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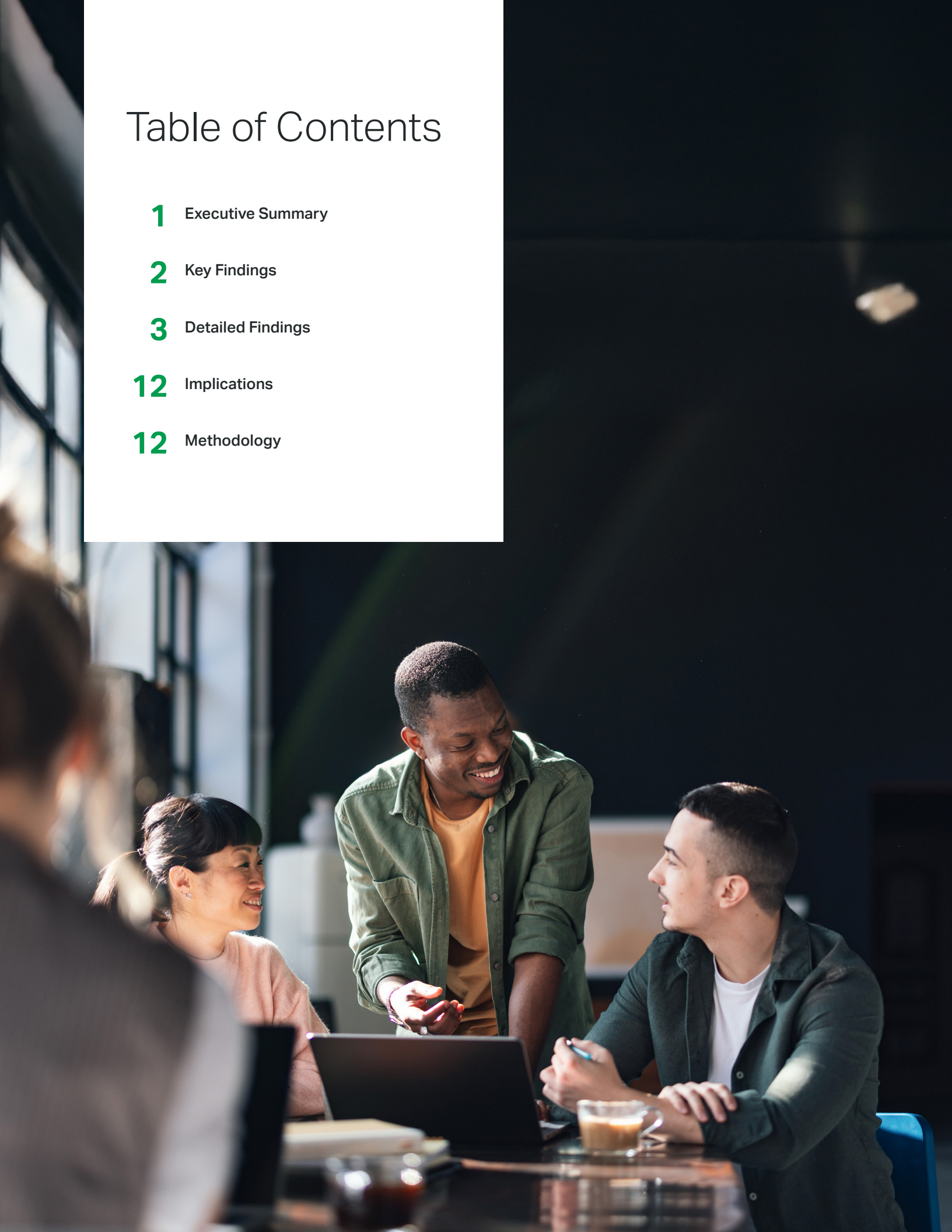
# AI in Higher Education

Widespread Use,  
Unclear Rules



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# Executive Summary

In the span of the three years that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been broadly accessible to the public, this technology has moved from a novelty to a regular study aid for many U.S. college students. Since AI's introduction, higher education leaders have been tasked with translating this technological shift into clear policies regarding its use.

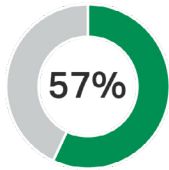
Against that backdrop, a new survey from Lumina Foundation and Gallup finds that AI use is now commonplace in college coursework. Most of the nearly 4,000 associate and bachelor's degree students surveyed report using AI tools for schoolwork on at least a weekly basis, while just 13% say they never do. Those who use AI primarily do so to better understand complex course material, while those who avoid it are most likely to cite ethical concerns or a belief that using AI is cheating.

