READY TO SCALE, POISED TO LEAD

Assessing AI Readiness at Our Nation's HBCUs

Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center
Thurgood Marshall College Fund
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DR. N. JOYCE PAYNE RESEARCH CENTER

HBCUs AND THE UNFINISHED WORK OF AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer an emerging possibility; it is a structural force shaping the daily lives of millions of Americans. As AI becomes a constant presence in households, workplaces, and civic institutions, it is essential that higher education policies evaluate how this rapidly evolving technological landscape is integrated into institutional practices, governance structures, and strategic frameworks, with the explicit intention of using it to drive equitable and progressive national growth. At the center of this transformation are the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These institutions are not peripheral to the country's innovation ecosystem; they are positioned on the pulse of technological change and are already demonstrating the capacity to lead. Now is an opportune moment to assess how HBCUs can shape, guide, and lead the nation's engagement with artificial intelligence.

The global competition for artificial intelligence capacity is underway. Executive Order 14179, "Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence," has established a national mandate to accelerate national AI capability. In addition, federal research pipelines have expanded through increased investments from the National Science Foundation (NSF), United States Department of Energy (DOE), and United States Department of Defense (DoD), while private-sector commitments now reach into the billions. Across every domain of American life, from national security to biomedical research to workforce development, the central question has shifted from whether AI will transform the economy to how rapidly that transformation will occur and who will be its beneficiaries.

By conventional metrics such as access to capital, computing capacity, research infrastructure, and large-scale research funding, HBCUs may appear, at first glance, to be structurally disadvantaged. However, this report demonstrates that such assumptions are analytically incomplete. Seventy-five percent of surveyed HBCU leaders now report frequent AI use, a rate that exceeds 2025 national peer benchmarks and reflects an increase in adoption within only three years. The data presented in this report indicates that HBCUs are actively engaging in the use of artificial intelligence, and it is critical to examine how institutional operations can be leveraged to strengthen their competitiveness in this rapidly evolving AI landscape.

If the United States seeks to sustain global competitiveness in artificial intelligence, it cannot overlook the institutions that have historically produced a disproportionate share of the nation's engineers, scientists, and innovators, including those educated at HBCUs. Yet persistent inequities continue to constrain progress, affecting not only HBCUs but also the broader national innovation ecosystem. Gaps in infrastructure, policy alignment, and the development of an AI-literate talent pipeline do not signify deficiencies in institutional capacity or intellectual readiness. Instead, they reflect resource allocation patterns that stem from policy choices rather than inherent or inevitable constraints. HBCUs remain among the nation's most efficient engines of talent development; however, sustained investment is necessary to ensure these institutions are positioned to lead in future waves of American innovation.

Accordingly, this report does not focus on deficiencies. It offers an evidence-based assessment of current conditions and presents five data-driven recommendations for federal, state, philanthropic, and private-sector stakeholders. A competitive and inclusive AI economy by 2030 is attainable but not guaranteed. Achieving it will require disciplined coordination, intentional investment, and sustained national commitment to the institutions that drive the nation's technological innovation and associated workforce.

THE THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE FUND

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) is America's largest organization exclusively representing the Black College community since 1987. TMCF is a charitable, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation and membership organization whose membership consists of all our nation's publicly supported bachelor's degree-granting Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), nine associate degree-granting Historically Black Community Colleges (HBCCs), four private HBCUs, three Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), and one technical college. TMCF supports more than 375,000 students across its member schools, positioning the organization as a leading advocate for the public HBCU ecosystem.

The Thurgood Marshall College Fund significantly impacts students' lives by offering a comprehensive pathway from high school to career. TMCF's efforts are particularly crucial given the unique challenges HBCU students may encounter. Through various programs and support systems, TMCF transforms the lives of thousands of students annually, making a substantial difference in the educational and professional landscape by fostering academic excellence, leadership development, and career readiness. Our work directly contributes to building a diverse and skilled national workforce.

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THE DR. N. JOYCE PAYNE RESEARCH CENTER

The Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center was established to advance rigorous, evidence-based research that addresses systemic challenges, informs policy solutions, and improves outcomes for populations facing barriers to opportunity. Rooted in the legacy of HBCUs and committed to the public good, the Center serves as a national platform for generating research-driven strategies, elevating institutional capacity, and translating knowledge into meaningful action.

The Center's work is guided by a stakeholder-centered philosophy that ensures the voices of communities most affected by systemic challenges help shape the questions, methods, and solutions that emerge from its research. Through collaboration with scholars, policymakers, practitioners, industry leaders, and institutional partners, the Payne Center produces and disseminates cutting-edge research, supports HBCU faculty and student scholarship, and provides policy analysis that strengthens decision-making across sectors.

Ready to Scale, Poised to Lead: Assessing AI Readiness at Our Nation's HBCUs is the ninth publication of the Payne Center, reflecting our commitment to providing actionable insights that strengthen public HBCUs and, by extension, the nation. As part of the Center's ongoing effort to integrate research, convening, publishing, consulting, and program development, this report is intended to drive change, inform policy, and generate sustainable solutions. By centering evidence, amplifying HBCU contributions, and focusing on issues that shape opportunity, mobility, and institutional strength, the ***Ready to Scale, Poised to Lead*** report seeks not only to document challenges, but to empower the solutions necessary to meet them.

Researching Solutions, Empowering Change.

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Executive Summary

This report is based on the AI Landscape Survey, conducted by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) in partnership with Tyton Partners, an education-focused advisory firm. The survey was administered across predominantly TMCF member institutions to examine how Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) are approaching artificial intelligence (AI) use, governance, investment priorities, and institutional needs. This report synthesizes the findings and provides evidence-based recommendations for HBCU leaders, as well as federal, state, philanthropic, and private-sector stakeholders committed to strengthening institutional capacity in the AI era. The participating institutions totaled 32: 26 HBCUs, four Historically Black Community and Technical Colleges, and two PBIs (see Appendix A). The findings reflect the ways HBCUs are engaging in the AI era, with an evaluation of their adoption of artificial intelligence across institutional leadership and operational functions. This report also highlights areas for continued improvement as this emerging technological landscape evolves.

In an age of widespread technological caution, leaders at public HBCUs have quietly surpassed national AI adoption benchmarks. Seventy-five percent of surveyed HBCU institutional leaders now report frequent (daily or weekly) AI usage, surpassing the 47% recorded among peer institutions in Spring 2025 and more than quadruple the reported national benchmark of frequent usage in 2024 (see Figure 1.1).

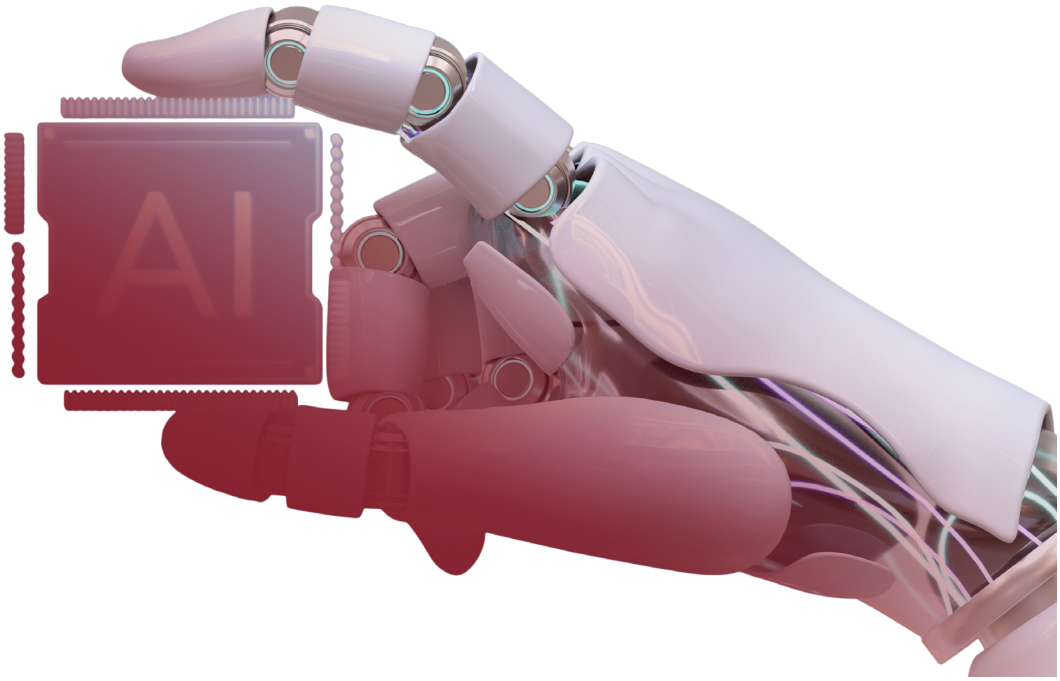
These findings upend the conventional narrative. HBCUs are not laggards playing catch-up. They are quietly leading, driven by entrepreneurial "AI Champions" in technology, student success, and institutional research roles. This report documents a quiet revolution: high engagement and accelerating momentum, constrained only by structural under-investment.

Three structural gaps stand between current momentum and durable, national-scale success:

1. The Infrastructure Gap: 16% of surveyed institutions lack an identified institutionally approved AI Large Language Model (LLM). At these campuses, students engage with AI using personal accounts, without institutional data protection or oversight.

2. The Policy & Governance Gap: 71% of surveyed institutions lack a clear, institution-wide student AI policy. Faculty guidance is even less developed, creating a landscape of conflicting signals.

3. The AI Literacy Pipeline Gap: Only 21% of surveyed institutions agree that AI literacy is measured as a student outcome today, yet 81% expect to do so within three years. The curriculum, faculty capacity, and assessment infrastructure needed to deliver on that commitment do not yet exist at scale.



These gaps reflect a structural lag in which institutional advancement is moving faster than the systems designed to support it. The encouraging reality is that these gaps can be closed through strategic investment and coordinated national action. The five recommendations that follow are grounded in the survey data, calibrated to the scale of the existing gaps, and directed toward specific stakeholders across government, philanthropy, industry, and higher education.

Recommendation 1:

Make AI a priority by ensuring that every HBCU designates an AI Strategy Lead and establishes clear board-level accountability for artificial intelligence strategy within the next 12 months.

Recommendation 2:

Close the infrastructure gap through a combination of dedicated federal appropriations, structured technology company licensing programs, and the creation of a coordinated philanthropic infrastructure fund to support institutional capacity-building.

