whether the institution will standardize responsible practice, reduce harmful variance, and capture competitive advantage through AI literacy and career preparedness, or accept the compounding risks of fragmented, trust-deficient adoption at scale.

The survey data provide a clear mandate. The recommended actions are tractable. The window for proactive leadership is narrow but open. MSU Denver has the opportunity to demonstrate that responsible AI integration is achievable, measurable, and aligned with institutional mission. What happens next will determine whether AI becomes a source of differentiation and student value, or a persistent source of anxiety and quality risk.

While peer institutions debate AI policy, MSU Denver has an opportunity to lead through execution—capturing first-mover advantage in responsible AI integration and student career readiness. As a result, the institution's response to these findings will define MSU Denver's competitive positioning in an AI-enabled higher education landscape for years to come.

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