

The AI Readiness Guide for *Higher Ed*

A three-step assessment tool for AI adoption at colleges and universities.



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Introduction

Institutions of higher education aren't asking if they'll use **artificial intelligence**. They're asking how — and what — and when.

At the same time, they're questioning their schools' ability to adopt such cutting-edge technology. Where will the expertise come from? Who will get everyone on board? Will employees fear for their jobs?

These are some of the most basic questions they'll need answered in order to effectively assess the organization's ability to adopt AI.

In this guide you will find a simple, three-step assessment tool to help measure your AI-readiness.

Whether your institution recruits and serves hundreds or thousands of learners, this **guide will help you:**

-  **Understand what it means to be AI ready**
-  **Assess your AI readiness using a simple, yet powerful three-step process**
-  **Ask the right questions to evaluate your readiness**
-  **Identify strategic areas to improve readiness**

Before we dive into the framework, a few words about readiness more generally. Readiness isn't an either/or.

Most of us — as individuals, and as groups — are never completely ready for a new endeavor.

Instead, we prepare as best we can and enter with a growth mindset that we will learn and iterate as we work towards a goal.



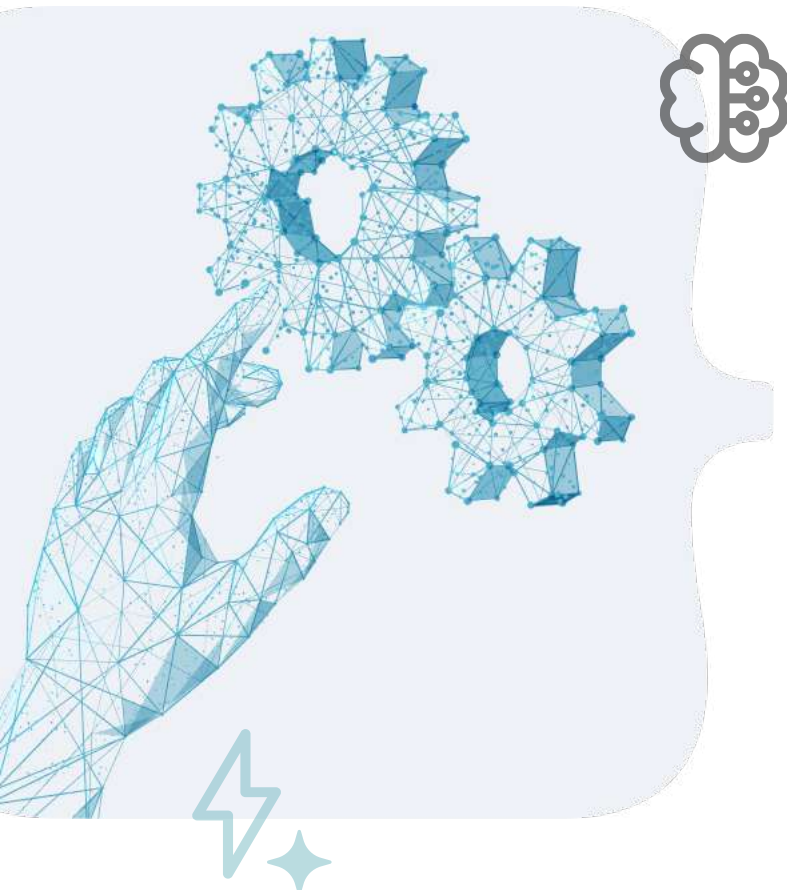
Part 1: AI Readiness

What is AI Readiness?

You can think of **AI readiness** in a couple of ways at both the individual and organizational level:

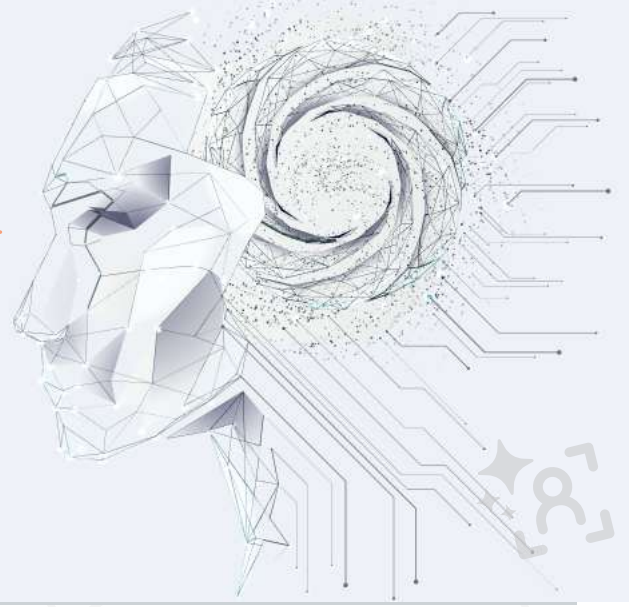
- AI literacy:** A broad understanding of how AI works and knowledge of its existing and potential applications.
- AI practicality:** The ability to implement a valuable AI project to take advantage of new opportunities and solve business challenges.