Recommendation 3:

Build the AI literacy pipeline urgently by implementing baseline assessments across campuses, embedding faculty development into annual performance review systems, and developing and disseminating standardized curriculum frameworks.

Recommendation 4:

Replace detection with development by shifting institutional AI policy away from punitive surveillance models and toward competency-based assessment approaches that prioritize learning and skill-building.

Recommendation 5:

Activate the full ecosystem by positioning the Payne Center as a national coordination hub, establishing an annual convening summit, and formalizing dedicated liaison relationships with relevant federal and state agencies.

SECTION 1

A Quiet Revolution in a National Emergency

We are living through one of the most consequential technological transformations in human history. Artificial intelligence (AI) is not a distant promise or a research curiosity. It is here — reshaping how companies hire, how hospitals diagnose, how governments defend, how teachers teach, and how the next generation of professionals will build their careers. The nation that develops, deploys, and leads on AI will hold enormous advantages in economic productivity, national security, scientific discovery, and global influence.

America is at a turning point in AI. America's leaders have signaled this with unprecedented clarity and urgency across government, workforce, and cross-sector initiatives.

Executive Action: In January 2025, Executive Order 14179, "Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence," established as official U.S. policy the goal of sustaining and enhancing American global AI dominance. In July 2025, the White House released its AI Action Plan, framing AI as a matter of urgent national competitiveness. In December 2025, a second executive order, "Ensuring a National Policy Framework for Artificial Intelligence," committed the administration to working with Congress on a unified national AI standard (The White House, 2025a, 2025b, 2025d).

Federal Investment: The National Science Foundation has built the National AI Research Institutes network, committing approximately $800 million annually to AI research, with an additional $200 million dedicated to AI education and workforce development (National Science Foundation, 2025). The National AI Research Resource (NAIRR) pilot, launched in 2024, has already supported more than 760 research projects (NAIRR Pilot, 2026).

Private Sector Mobilization: Microsoft committed $4 billion over five years through its Microsoft Elevate initiative (Smith, 2025). Google pledged $150 million specifically for AI education (Pichai, 2025). Amazon pledged to train four million people in AI competencies (Majerus, 2025). At a September 2025 White House AI Education Task Force meeting, the nation's largest technology companies stood together and declared their intent to build an AI-ready American workforce with urgency (The White House, 2025c).

Workforce Transformation: According to the BCG Henderson Institute's April 2026 analysis, AI is expected to reshape between 50% and 55% of U.S. jobs over the next two to three years. Consistent with this projection, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) issued guidance in 2026 stating that AI fluency will become a baseline expectation for competitive employment across virtually every sector. The U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor have both published workforce development frameworks emphasizing that AI literacy is no longer a technical skill but a foundational competency for economic mobility (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2026; U.S. Department of Labor, 2026).

The nation's accelerated push toward AI is already redefining economic opportunity in America. Institutions that fail to prepare students and workers with AI literacy will leave them at a significant disadvantage in the workforce and economy taking shape today.

The Strategic Importance of HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) account for roughly 2.5% of America's colleges and universities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). By raw numbers, they may appear to represent a relatively small segment of the postsecondary landscape. However, these numbers do not capture HBCUs' widespread impact on America's evolving industries and talent pipeline. Drawing on recent national data, the impact of HBCUs is substantial and far-reaching (Leadership Brainery, 2025; McDonald, 2021; Siid, 2024).

HBCUs produce a disproportionate share of Black professionals across critical sectors:

- 40% of all Black engineers.
- 50% of Black lawyers.
- 70% of Black doctors and dentists.
- 80% of Black judges.
- More than 75% of Black military officers in the U.S. Armed Forces.

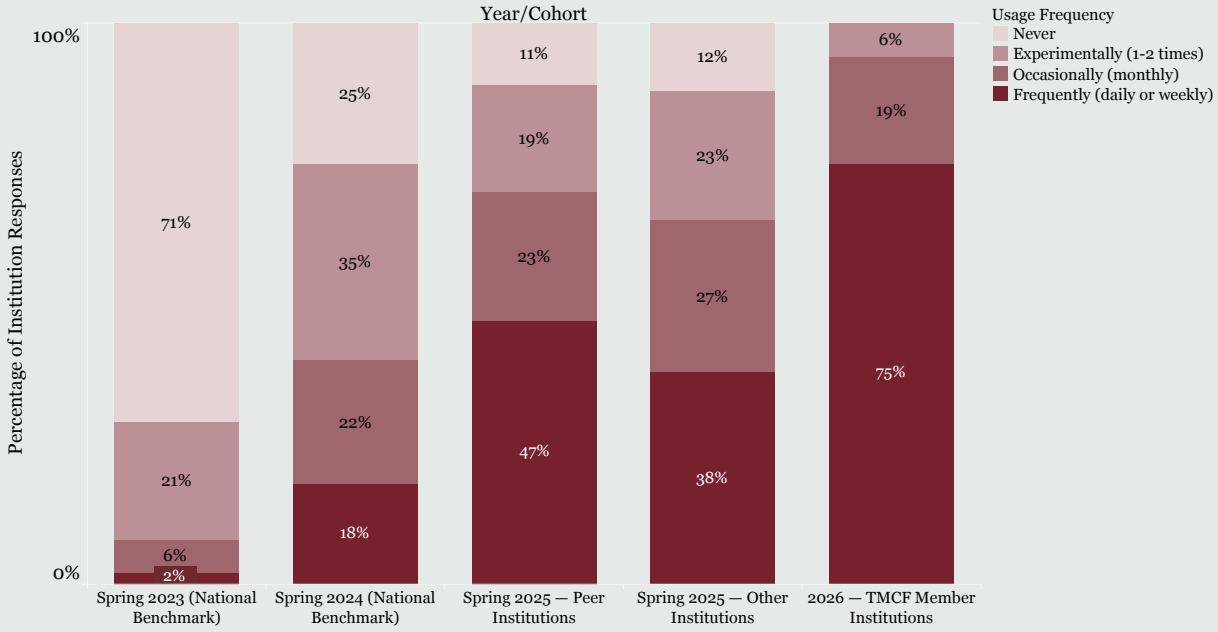
For generations, HBCUs have produced excellence at a disproportionate scale, with fewer resources. It is from this historic "doing more with less" effectiveness that the *American Dividend* (Brown et al., 2025) framework emerged, an evidence-based strategic call to government, industrial, and philanthropic leaders to recognize, invest in, and achieve alongside HBCUs for American advancement. The efficiency and dedication embedded in the HBCU model is itself a form of innovation. As technological determinism reshapes higher education and the workforce, HBCUs must adopt AI not as a trend, but as a strategic instrument to scale their longstanding impact, strengthen institutional capacity, and safeguard their role in advancing national progress. The question in this moment is whether the inequities that have long constrained HBCU resources will finally be addressed, or whether they will compound into a significant AI-readiness gap.

The Quiet Revolution: Surpassing National Benchmarks

The conventional narrative assumes HBCUs are technological laggards, waiting to be brought into the modern era. The data tells a radically different story. In an era of widespread technology reticence, HBCU leaders have quietly surpassed national AI adoption benchmarks. Three-quarters (75%) of surveyed TMCF member institutions reported frequent (daily or weekly) AI use in early 2026. This both fits the rapid acceleration in AI usage shown in national benchmarks from 2023 to 2025 and displays an exceptional investment by HBCU leaders in the growing adoption of AI, surpassing the 47% reported frequent usage by peer institutional leaders in 2025 (Shaw et al., 2025). A key consideration in this study is respondent self-selection, which could have introduced bias, as leaders with more favorable views toward AI were more likely to participate. However, the findings show that the institutions demonstrate leadership, momentum, and an opportunity to scale.

Figure 1.1

AI Usage Frequency Among Surveyed Institutions Against 2023–2025 National Benchmark of Peer and Other Institutions



The data on AI usage challenges the deficit-based lens through which the innovation and adeptness of HBCUs are often viewed. By outpacing their peers in AI engagement, these institutions are positioned as early adopters of transformative technology and ambassadors for its potential gains. While AI engagement is already prominent, the data suggests that HBCUs must now move toward establishing a more robust foundation for institutional resilience and a strategic blueprint for the future of higher education.

Scaling AI innovation represents a continuation of existing momentum and an opportunity to expand its impact further. To transition from individual leadership to systemic excellence, HBCUs must move beyond the "adoption" phase and into the "integration" phase. This requires a deliberate shift from utilizing AI as a series of isolated tools to embedding it as a core pillar of institutional infrastructure. By codifying these early gains into long-term strategic frameworks, HBCUs can ensure that the technological gap does not merely close but becomes irrelevant as they lead the charge into the next era of academic and operational excellence.

The Core Tension: High Engagement, Low Infrastructure

The data suggests that while AI engagement at HBCUs is high, these institutions remain largely fragmented, underfunded, and unevenly resourced. These institutions often operate without a coordinated institutional strategy for AI implementation. Momentum is sustained not by institutions' strategic implementation, but rather by individual administrators who champion AI on campuses. Whether it is a technology director building a custom retention dashboard or an institutional research officer automating weeks of manual labor, these individuals are the catalysts of this progress. One of the most important qualitative findings is what we call the "AI Champions" phenomenon. Across the HBCU landscape, AI adoption is commonly driven by individual leaders who show interest in AI on their campuses. The AI Champions model has a critical limitation: it does not scale, it is not durable, and it creates fragmentation rather than institutional strength. The transition from AI Champions to AI institutions is a significant challenge to which this survey draws attention.

SECTION 2

Where HBCUs Stand Today

This study represents the largest and most comprehensive data collection effort undertaken on this topic to date, offering an important and timely view into how Historically Black College and University (HBCU) leaders are understanding, adopting, and governing artificial intelligence across their institutions.

The findings point to one clear and compelling conclusion: HBCU leaders are not standing on the margins of the AI revolution. They are already deeply engaged. Across institutions, leaders are navigating the opportunities, risks, uncertainties, and responsibilities that accompany AI adoption while working to ensure that their campuses are prepared for an era of rapid technological change.

The data discussed in this report derive from a Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center study conducted in collaboration with Tyton Partners. The sample includes 38 responses representing 32 unique institutions: 26 HBCUs, four Historically Black Community and Technical Colleges, and two Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs). While the sample includes these three institutional types, this report predominantly uses HBCU-specific language because of the strong representation of HBCUs in the sample and the meaningful overlap in the data. Additionally, although the responding institutions are primarily public institutions, the sample includes a small number of private institutions. As such, the findings may not fully generalize across all institutional contexts; however, they provide a powerful and instructive assessment of the current state of AI engagement and offer important insights for the entire HBCU ecosystem.