**Despite the widespread adoption of AI in students' academic work, 53% say their college discourages or prohibits AI use for schoolwork, while only a small minority say their school encourages maximal use.**

Yet even where restrictions exist, many students continue to use AI with regularity: 48% of students whose institutions discourage AI use still use this technology at least weekly, as do about one in four students attending schools that prohibit AI use altogether. Additionally, more than half of students (52%) indicate that at least some of their courses do not have clear policies about how they can use AI.

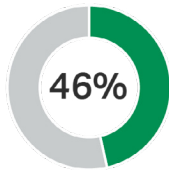
The impact of these policies may expand beyond the classroom. While 58% of students say their school is providing the right amount of training on how to use AI, nearly three in 10 say they are not receiving enough instruction. Importantly, students' perceived preparation is correlated with their institution's stance on AI: Students at schools that discourage or prohibit AI use are more likely to feel undertrained, and students unsure of their school's policy are especially likely to feel they are not getting enough education about AI. Colleges and universities that want to ensure students not only learn effectively alongside AI but are also well-equipped to employ it in their postgraduation lives and work must continue to find ways to strike a balance in how this technology is integrated into the classroom.

# Key Findings



**Over half of college students (57%)** use artificial intelligence in their coursework on a daily or weekly basis, while just 13% say they never do.

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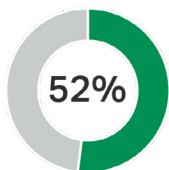
**Students who use AI for their schoolwork** are most likely to say they do so to better understand complex course material (46% say it is an “extremely important” reason). Infrequent users mostly say they avoid it due to ethical concerns or a belief that using AI is cheating.

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**More than half of college students say their school discourages (42%) or prohibits (11%)** AI use for schoolwork. Still, many of these students continue to use AI regularly: 48% of students at schools that discourage AI use report using it at least weekly, as do about one in four students who say their school prohibits it.

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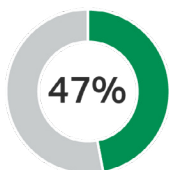
**Students frequently experience unclear or uneven course rules, as over half (52%)** indicate that at least some of their courses do not have clear policies about how they can use AI.

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**Nearly three in 10 college students** say their school is not adequately training them to use artificial intelligence. Students at schools that discourage or prohibit AI use are more likely than their peers at schools that encourage AI use to say they are not receiving sufficient training on how to use the technology.

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**Forty-seven percent of college students** have given at least a fair amount of consideration to changing their major due to the impact of AI on the job market, while one in six students (16%) say they have actually done so.