First, let's explore AI literacy and how it influences the adoption of AI.



Part 1: AI Readiness

AI Literacy



In “*Empowering educators to be AI-ready*,” researchers from the UK write:

“AI Readiness is about helping people understand enough about AI to make good decisions about procuring and using AI to meet their particular needs.”

At Element451 we describe this type of readiness as AI literacy. It’s the ability to engage in AI topics with the discernment that comes from general understanding. Proficiency isn’t required.

As the authors explain:

“We do not need the overwhelming majority of people involved within education to know how to build an AI system, rather, we need them to know how AI could be used to enhance and augment their human teaching expertise.”

AI literacy isn’t just for educators. It is required institution-wide, at every level and every department, because AI is impacting every function of higher education — from serving prospective students as they navigate the admissions process to supporting learning needs as students complete their degrees.

AI literacy is critical to successful adoption because it empowers schools to have productive conversations and make informed decisions about AI adoption. Instead of coming from a perspective of fear or doubt, with literacy, people can more thoughtfully evaluate the benefits of using AI.

As detailed in our first edition of the [*Definitive Guide to AI in Higher Education*](#), there are immediate steps institutional leaders can take to help cultivate AI literacy in their teams.

1

Encourage employees to explore free generative AI tools. Ask your department leads to let their staff play around with tools like ChatGPT and Bard as part of their workweek.

Be clear that there are no expectations or rigid goals. They can try to complete aspects of their regular jobs with AI assistance or do more generic activities.

The point is to build confidence and awareness.

2

Empower managers and employees to attend online AI workshops and training. Again, this doesn't need to be a formal process with strict guidelines.

Simply let your teams find low-commitment opportunities to learn how to use AI. LinkedIn, for example, has introductory courses in practical areas, like prompt engineering.

Marketing, admissions, and enrollment, in particular, are great matches for generative AI techniques.

The most important measure of AI literacy is just understanding the terminology. Terms like Generative AI and Predictive AI. They are very different things, but equally powerful. For instance, an example of using Predictive AI in admissions and enrollment, is answering the question - is this person going to enroll, yes or no?

When we talk about Generative AI, its understanding the rise of prompt engineering - a skill that as a practitioner, as somebody who is going to be writing emails to students, building landing pages and marketing campaigns - you really need to be good at.

These are just two of many examples of how understanding technical details isn't required for literacy, but the ability to understand terminology and spot where AI might be useful in solving challenges in higher ed is a key component of AI literacy.



Part 1: AI Readiness

AI *Practicality*



As your organization's AI literacy ramps up, you'll need to prepare for the practical demands of implementing AI. They include technology, data, roles and responsibilities, project management, expectation setting, and measurement, just to name a few.

It's daunting to consider aligning all the moving parts involved in adopting AI at an organizational-wide level. That's why many schools identify smaller-scale AI projects to accelerate their AI journeys and minimize risk.

One immediate step, as detailed in our first edition of the *Definitive Guide to AI in Higher Education*, is to pick a small project



Projects could be at a school-wide or department level. Find something to get teams to collaborate on. *Harvard Business Review* offers a helpful matrix for deciding what projects make sense for your organization

One way to shortlist *AI pilot projects* is to prioritize those that:

1

Demonstrate business value in a reasonable amount of time. You're not going to fill budget gaps with a pilot project but you can validate AI's positive financial impact.

2

Involve a manageable amount of resources. You'll want to learn how well your infrastructure and people are set up to collaborate on novel projects. Observing how IT, for example, and student services work together will surface shortcomings and strengths without having to involve the entire school community.

The following **AI projects** fit the above criteria for many institutions of higher ed:



Launching a personalized, auto-generated text campaign to accepted students to test yield rate improvements



Giving new students a natural language chatbot advisor to explore if it helps academic engagement and performance



Intelligently automating the application review processes to fast-track acceptance offers and deposits

Small steps like these will help you build a culture of AI for the eventual investments you'll make in products and services.