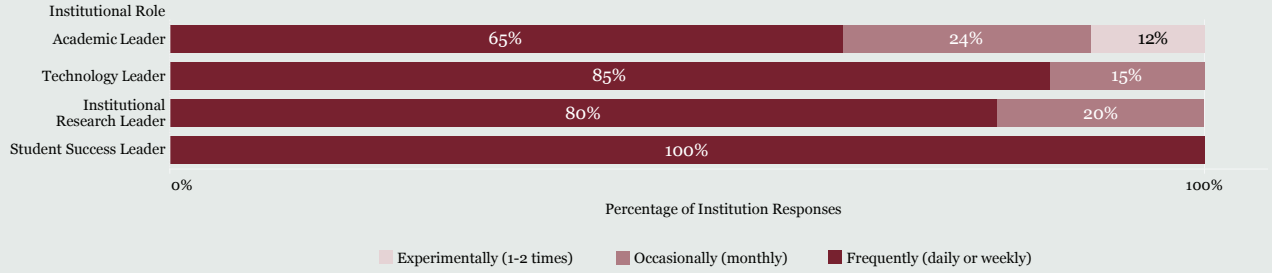
With these considerations in mind, this section examines the current state of AI across four central pillars: adoption, sentiment, use cases, and policy. Together, these pillars offer a data-informed picture of where institutions are today, how leaders are thinking about AI's promise and challenges, and what must be considered as HBCUs move from early engagement to strategic institutional transformation.

Institutional Leader AI Usage

While 75% of surveyed TMCF member institutional leaders reported frequent AI use, adoption rates vary by role, revealing both institutional strengths and a critical leadership gap. To better understand how AI integration differs across functional areas of the institution, Figure 2.1 disaggregates usage patterns by respondent role. These findings indicate how frequently Academic, Technology, Institutional Research, and Student Success leaders (n=36) engage with AI in their day-to-day practice. The data highlights where AI adoption is most concentrated and where it is emerging as a structural tool for decision-making. It also signals opportunities for broader institutional alignment.

Figure 2.1

AI Usage Frequency by Respondent Role: Academic, Technology, Institutional Research, and Student Success Leaders



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Student Success Leaders (100%; n=1): An important consideration in this data point is that in this survey, only one respondent identified as a student success leader. As such, generalizations cannot be directly drawn from this statistic; instead, this offers promise and drive for further investigation. The respondent, whose role is closely aligned with student retention, advising, early alert systems, and academic support, reported making AI a central component of their practice. Given the importance and involvement of their role, this adoption makes logical sense and should be considered for other student success leaders if frequent AI usage is not universal.

Technology Leaders (85%; n=13): Near-universal adoption among the professionals who understand AI most deeply and have the most direct access to institutional technology platforms. The technical advocates for broader AI investment are already in place.

Institutional Research Leaders (80%; n=5): High adoption in the offices that serve as the data infrastructure backbone of the institution. This suggests AI is beginning to shape the evidence base that HBCU leaders use to make decisions.

Academic Leaders (65%; n=17): The lowest of the four groups, though still well above national benchmarks. This gap warrants focused attention because academic leaders set curriculum direction, tenure policy, and the institutional culture around teaching and learning. If adoption is delayed among this group, it may signal concerns related to academic integrity, faculty roles, or institutional change, highlighting the need for targeted professional development and clear policy guidance. While it is important to note the contributions made by institutional "AI Champions," their success also reveals a structural vulnerability: when innovation depends primarily on the presence of a specific leader, the institution remains one resignation or retirement away from losing its momentum.

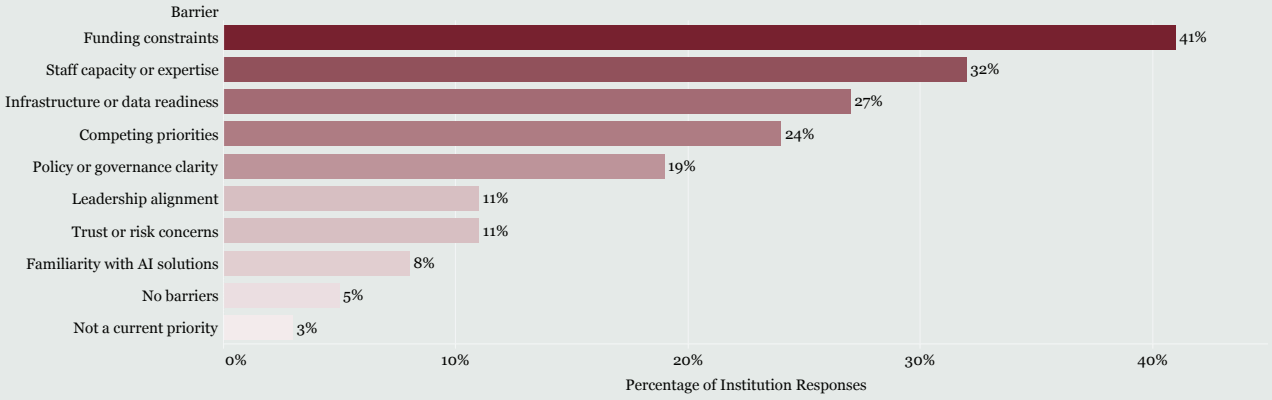
This underscores a key area for improvement: not only retaining employees with expertise in AI implementation but also building systems that institutionalize this expertise across the organization. AI should not be the responsibility of a few individuals; rather, it should be an institutional responsibility supported by clear governance, strategic alignment, and responsible implementation. It should be embedded within institutional processes rather than concentrated in isolated expertise. Doing so would establish continuity beyond individual leadership and promote the longevity of innovative programming and opportunities for strategic investment in innovation. The gap between localized human effort and the structural support required to sustain it is precisely what this report documents. It measures where HBCUs stand today and, more importantly, where they can go when investment aligns with their ambition. HBCUs are not behind; they are ready.

Barriers to Adoption

When asked directly what is holding their institutions back from fully adopting AI, HBCU leaders were unambiguous.

Figure 2.2

Top Reported Barriers Limiting AI Adoption at Surveyed Institutions



The top three barriers — funding (41%), staff capacity (32%), and infrastructure (27%) — are not technology problems. They are resource problems, predictable given the structural underfunding that these HBCUs have historically navigated. This issue becomes more glaring when compared to the top barrier of trust or risk concerns (22%) reported in the 2025 national benchmark with funding constraints as a much less significant concern (12%) (Shaw et al., 2025). Only 5% of respondents reported no barriers and 3% reported AI adoption as not a current priority. Further, trust and risk concerns are cited by only 11% of respondents — roughly one-fourth as often as funding constraints (41%). Virtually everyone advancing AI at these institutions is doing so in spite of real obstacles.

Sentiment Around AI

The survey reveals a striking and productive tension in how the surveyed HBCU leaders think about AI on campus.

Figure 2.3

Distribution of Confidence in AI's Current Institutional Value Across Surveyed Institutions

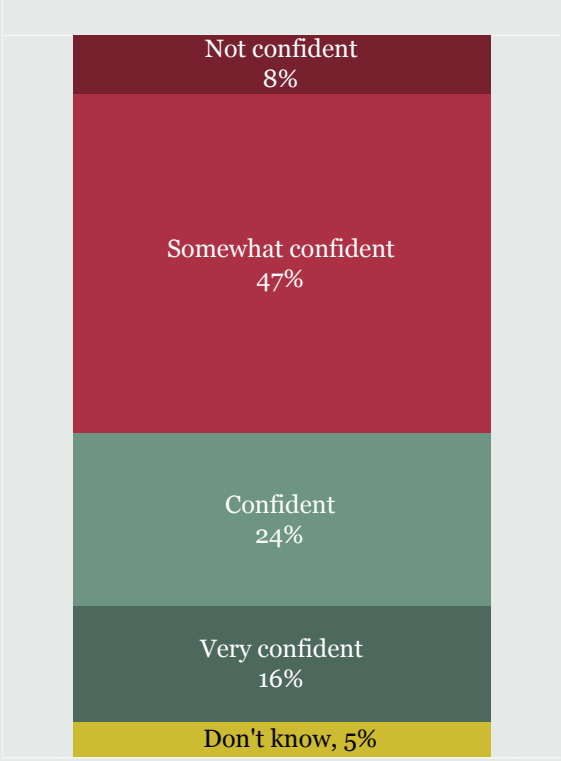
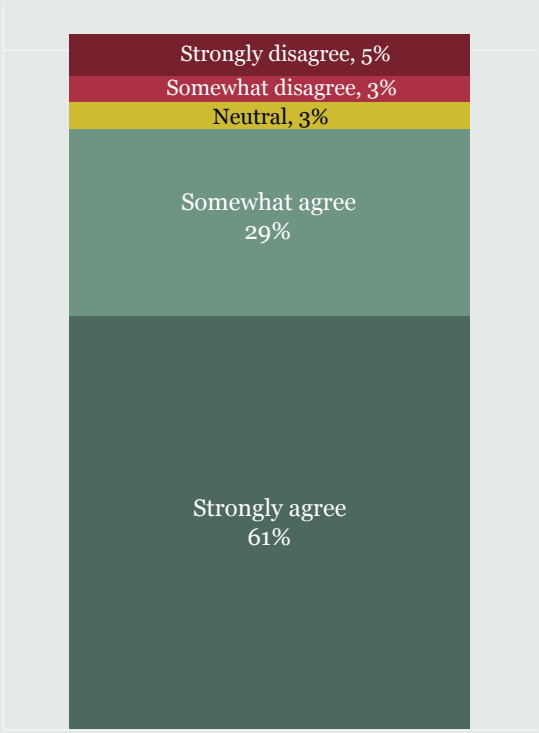


Figure 2.4

Distribution of Agreement That AI Has Potential to Support Institutional Mission Across Surveyed Institutions