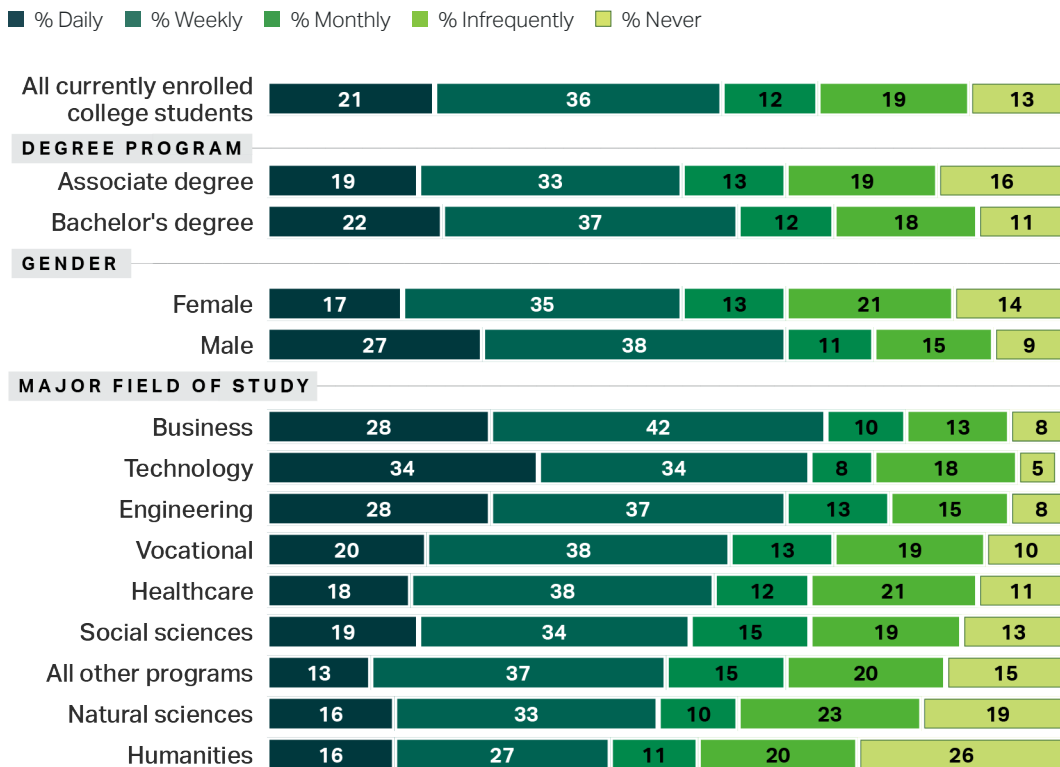
# Detailed Findings

## 1 College Students' AI Use Habits

Fifty-seven percent of U.S. college students say they use artificial intelligence in their coursework — including tools like ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini, as well as virtual assistants like Amazon’s Alexa or Apple’s Siri — on a daily or weekly basis. Even among those who do not use AI for their coursework at least once a week, most do so at least occasionally, with just 13% of college students saying they never use AI at school.

**CHART 1**  
**Frequency of Artificial Intelligence Use by College Students**

How often do you use artificial intelligence (AI) in your coursework?



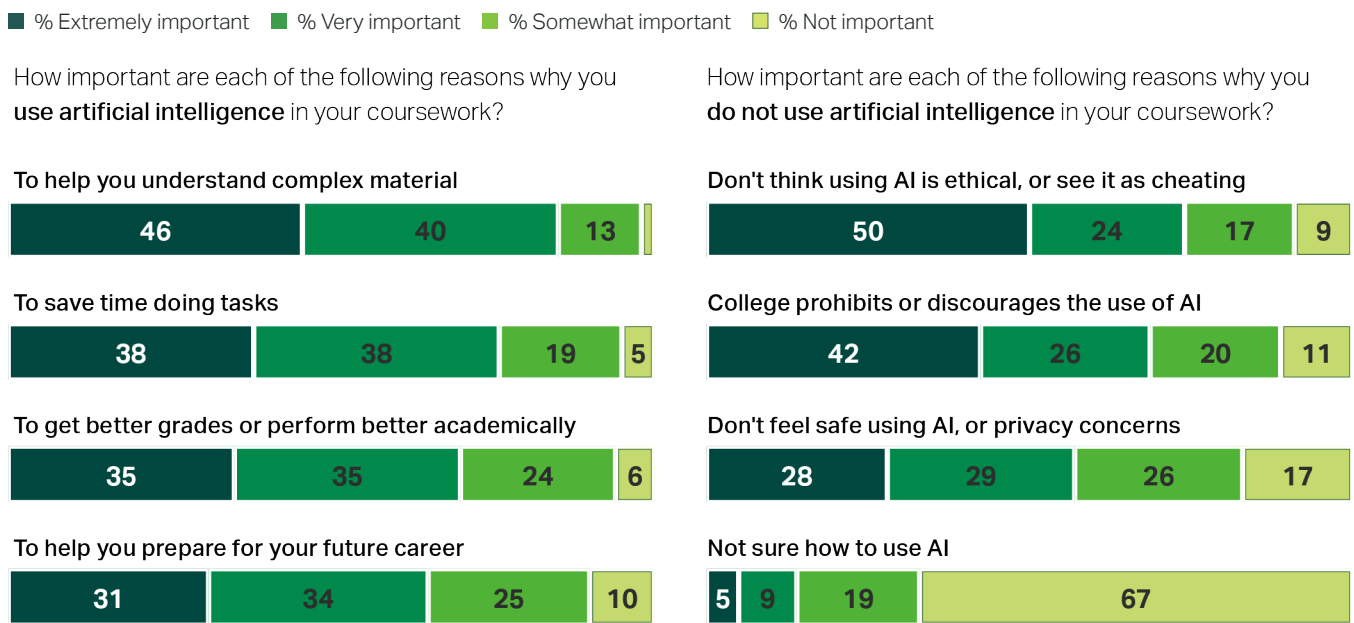
Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ± 1 percentage point.

Within this widespread adoption of artificial intelligence, use of the technology is slightly more prevalent among several subgroups of students, though it is used by at least half of all students, except humanities and natural sciences majors. Nearly two-thirds of men (65%) say they use AI in their coursework at least weekly, 13 percentage points higher than the 52% of women who say the same. Meanwhile, students enrolled in bachelor’s degree programs are seven points more likely than those in associate degree programs to use AI at least weekly (59% vs. 52%, respectively). The academic disciplines that see the highest rates of weekly AI use are business (70%), technology (68%) and engineering programs (65%).