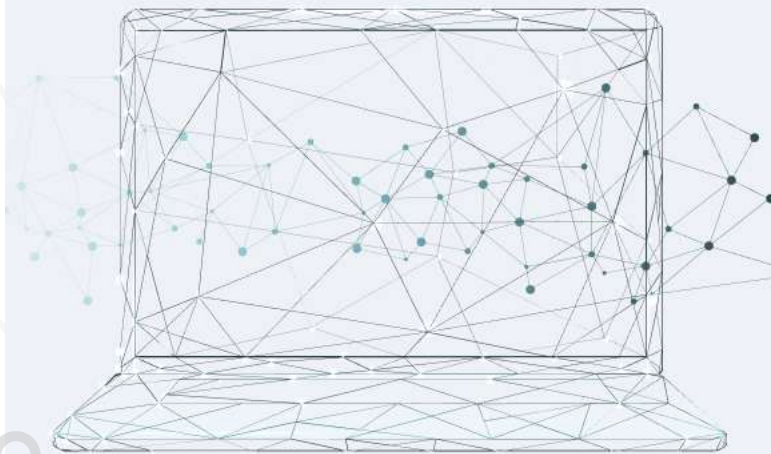
Most importantly, you'll need to evaluate whether your institution is ready to pilot AI projects. Our simple, three-step readiness assessment model is intended to provide a framework for understanding your institution's adoption readiness.

Choosing an AI Project



Part 2: Three Step Assessment Model

The Three Steps of *AI Readiness*: A Self-Assessment Mode



Most organizations fall into one of these categories in terms of *AI adoption*.

-  First timers
-  Scalers
-  Innovators

While this AI readiness model is applicable to all phases of an institution's AI journey, the guide is intended for higher ed organizations that are using AI for the first time in an intentional way.

So, for example, your employees might use ChatGPT, a popular generative AI technology, to jumpstart communication or event planning, but departments aren't yet using behavioral data to generate individually tailored enrollment campaigns.

Or, your school may have a chat feature on its website for students to ask questions, but human advisors do the majority of replying.

To progress to the next stage of your AI journey you need to have the right elements in place across skills, resources, infrastructure, and technology.

Three-Step *AI Readiness* Assessment Model:

1

Foundational: Do you have the appropriate infrastructure and software for non-technical employees and students to engage with AI?

2

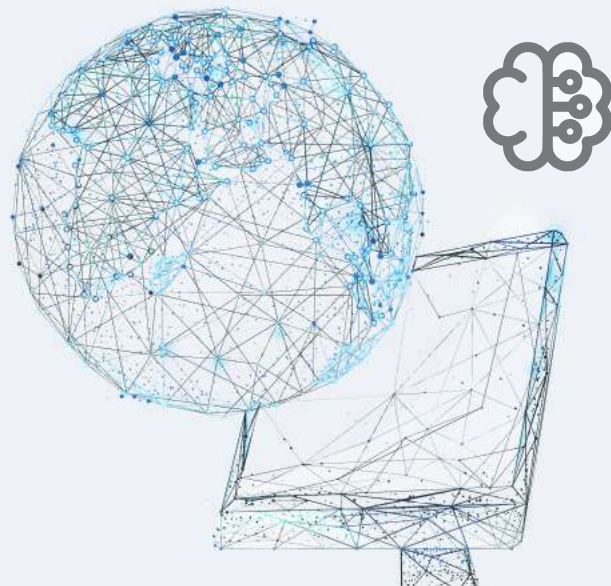
Operational: Is there suitable management and governance to sustain AI initiatives?

3

Transformational: Are you able to maximize the value your school gets from AI?

Part 2: Three Step Assessment Model

Foundational Readiness



Foundational readiness refers to the structures and resources you have in place (or need to obtain) to launch AI projects and programs. They mostly involve technology.

Use these questions to assess your *foundational readiness*:

Y/N

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------|
| ✦ Do we have access to the student data sources available? For example, student engagement data, class attendance, usage of academic support? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Is your data clean and reliable? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Is the data captured on a regular basis? In real-time, quarterly, etc. | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Is the data accessible and visible to the people who need to use it? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do we have the necessary computing capacity with our cloud providers? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do systems share data easily? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do our AI tools integrate with current databases and software systems? (For the purposes of the assessment, mark this as No if you do not have AI tools deployed). | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Are our AI tools user-friendly for non-IT people? (For the purposes of the assessment, mark this as No if you do not have AI tools deployed). | ☐ | _____ |

Notes

Part 2: Three Step Assessment Model

Operational Readiness

You can have the right technology and systems in place, but you won't achieve success without governance, facilitation, and skills to operationalize your AI ambitions.