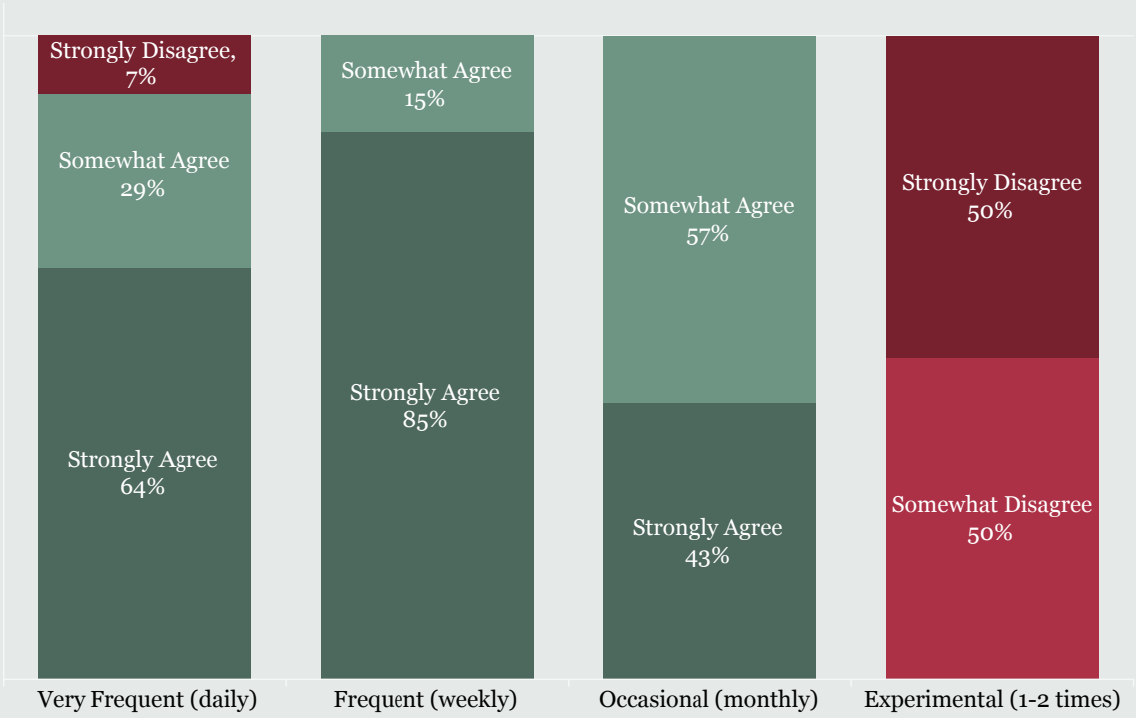
Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Only 40% of surveyed HBCU leaders are confident that AI is currently delivering meaningful value at their institution today. Yet 90% believe AI has the potential to support their institution's mission, including 61% who strongly agree. The 50-percentage-point gap between present confidence and future belief is an indication of the implementation support gap. The vision is there; the scaffolding is not.

The most consequential finding in this section is one that points directly toward a potential solution: confidence correlates with experience.

Figure 2.5

Distribution of Agreement That AI Has Potential to Support Institutional Mission by Respondent AI Use Frequency



Frequent (daily or weekly) AI users have the highest levels of confidence while experimental users have the lowest. From one perspective, this may be expected and not very useful information; it would make sense that those who use AI frequently are more likely to find it generally beneficial. But this could also point to a solution: structured AI professional development. Risk and trust concerns were not a highly reported barrier to AI adoption but it is nonetheless a barrier that can be addressed with introductions and guidance with the technology.

Responsibility of AI Policy Implementation

Complementing this trend of surveyed institutional leaders' perspectives of AI for their campuses is a tendency toward institution-wide implementation. On average, surveyed institutional leaders more strongly agreed that their schools need institution-wide policies instead of department-specific policies compared to national peer institutions. Similarly, these leaders more strongly agreed that it is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that students know how to effectively use AI. This reflects a communal value that runs deep at HBCUs: decisions affecting the whole community should reflect the whole community's voice.

Openness to AI-Integrated Student Support Services

Surveyed institutions reported 7% to 22% greater openness to AI-integrated student support services compared to 2025 national benchmarks. Openness is highest for tutoring and academic support, course registration assistance, and financial aid counseling — precisely the high-touch services where staffing constraints most acutely limit capacity. Institutions are appropriately more cautious about AI in mental health counseling, where human relationships and professional judgment are most critical.

AI and Ethics

However, this general interest in institution-wide policies on AI also carries responsible consideration of the ethics involved.

Figure 2.6

Surveyed Institutions' Agreement on Ethical Risks Being a Significant Concern for AI Decision-Making

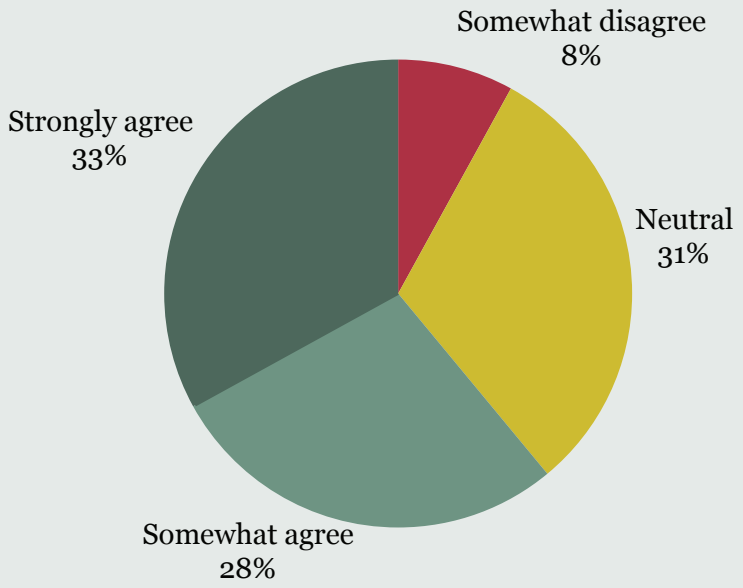


Figure 2.7

Top Reported Ethical Concerns Where Guidance Is Sought by Surveyed Institutions

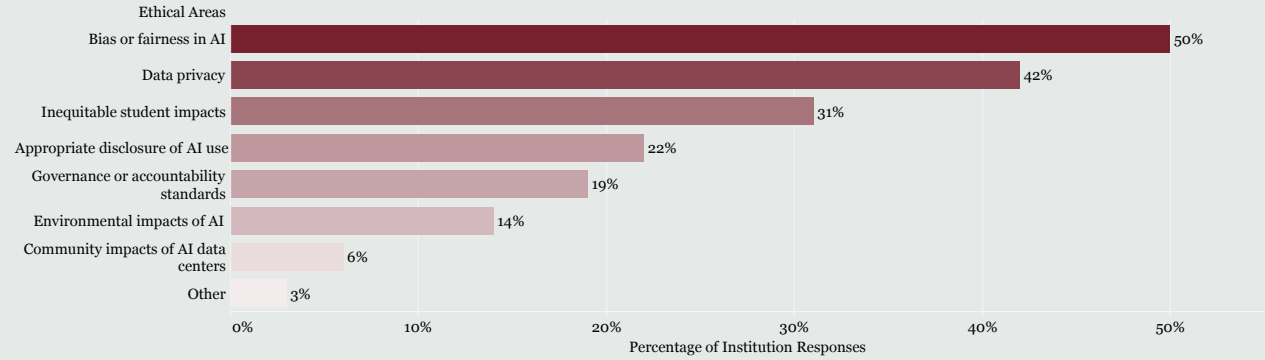


Figure 2.6 shows the distribution of agreement that ethical risks are a significant concern regarding AI, while Figure 2.7 breaks down these risk concerns by category. Sixty-one percent of surveyed leaders agree that the ethical risks of AI use are a significant concern, a mark of institutional seriousness and moral clarity alongside their interest and vision. When asked what specific ethical concerns leaders want to address, bias and fairness ranked first (50%), followed by data privacy (42%). HBCUs serve student populations who have historically been on the wrong side of algorithmic decision-making from credit systems to criminal justice to employment screening. When an HBCU leader raises concerns about AI bias and fairness, they are drawing on lived institutional knowledge about what happens when systems that claim to be neutral encode disadvantage. Technology leaders are especially concerned about data privacy, with 54% identifying it as their primary issue. This concern likely stems from the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the risks of unregulated AI use involving student data. This adds another dimension to the vision these leaders have for AI at their institutions: they are not anti-AI but pro-responsible AI.

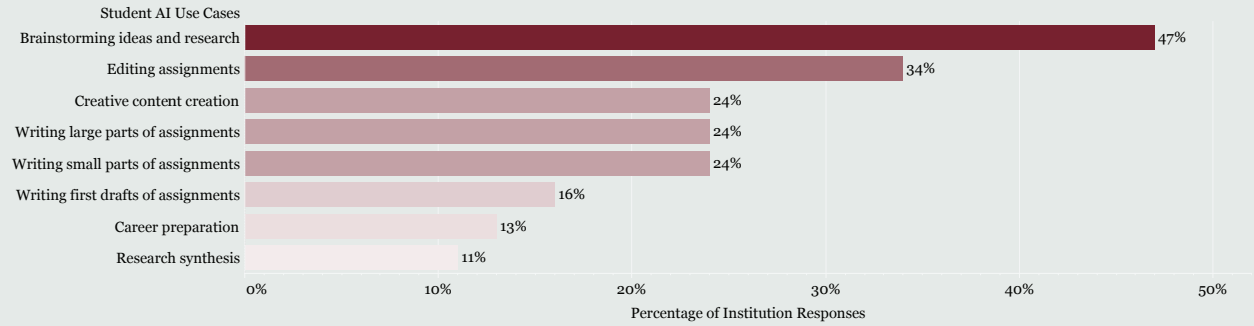
Use and Practices of AI on Campuses

Student Use and Support

The surveyed TMCF member institution leaders reported that their students are already using AI extensively, primarily as a thinking partner and writing aid. The data shows that students are incorporating AI usage directly into their learning and knowledge-production processes to support written assignments, career development, and ideation. Figure 2.8 illustrates the most commonly reported student AI use cases across institutions, drawing attention to the specific ways AI is shaping student academic practice and engagement.