## 2 Motivators and Barriers to Student AI Use

College students who use artificial intelligence on at least a monthly basis cite several benefits, including better understanding of complex material, which more than eight in 10 students say is an “extremely important” (46%) or “very important” (40%) reason for integrating AI into their studies. Smaller but still significant majorities of students say that saving time (76%), getting better grades (70%) and preparing for a future career (65%) are extremely or very important reasons they use artificial intelligence at school.

**CHART 2**  
**Reasons for Using or Avoiding Artificial Intelligence in Coursework**



Among the 69% of students who use artificial intelligence for their schoolwork at least monthly. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

Among the 32% of students who never use artificial intelligence for their schoolwork or use it infrequently. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

Among those who never use AI for schoolwork, or do so only infrequently, the most important reasons for avoiding artificial intelligence are because they view AI as unethical or cheating (74%) or because their college prohibits or discourages its use (68%). Few students (14%) say a lack of knowledge of how to use AI is an extremely or very important reason they avoid incorporating it into their schoolwork.

When students do leverage AI, the most common use cases are getting help with coursework they do not understand and checking their answers on their assignments, as at least six in 10 students use it for these purposes on a daily or weekly basis.

**CHART 3**  
**Specific Use Cases of Artificial Intelligence at School**

How often, if ever, do you use artificial intelligence for any of the following?

■ % Daily ■ % Weekly ■ % Monthly ■ % Infrequently ■ % Never



Among students who use artificial intelligence for their schoolwork at least infrequently. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

While just over one in three students say they use AI to actually write — rather than research or brainstorm — papers on a daily (14%) or weekly basis (23%), about three-quarters of students who use AI at least infrequently say they use the technology at least occasionally for this purpose.



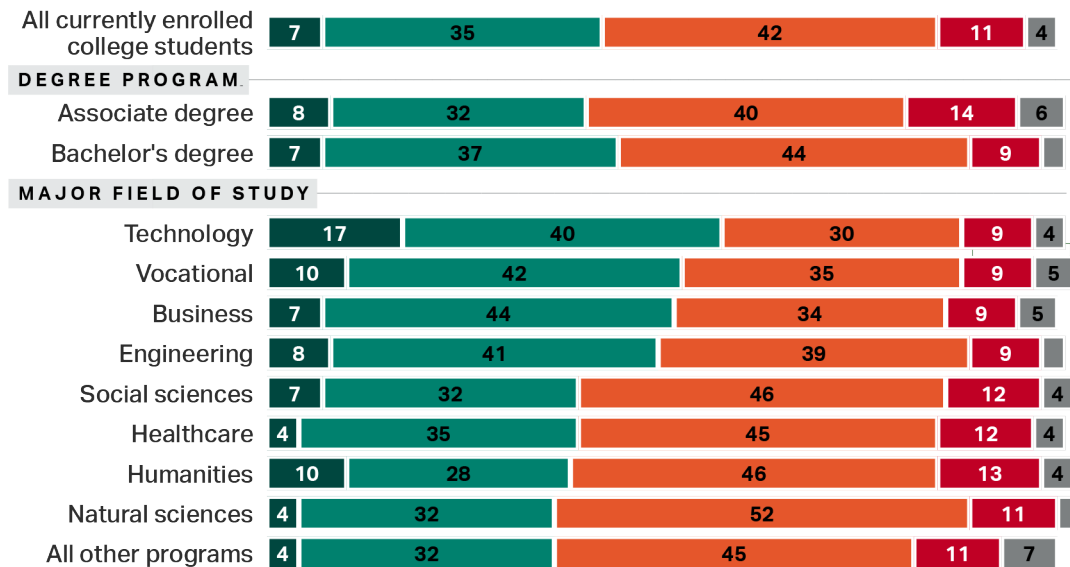
### 3 College and Course AI Policies

In general, colleges allow students to use AI with some limits. Just 7% of college students say their college encourages them to use AI as much as possible, and at the other extreme, 11% say their college prohibits its use. That leaves a large middle group, which tends toward discouraging AI use in all but a few circumstances (42% of students) versus encouraging its use with limits (35%).

**CHART 4**  
**Institution Position on AI Use by Students**

As far as you know, which of the following best describes your college’s position on student use of AI in their coursework?