When assessing your *operational readiness*, ask:

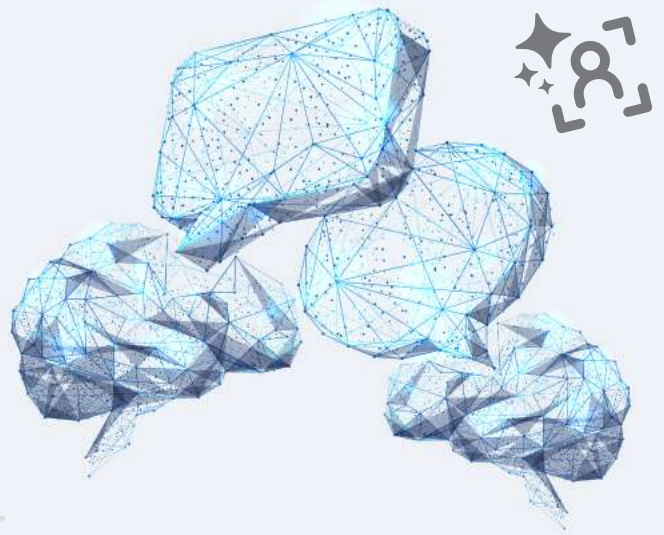
Y/N

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Do we as an organization share a vision for why we want to use AI? | ☐ |
| Have we considered the unintended consequences of using AI? For example, introducing bias or generating offensive content. | ☐ |
| Have we properly documented our vision and policies around AI? | ☐ |
| Have we consulted with the right stakeholders to develop our AI plans and policies? | ☐ |
| Are mechanisms in place to hold ourselves accountable if our AI causes harm? | ☐ |
| Does our way of working match the needs of innovative, AI-driven activities? | ☐ |
| Do we have the skills on our teams to deploy and manage AI? | ☐ |
| Do we have clear roles and expectations for those involved? | ☐ |
| Do we have a plan for skilling up as we grow our AI efforts? | ☐ |
| Are safeguards for cybersecurity and protecting personal information in place? | ☐ |

Notes

Part 2: Three Step Assessment Model

Transformational Readiness



The third step of AI readiness is understanding if your organization can maximize the value AI may create, whether that be in automating processes or delivering better student experiences.

Maximize in this context means reinvesting energy and resources into your AI successes so they substantially impact your institution for the better. It also means embracing the change in day-to-day operations that will result.

When evaluating your *transformational readiness*, ask:

Y/N

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-------|
| ✦ Has executive leadership made the case for AI as a driver for growth? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do decision makers see AI as a competitive advantage? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do employees and faculty see AI as an enhancement to their work rather than a threat? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Is the institution willing and prepared for restructuring departments or creating new ones? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Are there clear objectives for a proposed AI project and criteria for measuring its success? | ☐ | _____ |
| ✦ Do you have a plan for communicating success and failures to stakeholders so that AI continues to be funded and operationalized? | ☐ | _____ |

Notes

Are You *Ready*?

Out of 24 total questions, how many did you say *yes* to?



If you answered yes to 19 or more questions (> 75%), we consider you to be AI ready. Move forward with confidence.



If you answered yes to between 12 and 18 questions (50-75%), you are almost AI ready. There could be areas in which you need to revisit readiness levels in skills, resources, infrastructure, and technology.



If you answered yes to 11 or fewer questions (< 50%), you have room to improve. Take the time to thoroughly assess your gaps and start building more AI literacy across the organization.

Depending on your readiness level, you may have to spend more time in the literacy phase and repeat the assessment at a later date. Having a clear picture of where you are now is an opportunity to identify where you need to make up ground.

Whatever your score, Element451 can help you accelerate your AI readiness journey. We work with over 160 institutions, and in varying degrees, have helped them understand, adopt and gain rapid value from AI powered student engagement tools.



For a limited time, Element451 is offering a complimentary AI Readiness Workshop.

[Set up a session today](#)

[Set up a session today](#), and ask for [#AIWorkshop](#).