Figure 2.8

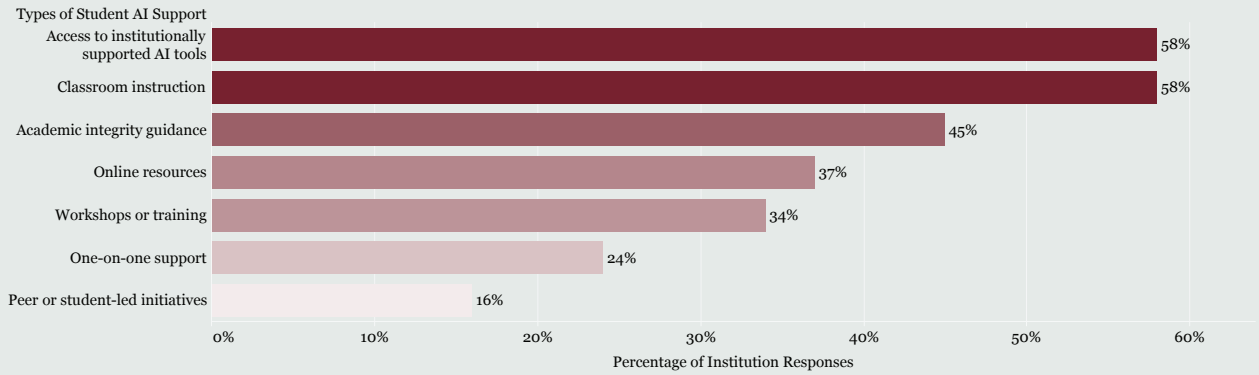
Top Student AI Use Cases Reported by Surveyed Institutions



Although this data reflects institutional leaders' perspectives on student AI usage rather than direct student reports, these results still provide insight into AI activity and areas of needed attention. Overall, surveyed leaders reported that students use AI more as a supplementary aid for assignments via brainstorming (47%) and editing (34%) rather than as a tool to complete their work for them. This suggests that students' AI use patterns align with the responsible-use values held by institutional leaders. As reflected in Figure 2.9, some institutions are proactively adopting practices to build responsible AI use and knowledge among students.

Figure 2.9

Prevalence of Student AI Support Practices at Surveyed Institutions



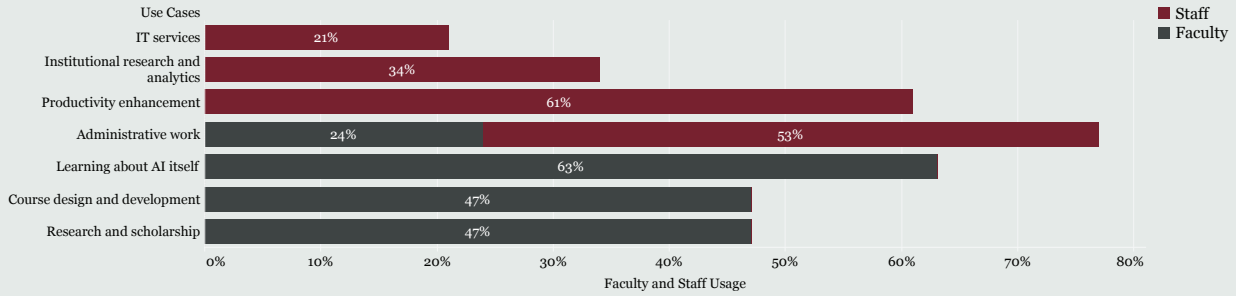
The majority of surveyed institutions (58%) provide students with access to institutionally supported AI tools, and an equal share (58%) of institutions also provide classroom instruction, representing a promising foundation with room for expansion. The secondary prevalence of academic integrity guidance sensibly addresses the concern of overreliance on AI tools by students, but the greater frequency of access and active classroom use suggests institutional confidence in AI's benefits and a willingness to extend trust and learning space to students. Rather than solely addressing academic misuse, the findings suggest that AI is being used to enhance learning. However, the need for broader implementation remains evident, as many institutions have yet to adopt these practices. Institutional responses must be calibrated accordingly.

Faculty and Staff Use

Surveyed member institutions reported notable differences in how faculty and staff use AI, reflecting variation in job responsibilities as well as differences in familiarity, comfort, and integration into daily work. Figure 2.10 illustrates these distinctions in reported use cases across both groups. While faculty AI use is primarily concentrated in learning, instruction, and research activities, often reflecting an early-stage exploration and orientation phase, staff leverage AI for productivity and administrative functions. The reported differences in AI use show not only an understandable difference in roles but also a suggested difference in familiarity and approach to AI.

Figure 2.10

Faculty and Staff AI Use Cases Reported by Surveyed Institutions



Overall, faculty engagement with AI remains concentrated in learning and research, with most respondents still in an exploration and orientation phase. Meanwhile, staff are leveraging AI primarily for productivity and administrative purposes without a corresponding emphasis on continued AI learning and development. Both patterns are appropriate for early-stage adoption. However, this disconnect highlights a need for a more universal professional development approach for all employees, and neither pattern reflects the embedded, routine AI practice that will be required to deliver on projected AI literacy outcomes.

AI Policies

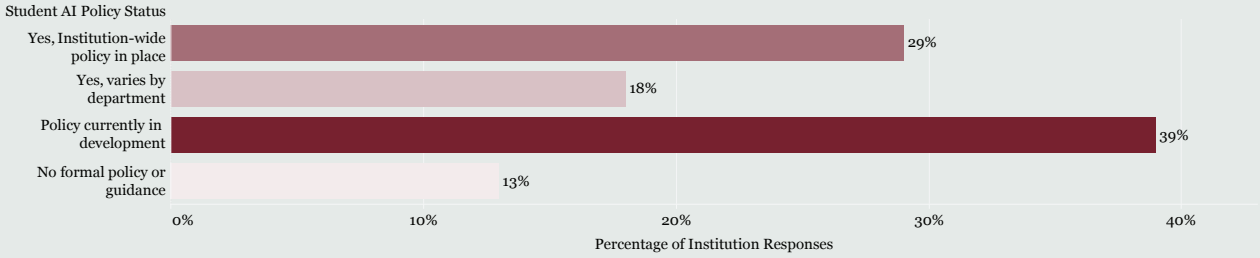
The policy framework provides the foundation for coherent governance, risk management, and operational execution. Without clear institutional AI frameworks — governing student use, faculty use, data privacy, academic integrity, and vendor management — even the most enthusiastic adoption creates vulnerability rather than strength. The policy landscape at public HBCUs is a work in progress, but the work must accelerate.

Status of Student and Faculty AI Policies

The data collected regarding the existence of student and faculty AI policies at the surveyed institutions reveals a significant policy vacuum.

Figure 2.11

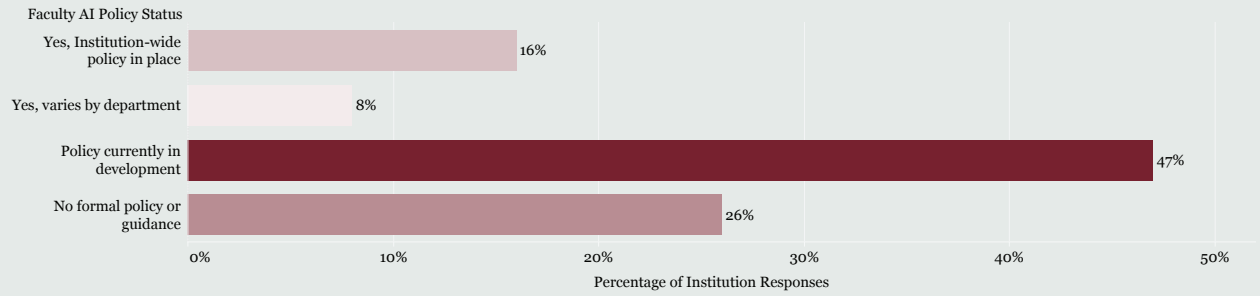
Distribution of Status of Student AI Policy at Surveyed Institutions



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

Figure 2.12

Distribution of Status of Faculty AI Policy at Surveyed Institutions



Note: 'Don't know' responses are excluded from Figure 2.12; as a result, percentages may not total 100%.

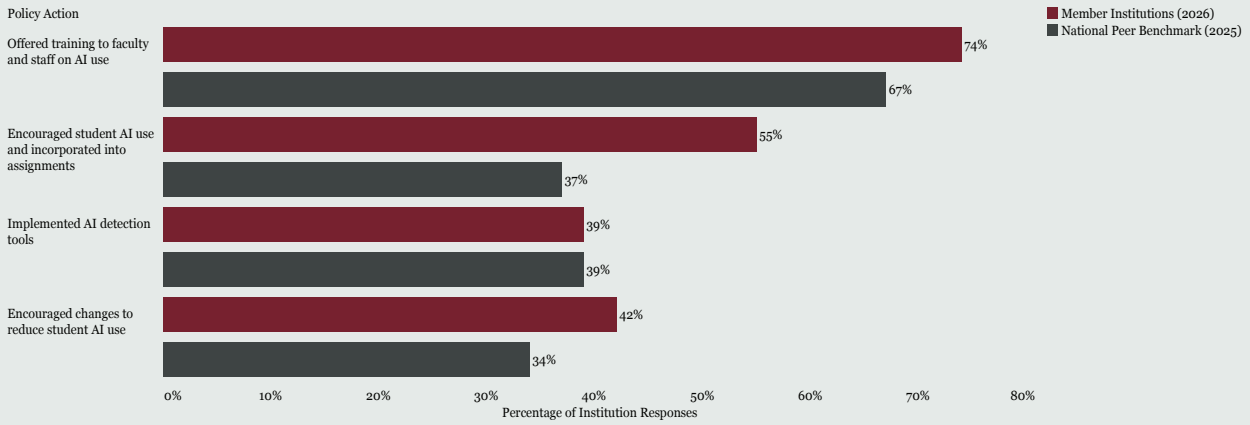
Seventy-one percent of surveyed institutions do not yet have a clear, institution-wide student AI policy. The policy vacuum creates confusion for students, vulnerability for institutions, and inconsistency in the student experience. Further, the comparison between student and faculty policy status is instructive. Student policy is somewhat more developed than faculty policy at the institution-wide level (29% vs. 16%). However, the share of policies that remain "in development" or "varies by department" is notably high across both groups. As a result, neither faculty nor students currently benefit from consistent, institution-wide guidance.

Current AI Policy Actions

Despite the lack of formal AI policy development, HBCUs have taken concrete actions to manage and shape AI use on campuses. Figure 2.13 compares the prevalence of key AI-related policy actions at surveyed institutions with national peer benchmarks. These actions include faculty and staff training, guidance on student AI use in coursework, the adoption of AI detection tools, and efforts to discourage or regulate student AI use. The data shows that institutions are moving forward in practice, even in the absence of fully developed or standardized policy frameworks.