- % Students are encouraged to use AI as much as possible
- % Students are encouraged to use AI, but with limits
- % Students are discouraged from using AI, but it is allowed in a few circumstances
- % Students are prohibited from using AI at all
- % Unsure of institution’s position on AI



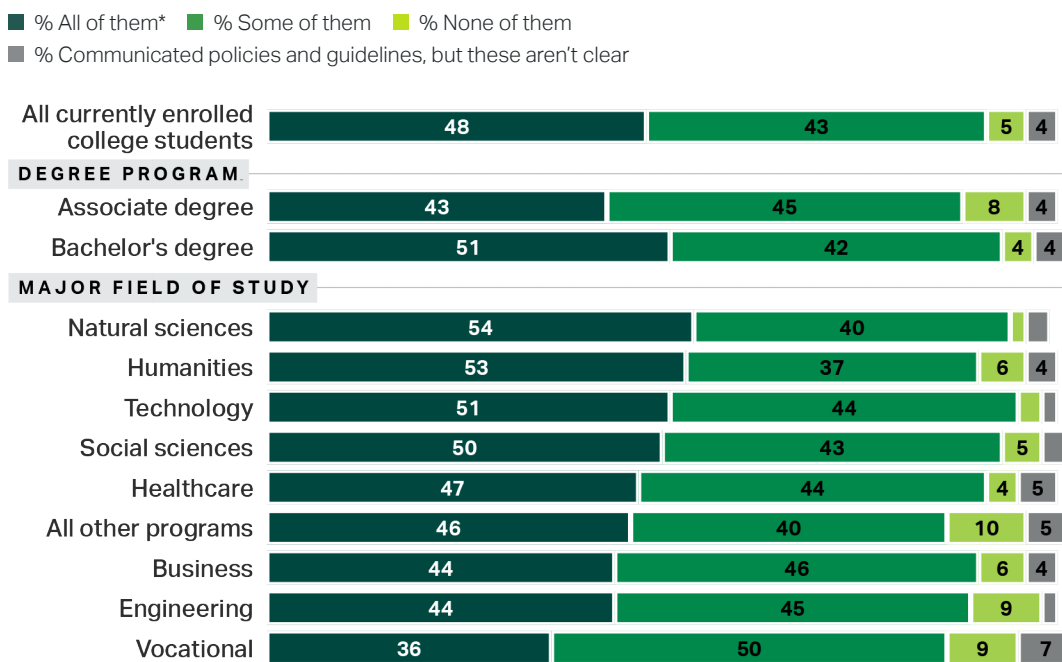
Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

This stance varies only minimally between two- and four-year institutions. However, these policies may be interpreted and enforced differently at the program level, as students enrolled in technology (57%), vocational (52%), business (51%) and engineering programs (49%) are at least 10 percentage points more likely than their peers to say their school encourages AI use.

In addition to institution-level positions on artificial intelligence, a majority of students report unclear or uneven communication of specific use policies at the course level. More than half of students (52%) indicate that at least some of their courses do not have clear policies about how they can use AI. In contrast to their similar institution-level stances, students at four-year institutions are somewhat more likely than those at two-year colleges to say all of their courses have clear AI policies (51% vs. 43%, respectively).

**CHART 5**  
**Clarity of Course-Specific AI Use Policies**

Thinking about your current classes, about how many have clear policies regarding how you can and cannot use AI for the class?



\* "All of them" category has been adjusted to include students who say their institution prohibits all AI use. Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ± 1 percentage point.

Across academic disciplines, between 36% and 54% of students say all of their courses have clearly communicated AI use policies; however, students in several of the programs that are least likely to encourage AI use — such as humanities, natural sciences and social sciences — are among the most likely to have comprehensive AI policies across their courses. This may suggest that faculty are currently doing a better job of clearly communicating policies that discourage AI use, rather than policies that clearly outline appropriate use. Technology students are also among the most likely to say all of their courses have clear AI policies, which may be related to technologically savvy faculty members having a stronger understanding of AI, on average, than their peers in other disciplines.

## 4 Impact of AI Policies on Student Use

Students' AI use is correlated with their institution's position on the technology. Among those who say their school encourages students to use AI as much as possible, 87% use the tools on at least a weekly basis; among students whose school discourages AI use, less than half (48%) integrate AI into their schoolwork weekly.

### CHART 6

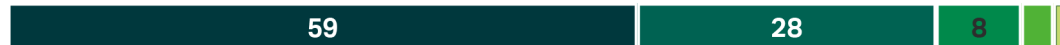
#### Relationship Between Institution Position on AI Use and Student AI Use Frequency

How often do you use artificial intelligence (AI) in your coursework?

*Based on institution's position on AI use*

■ % Daily ■ % Weekly ■ % Monthly ■ % Infrequently ■ % Never

Students are encouraged to use AI as much as possible



Students are encouraged to use AI, but with limits



Students are discouraged from using AI, but it is allowed in a few circumstances



Students are prohibited from using AI at all



Unsure of institution's position on AI



Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ± 1 percentage point.