Figure 2.13

Prevalence of AI Policy Actions Taken at Surveyed Institutions Compared to National Benchmark of Peer Institutions



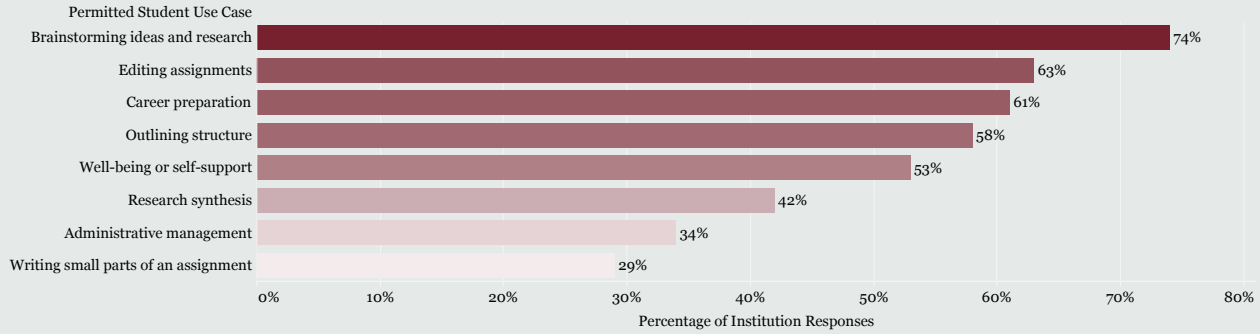
The coexistence of encouraged AI use (55%) and the deployment of AI-detection tools (39%) reflects an institutional landscape lacking clear policy frameworks. The data points to a contradiction: AI is encouraged in some contexts while monitored and penalized in others.

Permitted Student AI Use Cases

The surveyed institutions are broadly permissive about AI uses that scaffold student effort and more cautious about uses that replace student effort entirely.

Figure 2.14

Prevalence of Institution-Permitted Student AI Use Cases Reported by Surveyed Institutions



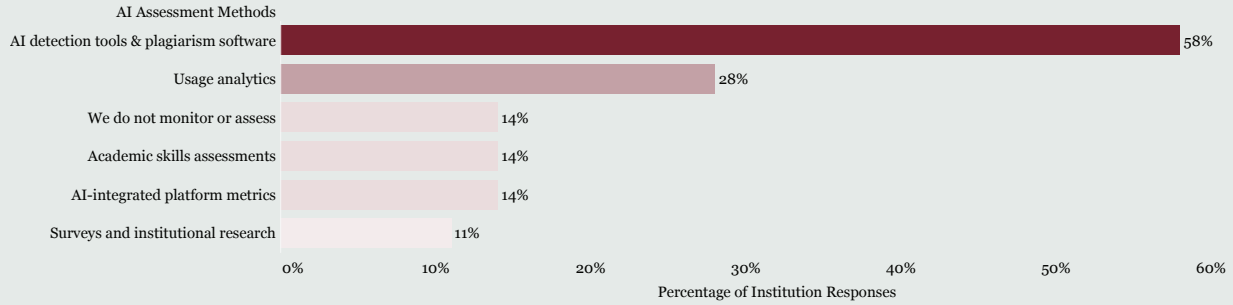
Almost three-fourths (74%) of institution respondents reported that their students were permitted to use AI for brainstorming ideas and research, with editing (63%) and career preparation (61%) following closely behind. On the opposite side of this is student AI use for writing sections of their assignments at 29%, even if only for small parts. This is a coherent and pedagogically defensible position: AI as a cognitive prosthetic that extends human capacity rather than substituting for it.

Measuring Student AI Use

Despite responsible student AI use (e.g., brainstorming ideas) being the most commonly reported by surveyed institutions, the ways student AI use is assessed still display a need for change on the administrative side.

Figure 2.15

Top Reported Means of Measuring Student AI Use by Surveyed Institutions



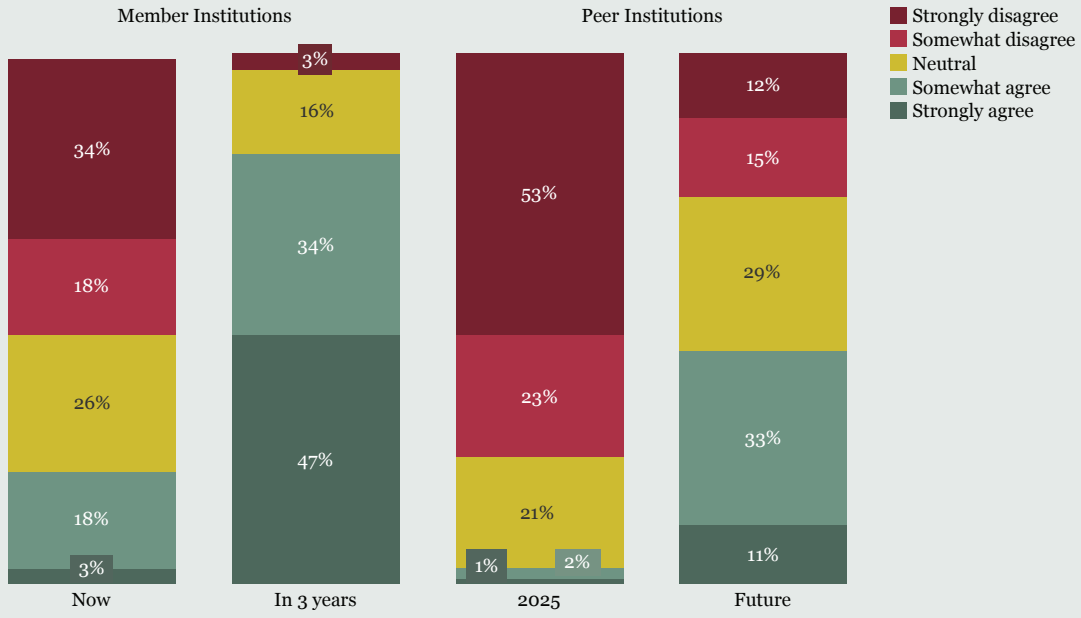
AI detection tools & plagiarism software were the most common means by which institutional leaders reported knowing about students' AI use (58% of institutions) followed by usage analytics (28%). Notably, 14% of institutions reported no monitoring or assessment. AI-integrated platform metrics (14%), academic skills assessments (14%), and surveys and institutional research (11%) were the least common means. Existing surveyed policies and perspectives show that a willingness to trust students to responsibly use AI is already present at some of these institutions. In order to foster this trust and skill in their students, institutions must adopt more communicative means of measuring student AI literacy.

Measuring AI Literacy as a Student Success Outcome

One of the most dramatic findings in this survey involved the commitment of surveyed institutions to future student outcomes around AI.

Figure 2.16

Current and Projected Agreement That AI Literacy is a Measured Student Learning Outcome of Surveyed Institutions Against National Peer Institutions Benchmark



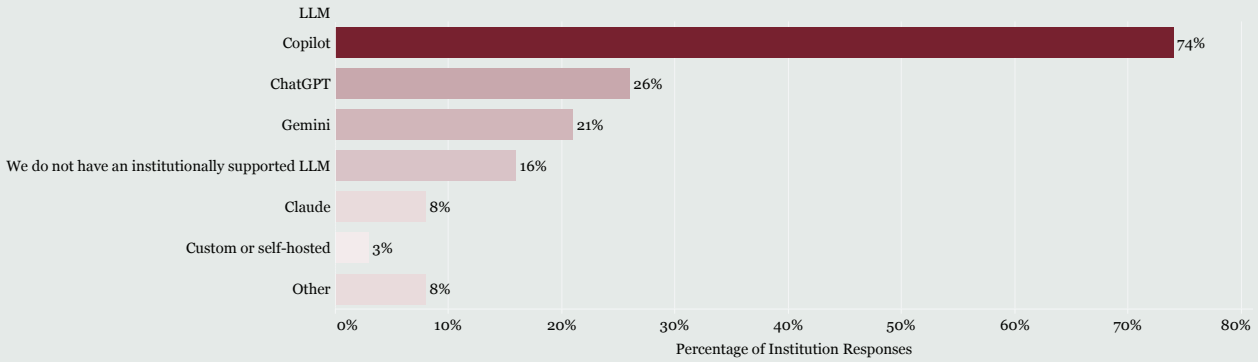
This data again highlights the progressive approach and strong intention of the surveyed HBCU leaders in integrating AI into their student curricula. The surveyed institutions show some existing practice of measuring AI literacy as a student outcome with 21% of respondents' combined agreement (i.e., "Strongly agree" and "Somewhat agree") with the statement "ability to use AI tools is [currently] a measured student success outcome." More striking, however, is an overwhelming commitment to advancing this work, with 81% of respondents indicating that they expect AI to be measured as a student outcome within the next three years. This fits alongside the trend shown in the national benchmark of peer institutions at 3% combined agreement in 2025 and future combined agreement of 44%. This demonstrates the widely recognized need for these institutions to prepare their students for the rapidly growing need for AI literacy. However, the large gap between current AI literacy measurement and intention of measurement at these schools creates urgency. In 36 months, the majority of these schools must build the curriculum, faculty capacity, and institutional infrastructure to meet their goals. Immediate action and support are vital.

Approved Large Language Models (LLMs)

The data reveals both consideration of large language models (LLMs) on these campuses and the potential for growth.

Figure 2.17

Prevalence of Institutionally Approved LLMs Across Surveyed Institutions



While the high percentage of institutions having an approved LLM is promising, the remaining 16% may pose some security risk. Not having an institutionally approved LLM does not necessarily mean that LLMs are not being used; there is also the possibility that LLM usage on both student and faculty levels is happening without the data protection, usage oversight, consistent access, and FERPA-compliant data handling framework that licensing provides. When a student uses a personal AI account to draft an appeal for financial aid reinstatement, the AI service may store, analyze, and train on that communication. When a faculty member uploads course materials to a free AI tool, including student work, those materials fall outside of the institution's control. This raises concerns about data privacy, security, and institutional oversight.

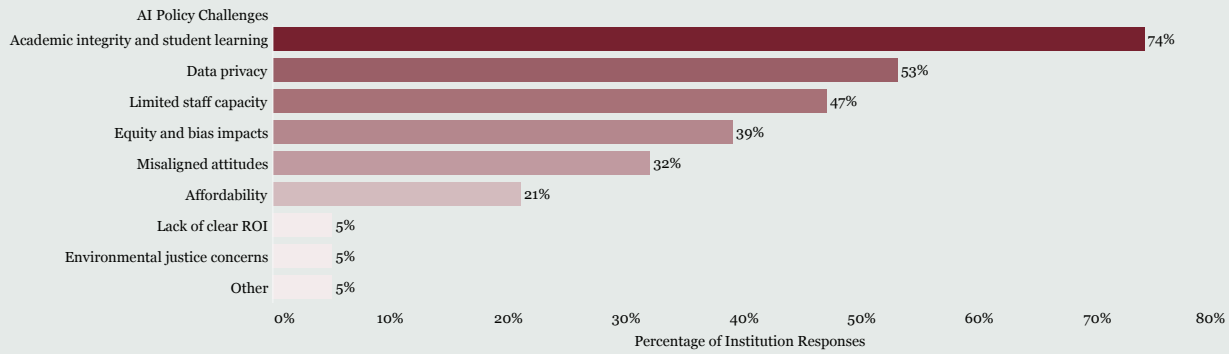
Closing the 16% infrastructure gap is among the most urgent and achievable near-term priorities. It does not require years of implementation. It requires enterprise licensing decisions and the resources to support them.

Concerns Driving Policy Decisions

When the surveyed HBCU leaders reported which concerns were most actively shaping their AI decision-making, the results provide a clear picture of what is at stake.

Figure 2.18

Top Concerns Driving AI Policy Decision-Making Reported by Surveyed Institutions



Academic integrity (74%), data privacy (53%), and limited staff capacity (47%) were the three most prevalent concerns of the surveyed leaders when creating AI policy. The strong concern of academic integrity and student learning is both understandable given the potential unethical uses of AI. This is an interesting finding, especially given the simultaneous high reporting and institutional allowance of AI use as supplementary thinking aids for students. The data indicates that these leaders are aware of both the benefits and risks of AI in academic settings and are managing their campuses accordingly. Similar understanding could be extended to explain the strong concern about data privacy. The concern over limited staff capacity, however, draws attention to a different issue on these campuses. This reflects a structural constraint rather than a lack of commitment to innovation. Policy development requires human capital: people to research, draft, consult, revise, communicate, and implement. For institutions already stretched thin, finding that capacity from existing resources is extraordinarily difficult.

HBCUs' adoption of AI policy infrastructure protects students, enables faculty, and signals to funders and employers that the institution is AI-ready. Building policy now is not a distraction from the real work; it is the real work.

SECTION 3

Institutional Pathways for AI Development

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) activity is now evident across Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), its institutional significance varies in form and maturity. The key question is how this activity moves from early engagement to more coordinated and sustained institutional practice. To understand the path forward, we must distinguish between four concepts: Use, Utility, Adoption, and Development.

Use: The application of AI tools by students, faculty, and staff to complete tasks such as writing, analysis, instruction, or administrative work. This represents the current state of AI engagement across HBCUs.

Utility: The institutional capacity of AI to generate measurable, system-wide value beyond individual tasks, supported by infrastructure, governance, and policy alignment.

Adoption: The extent to which AI use is consistently integrated into institutional workflows through both formal systems and the efforts of individual AI champions. While visible and impactful, this stage remains uneven and dependent on individual advocates rather than institutional structures.

Development: The intentional integration of AI literacy into curriculum, faculty development, and student learning outcomes, resulting in sustained institutional capability and long-term alignment with AI-enabled teaching, learning, and operations.

Where are HBCUs in this progression? The data shows that these institutions have mastered Use and are demonstrating Adoption. Now, HBCUs are positioned to move from Adoption to Development and from individual Use to institution-wide Utility. Moving toward Development strengthens institutional capacity by embedding AI literacy into curriculum, faculty practice, and student learning outcomes. Advancing toward Utility ensures that AI use is coordinated, measurable, and aligned with institutional goals rather than occurring in isolated pockets.

Together, these shifts move AI from individual practice to sustained institutional capability, making AI a staple in HBCU learning models, strategic planning, and day-to-day institutional operations, and positioning it as a consistent value-add to teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness. This also enhances institutional competitiveness by driving technological innovation, increasing readiness for future investments, and strengthening the pipeline for workforce development aligned with emerging AI-enabled industries.

However, three structural gaps stand in the way. See the table below:

Table 3.1:

Identified Structural Gaps in HBCU AI Advancement

Gap	The Data	The Consequence
Infrastructure Gap	16% of institutions lack an approved AI tool	Students at these campuses navigate the AI era without data protection, oversight, or consistent access.
Policy & Governance Gap	71% lack an institution-wide student AI policy	Mixed signals create confusion and vulnerability. Institutions encourage AI use in one context and penalize it in another.
AI Literacy Pipeline Gap	Only 21% measure AI literacy as a student outcome today — yet 81% expect to do so within three years	The curriculum, faculty capacity, and assessment infrastructure to deliver on that commitment do not yet exist at scale.

The identified structural gaps are not signs of inability. Rather, they emerge when institutional change outpaces the systems needed to support that change. Fortunately, these gaps can be addressed through targeted investment and coordinated support.

The cost of inaction is not neutral. According to SHRM (2026) and Department of Labor (2026) guidance created this year, AI fluency is rapidly becoming a baseline expectation for competitive employment. Students who graduate without AI literacy will enter a job market where they are already behind. For HBCUs — which produce 40% of Black engineers, 50% of Black lawyers, and 70% of Black doctors and dentists — this is not an abstract equity concern (Leadership Brainery, 2025). It is a workforce development crisis and a national security vulnerability. We cannot credibly claim to be winning the global AI race while leaving America's HBCUs behind in it.

SECTION 4

Recommendations: From Insight to Action

The following recommendations are the core deliverable of this report. Each is grounded in survey data, sized to the actual gap it addresses, and structured to name specific actors and specific actions. They are designed to move Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) from quiet, champion-driven momentum to scaled, institution-wide AI readiness.

Recommendation 1

Make AI a Presidential Priority at Every HBCU

Rationale: AI adoption is driven by champions, not strategy. Until AI appears on the president's agenda, the board's work plan, and the institution's strategic plan, with named accountability and dedicated resources, fragmentation will continue. Addressing this not only would advance AI adoption for the betterment of institutions but would also aid in aligning HBCU leaders with national resources and directions, a necessary pillar for addressing the historical HBCU leadership instability highlighted in *Stewarding the Legacy* (Gallot et al., 2026).

Actions:

- **HBCU Presidents:** Every HBCU president designates an AI Strategy Lead (CIO, VP-level, or appointed senior administrator) within 12 months responsible for coordinating institutional AI policy, training, and use case development across academic, administrative, and student success functions.
- **HBCU Boards:** Boards of trustees add AI strategy as a standing agenda item and annually review the institution's AI readiness posture, investment levels, and policy compliance.
- **TMCF Payne Center:** The Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center develops an AI Leadership Playbook for HBCU presidents, a step-by-step guide from AI readiness assessment through full implementation, including budget templates, vendor evaluation frameworks, and HBCU early adopter case studies.

- **Philanthropy:** Philanthropy funds a two-year to three-year cohort of HBCU AI Leaders, 10 to 25 institutions each receiving a planning grant and peer cohort membership, with structured convenings, shared learning, and a public-facing outcomes report.

Recommendation 2
Close the Infrastructure Gap Through Dedicated Investment

Rationale: 27% of surveyed institutions cite infrastructure and data readiness as a top barrier and 16% lack even a basic institutionally approved LLM. Without reliable access to tools, all other AI strategies are theoretical.

Actions:

- **AI Providers:** AWS, Google Cloud, and Microsoft Azure establish dedicated HBCU cloud credit packages — minimum $100,000 per institution per year, structured as multi-year grants with HBCU-specific technical onboarding and support.

- **Tech Companies:** Microsoft, Google, and OpenAI expand enterprise LLM licensing programs specifically targeting the 16% of HBCUs with no institutionally approved LLM, prioritizing FERPA-compliant pricing structures accessible to smaller institutions.

- **Federal Government:** Congress increases Title III, Part B appropriations by $50 million with explicit statutory language permitting AI infrastructure investment, including hardware, cloud services, software licensing, and staff capacity.

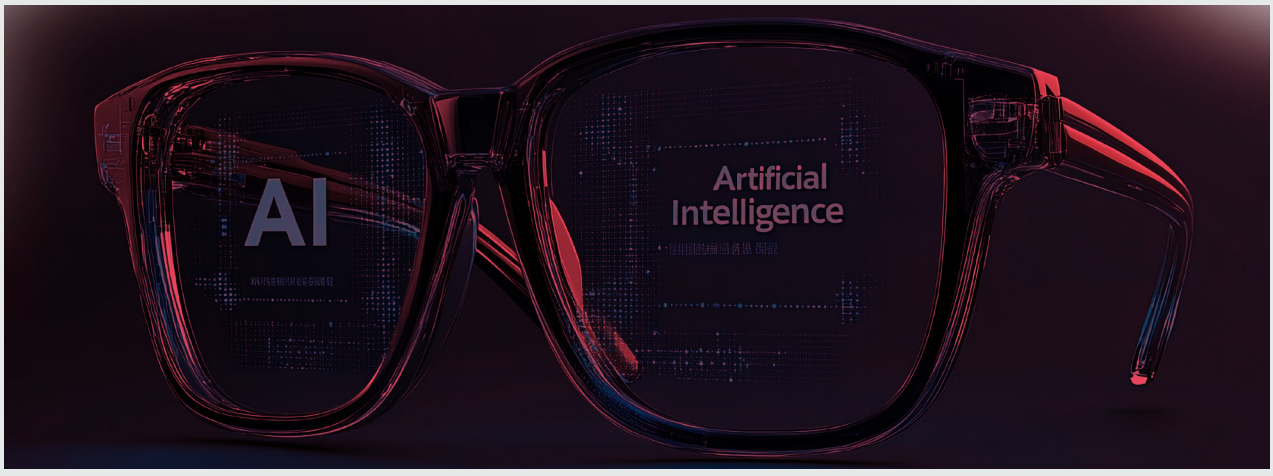
- **Philanthropy:** A philanthropic HBCU AI Infrastructure Fund — pooling a minimum of $50 million from leading foundations such as Gates Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and comparable funders — provides direct hardware, bandwidth, and software grants to institutions with the highest documented infrastructure gaps.

Recommendation 3
Build the AI Literacy Pipeline Urgently

Rationale: The projected jump from 21% to 81% of institutions measuring AI literacy as a student learning outcome within three years is the most urgent data point in this survey. The curriculum, faculty training, and assessment infrastructure to deliver on that commitment must be built in the next 12–24 months.