Unsurprisingly, students whose schools prohibit the use of artificial intelligence are the least likely to say they use AI for their schoolwork; however, about one in four of these students (27%) say they still use AI on at least a weekly basis. Students who are unsure of their institution's position on AI are less likely to regularly use AI than even their peers who know their college discourages using it, underscoring the importance of institutions delineating clear rules for the proper use of AI.

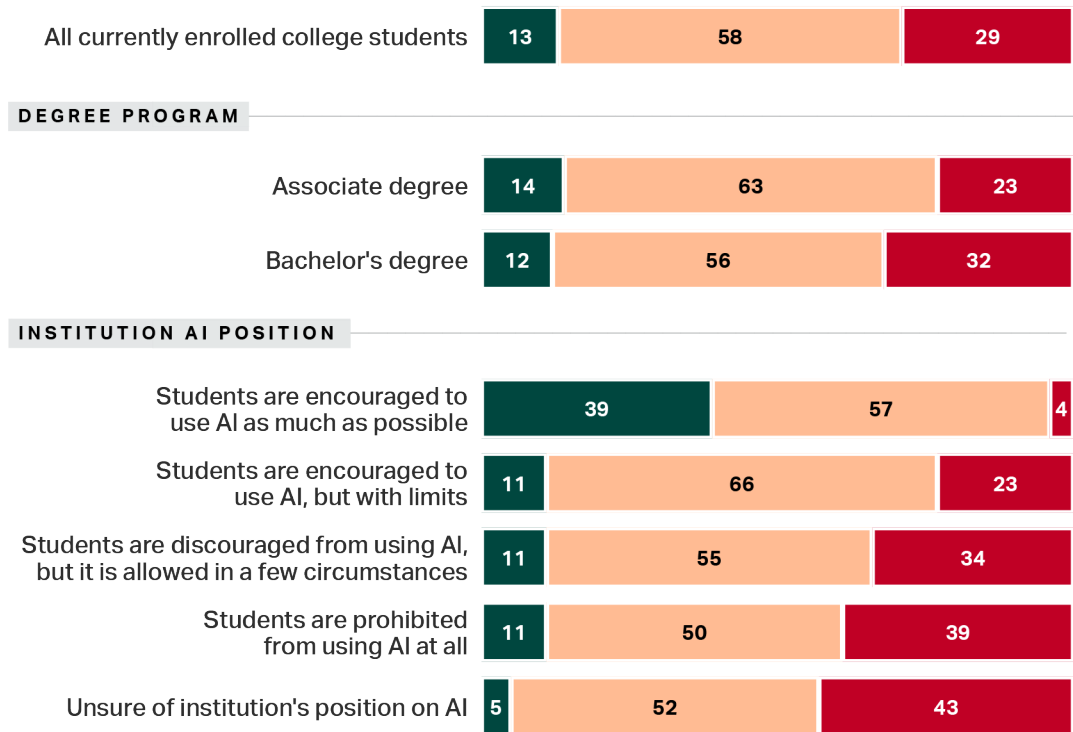
Students in the disciplines that are among the most likely to say their school encourages AI use are also the most likely to say they personally use AI for their schoolwork on a weekly basis. This includes students in business (70%), technology (68%) and engineering programs (65%).

One important consequence of these policies extends beyond students' educational experience and into their postgraduation lives. Overall, 58% of students say their school is providing them with the right amount of training on how to use AI, while 29% say they are not being given enough instruction or training in the technology.

**CHART 7**  
**Students' Perceptions of AI Training Provided by Their Institution**

Do you think your college is giving students too much training or instruction on how to use AI, the right amount of training, or not enough training?

■ % Too much   ■ % The right amount   ■ % Not enough



Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ± 1 percentage point.

Students whose school discourages AI use in coursework feel less prepared to use AI after graduation than their peers. More than three in 10 students at schools that discourage (34%) or prohibit AI use (39%) say their school is not providing them with enough artificial intelligence training. Among students who say they are unsure of their school's policy, 43% say they are not receiving enough education about AI.

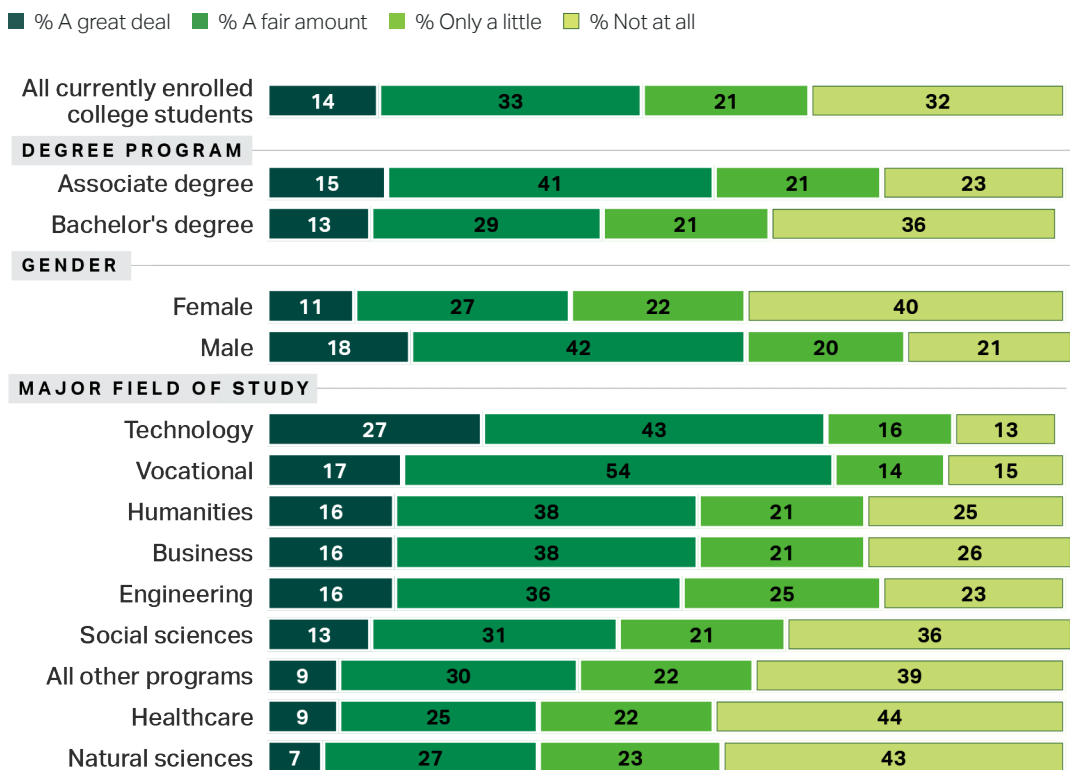
Though students at schools that encourage as much AI use as possible are far less likely than their peers to say their school is not providing enough AI instruction, many of these students seem to believe their institution has overcorrected. Nearly four in 10 students at the most pro-AI schools say their institution is providing too much training in artificial intelligence.

## 5 Impact of AI on Student Major and Career Outlook

Artificial intelligence is not only impacting *how* students study, but also *what* they study. Nearly half of college students say that the potential impact AI may have on a specific industry or the job market overall has caused them to think “a great deal” (14%) or “a fair amount” (33%) about changing their major field of study. This percentage is especially high among male students compared with their female peers (60% vs. 38%, respectively).

**CHART 8**  
**Students Reconsidering Major Due to AI Impact**

How much, if at all, have you thought about changing your major or field of study because of the impact AI might have on the job market or a specific industry?



Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

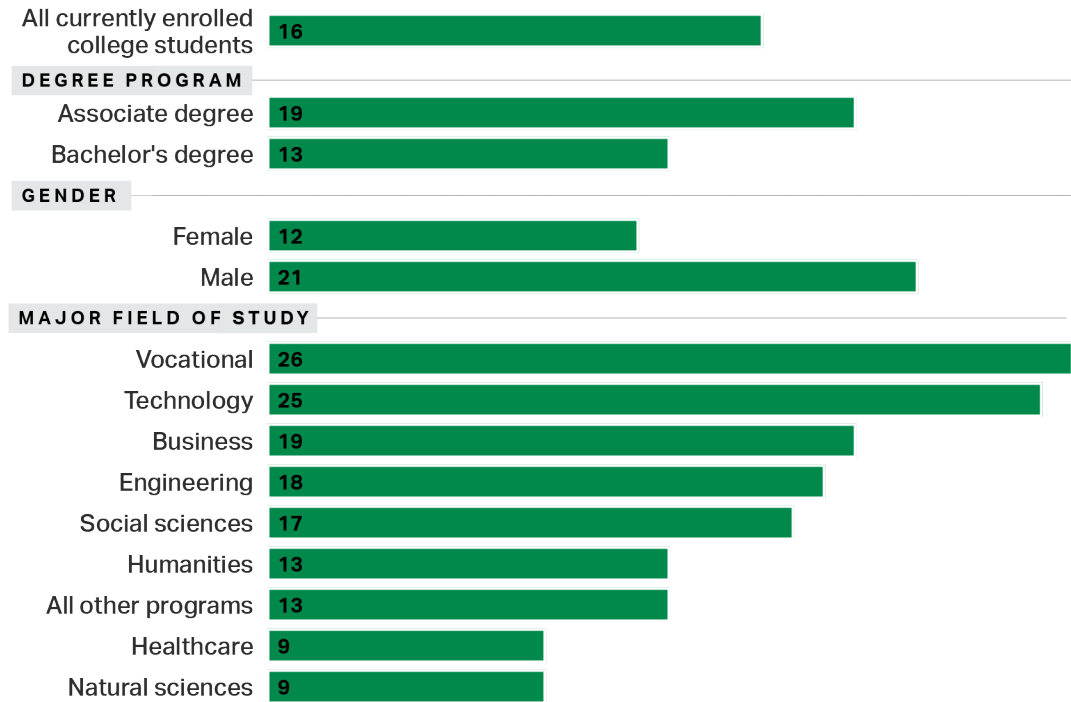
About seven in 10 students in technology and vocational programs say AI has caused them to reconsider their decision about what to study. Conversely, students in healthcare and natural sciences programs are the least likely to say AI has caused them to consider changing their major.