Actions:

- **HBCU Administrators:** Every HBCU launches an AI literacy baseline assessment for incoming students within 18 months, establishing a starting point from which to measure growth.
- **HBCU Faculty:** Faculty AI professional development becomes a required component of annual review cycles with institutions providing a minimum of 20 hours per year of supported AI professional learning per faculty member with stipend support and institutional release time.
- **TMCF:** Payne Center publishes an HBCU AI Literacy Curriculum Framework, adaptable templates for one-credit AI literacy modules that work across disciplines. Students in nursing, education, business, and social work need AI literacy as urgently as students in STEM.
- **Tech Companies:** Tech companies fund HBCU faculty AI residencies — semester-long embedded programs at Google, Microsoft, IBM, or comparable companies, specifically designed for HBCU faculty.



Recommendation 4

Replace Detection with Development and Reform AI Policy

Rationale: 71% of surveyed institutions lack an institution-wide student AI policy, and the dominant monitoring approach is punitive detection (58%). Policy must shift from surveillance to support.

Actions:

- **TMCF Payne Center:** The Payne Center publishes a model HBCU AI policy template covering student and faculty use, data privacy, academic integrity, and responsible AI principles, available for free download and adaptation to HBCU missions and student populations.

- **HBCU Leaders:** Every HBCU completes institution-wide student and faculty AI policies within 18 months, with the Payne Center and Tyton Partners providing technical assistance, peer review, and model language.

- **HBCU Faculty:** Assessment frameworks shift from detection-first to competency-first — institutions begin the transition toward AI literacy portfolios, reflective documentation of AI use, and authentic assessments that require demonstrated understanding rather than the absence of AI use.

Recommendation 5

Activate the Full Ecosystem of Support

Rationale: With 91% of HBCU leaders expressing likelihood or openness to AI support partnerships from the Payne Research Center, the demand for coordinated external engagement is documented and strong. No single institution can close the AI readiness gap alone.

Actions:

- **TMCF:** Payne Center becomes the national coordination hub for HBCU AI readiness — maintaining a live HBCU AI Readiness Dashboard updated annually, an open resource library of policy templates and curriculum frameworks, and a curated directory of funding and tech partner programs. The Payne Center will build this out as the "HBCU AI Hub," a digital resource center featuring all tools and templates described in this report.

- **Nonprofit/Advocacy Ecosystem:** The Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF), the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), and HBCU advocacy organizations co-host an annual National HBCU AI Summit — bringing together institutional leaders, technology company partners, federal agency representatives, and philanthropic funders in a structured convening that produces specific commitments.

- **Federal Government:** Federal agencies designate dedicated HBCU AI liaison officers responsible for proactive outreach to HBCU research offices, grant readiness support, and navigation of federal AI programs.

- **Tech Companies:** Technology companies create HBCU-specific AI partnership tiers tailored to institutional capacity. Three areas of support — AI literacy training (81%), funding and partner identification (69%), and policy templates (69%) — were named as the most valuable by respondents and should drive partnership design.

SECTION 5

A 2030 Vision

The data produced by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) provides a critical lens through which we must evaluate the current trajectory of our member institutions. The insights gleaned from this survey reveal a profound shift in the higher education landscape.

The realization of an AI future requires more than incremental progress; it demands a structural transformation that aligns institutional readiness with national necessity. The relationship between the nation and its Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is fundamentally reciprocal. As noted throughout this report, an investment in the AI strategy for these institutions is a direct investment in the long-term stability and security of the nation. This turn toward AI and the subsequent AI evolution is not merely an internal academic goal but a vital contribution to the American dividend.

If we act on the recommendations with urgency, investment, and coordination across member institutions, the landscape of HBCU AI readiness in 2030 will look meaningfully different from today. The following outlines what becomes possible when these actions are fully realized, moving from current conditions to a more mature and aligned HBCU AI ecosystem. Within the decade, we need:

- **Stronger Leadership and Governance:** Every public HBCU has a named AI Strategy Lead and a formal, institution-wide AI policy covering student use, faculty use, data governance, academic integrity, and responsible AI principles. AI is a standing item on every board of trustees' agenda.

- **Better AI Literacy Outcomes:** 80% or more of HBCU students graduate with verified, credentialed AI literacy competencies — skills that are named on transcripts, visible to employers, and recognized by graduate and professional programs.

- **Developed AI Infrastructure and Access:** Every public HBCU has access to institutional-grade AI tools. Students are supported in navigating the AI era through institutional guidance, oversight, and privacy protections. The 16% infrastructure gap is closed.

- **Increased Workforce Representation:** HBCU graduates are represented in AI-related careers — the deliberate outcome of a national investment in AI education, workforce development, and pipeline cultivation at institutions that have historically graduated a disproportionate share of Black professionals.

- **National Thought Leadership:** The TMCF Payne Center operates as the recognized national hub for HBCU AI readiness — running an annual survey that tracks progress, publishing model policy and curriculum frameworks, and serving as the coordination point for technology companies, federal agencies, and philanthropic engagement.

- **Established National Model for AI Education:** Federal agencies routinely cite HBCU AI programs as national models for equity-centered AI education — not as outliers or special cases, but as leading examples of how AI can be deployed in service of institutional mission, student success, and community development.

If accomplished, institutional infrastructure gaps have an opportunity to close, institution-wide policies have a chance to be reshaped and become more impactful, and AI literacy efforts can evolve into sustained, measurable outcomes that strengthen both workforce readiness and institutional capacity. This 2030 vision positions HBCU AI programs as the primary national models for advanced higher education. Federal agencies will no longer view these institutions as outliers, but as leaders in demonstrating how AI can be deployed in service of community development and institutional mission.

The strategic positioning of HBCUs, institutions that have historically anchored American progress, becomes a primary lever for ensuring that the next era of U.S. innovation is competitive and groundbreaking. The institutions that shaped the minds who argued Brown v. Board of Education, the mathematicians who powered the Apollo missions, and the healthcare leaders who have sustained underserved communities for a century are the same institutions that will safeguard America's technological future.

As we celebrate our nation's semiquincentennial, we must recognize that the country cannot credibly claim to lead the global AI race while its most consistent engines of social and economic mobility remain fragmented. Providing the investment to match this moment is a prerequisite for continued American excellence.

Methodology

The findings presented in this report are drawn from original institutional survey data collected by the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center in collaboration with Tyton Partners. The survey generated 38 responses representing 32 unique Thurgood Marshall College Fund (TMCF) member institutions with the majority being public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), making this the largest and most comprehensive data collection to date on AI readiness across public HBCUs. Survey findings are benchmarked against longitudinal national data from Tyton Partners' *Time for Class* (2025) and *Driving Toward a Degree* (2025) studies.

Data were collected between January and April 2026 through a voluntary, electronically distributed institutional survey administered to higher education leaders across participating institutions.

Institution types in this sample include public HBCUs (72% of sample), Historically Black Community and Technical Colleges (13%), private HBCUs (9%), and Predominantly Black Institutions (6%). The sample includes institutions ranging from under 2,500 students to 10,000 – 19,999 students. Respondents represent institutions with shared decision-making authority (63%), advisory input (21%), respondents acting on behalf of a decision-maker (11%), and final decision authority (5%).

Participation in the survey was voluntary, and responses reflect institutions that chose to participate. As a result, findings may not fully generalize to all HBCUs. Institutions with higher levels of AI engagement may have been more likely to respond, which could modestly overstate adoption rates across the broader public HBCU landscape. Nevertheless, the directional findings remain consistent and robust, indicating strong AI engagement across HBCUs, accelerating adoption, and structural, not motivational, barriers related to policy development, infrastructure, and resourcing.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Historically Black Colleges and Universities:
Alabama A&M University | Albany State University | Alcorn State University | Central State University | Delaware State University | Florida A&M University | Hampton University | Howard University | Jackson State University | Kentucky State University | Lincoln University of Pennsylvania | Mississippi Valley State University | Morgan State University | Norfolk State University | North Carolina A&T State University | North Carolina Central University | Prairie View A&M University | Savannah State University | South Carolina State University | Southern University and A&M College | Tennessee State University | Texas Southern University | Tuskegee University | University of Maryland Eastern Shore | Virginia State University | Winston-Salem State University

Historically Black Community and Technical Colleges:
Drake State Community & Technical College | Hinds Community College at Utica | Trenholm State Community College | Denmark Technical College

Predominantly Black Institutions:
Chicago State University | York College

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF KEY AI TERMS

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Computer systems designed to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence — understanding language, recognizing images, making decisions, and generating creative content.

AI Detection Tools: Software programs designed to identify whether content was generated by an AI system rather than a human. These tools are currently highly unreliable and frequently produce false positives, particularly for non-native English speakers.

AI Hallucination: The tendency of LLMs to generate information that sounds confident and credible but is factually incorrect or entirely fabricated. This is one of the most important limitations for users to understand.

AI Literacy: The knowledge and skills needed to understand, evaluate, and effectively use AI tools — and to think critically about their implications. An AI-literate person knows what AI can and cannot do reliably, how to use it responsibly, how to evaluate its outputs, and how to ask good questions about AI systems.

AI Policy / AI Governance: Formal documents and structures that guide how AI tools are used within an institution's community. A good AI policy addresses who can use AI tools and for what purposes, what data can be shared, what disclosures are required, and how violations will be handled.

FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act): The primary federal law governing student data privacy in higher education. It restricts the disclosure of student education records without consent. AI tool deployment must be FERPA-compliant.

Generative AI: AI systems that can create new content — text, images, audio, video, code — based on user instructions. Examples include ChatGPT, Claude, and Google Gemini.

GPU (Graphics Processing Unit): A specialized computer chip originally designed for graphics that is now the preferred hardware for training and running AI models.

Large Language Model (LLM): A type of AI system trained on enormous quantities of text to understand and generate human language. LLMs are the technology underlying most generative AI text tools.

Prompt Engineering: The practice of crafting effective instructions ("prompts") to get high-quality, useful outputs from AI language models.

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Contact Us

Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center
Thurgood Marshall College Fund

Mailing Address:
901 F Street, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004

Phone: 202.507.4851
Fax: 202.652.2934
Email: paynecenter@tmcf.org
www.tmcfpayne.org


DR. N. JOYCE
PAYNE
RESEARCH CENTER
Tyton
PARTNERS