Overall, 16% of college students say the impact of AI has extended beyond causing them to think about changing their major field of study and they have actually made that change. This is especially high among men (21%) and associate degree students (19%). Students enrolled in vocational (26%) and technology programs (25%) are the most likely to say that they have changed their major due to AI, meaning these students presumably transitioned *into* those majors. Combined with the finding that students who are currently enrolled in those programs are also among the most likely to say they are considering changing their major — but have not yet done so — this suggests that vocational and technology programs may be the disciplines most likely to be impacted by artificial intelligence, both positively and negatively.

**CHART 9**  
**Students Changing Major Due to AI Impact**

Have you changed your major or field of study because of the impact AI might have?

% Yes



Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1 percentage point.

## Implications

While a majority of college students say they are using artificial intelligence in their coursework every week, a majority also say their institution discourages or prohibits the use of AI. Meanwhile, 52% of students indicate that at least some of their courses do not have clear policies about how they can use AI, which may reflect the struggle to balance responsible use at the institutional level. With many of their students utilizing AI regardless of their stance — including about one in four students at schools that prohibit the use of AI who still do so on at least a weekly basis — institutions may want to consider adjusting or clarifying their stance to ensure students are using this technology in a way that is ethical and beneficial to their education and postgraduation job readiness.

In addition to the effect that AI is having on learning, many students appear to acknowledge the significant impact this technology is already having on the world of work — particularly for entry-level employees — by adjusting their field of study. One recent piece of research suggests that in jobs that are considered highly exposed to AI, employment for 22- to 25-year-old workers suffered relative declines of about 16% between 2022 and 2025 compared with their older peers in those same jobs.<sup>1</sup>

But as students grapple with the new realities of AI-augmented work and learning, many simultaneously say that their colleges and universities are not doing an adequate job of preparing them to integrate artificial intelligence into their postgraduation lives. Three in 10 students are also raising concerns about the extent to which their college is preparing them to use artificial intelligence after graduation. This — as well as the extent to which students practice integrating AI into their schoolwork — is clearly correlated with their school's stance on artificial intelligence: Students whose institutions promote using AI are more likely to use it and feel their school is adequately training them in how to do so, while students whose universities discourage or prohibit AI use feel they are falling behind in their knowledge of it. Giving students clear opportunities to engage with artificial intelligence during their degree program — even in limited ways — would likely help many of them feel more confident about their readiness to utilize AI in their postgraduation jobs.

## Methodology

Results for the Lumina-Gallup study are based on web surveys conducted Oct. 2-31, 2025, with a sample of 3,801 adults who are currently pursuing an associate or bachelor's degree. All respondents were between the ages of 18 and 59 and had a high school diploma or equivalent but not an associate or bachelor's degree. Respondents were interviewed via Dynata's nonprobability web-based panel.

The data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region for the population of U.S. adults aged 18 to 59 with a high school diploma but without a college degree. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent American Community Survey figures.

<sup>1</sup> Brynjolfsson, E., Chandar, B., & Chen, R. (2025). *Canaries in the coal mine? Six facts about the recent employment effects of artificial intelligence*. Stanford Digital Economy Lab. Retrieved from [https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/app/uploads/2025/11/CanariesintheCoalMine\\_Nov25.pdf](https://digitaleconomy.stanford.edu/app/uploads/2025/11/CanariesintheCoalMine_Nov25.pdf)

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**GALLUP®**

**World Headquarters**

The Gallup Building  
901 F Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

**t** +1.877.242.5587

**f** +1.888.500.8282

**[www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)**