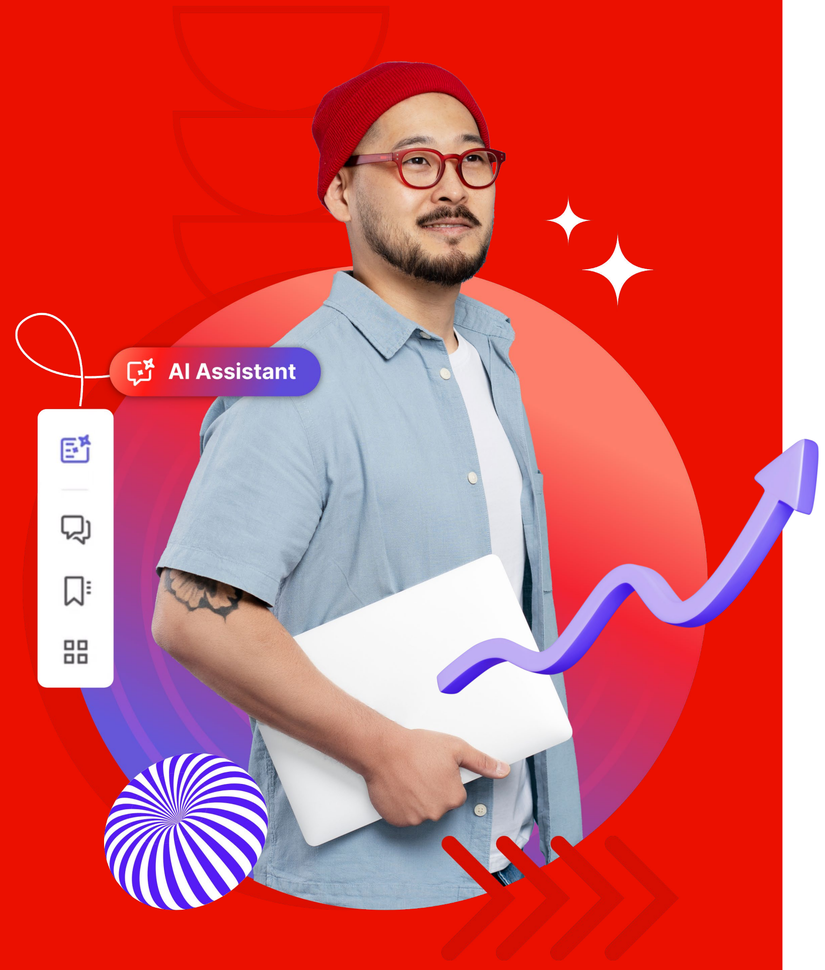
The Future of Reading, Studying, and Learning

How responsibly designed AI can support students and enrich learning in higher education



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1 Executive Summary

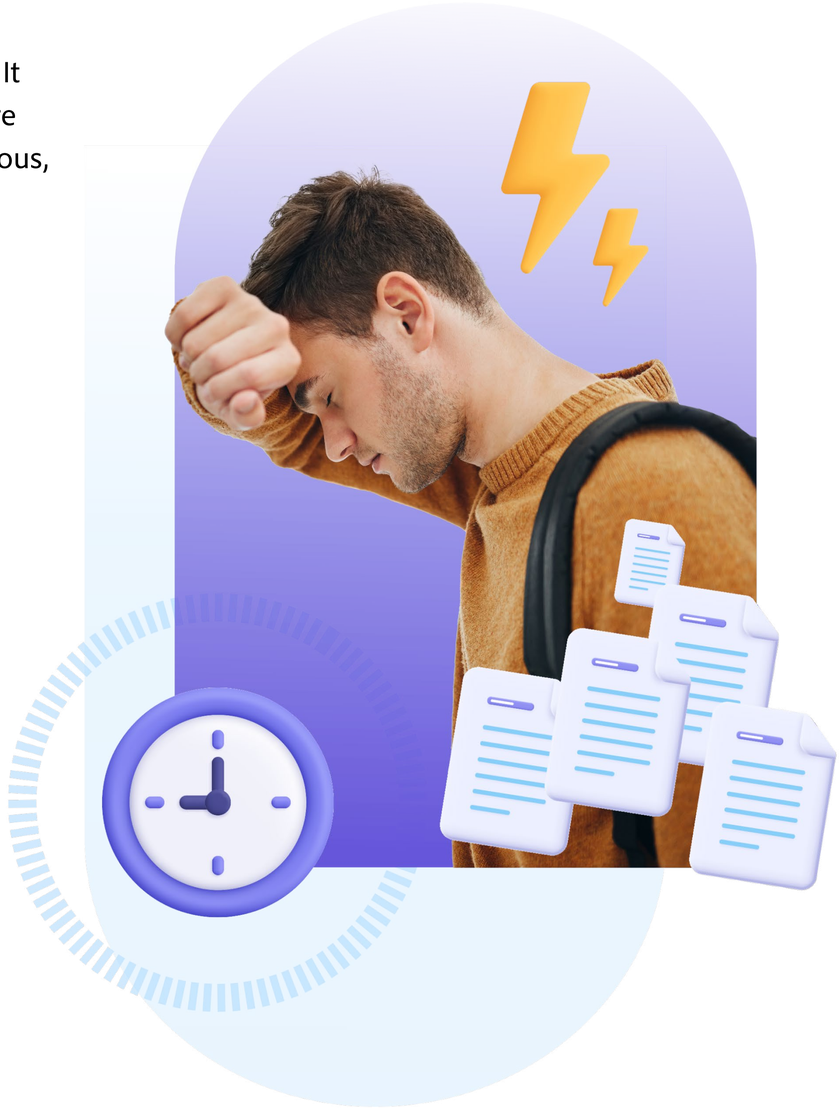
Higher education is at an inflection point. As colleges and universities grapple with persistent challenges—student disengagement, rising burnout, equity gaps, and growing demands for workforce-aligned skills—an unlikely tool has emerged to help turn these challenges into opportunities: generative artificial intelligence (AI).

Much of the public discourse around AI in education has focused on risk, particularly fears of academic dishonesty, over-reliance on automation, or a degradation of critical thinking. But a more complete picture is coming into view—one that positions generative AI not as a shortcut but as a scaffold: a means to deepen comprehension, improve study outcomes, and support the development of core academic skills like synthesis, analysis, and communication. When responsibly designed and transparently implemented, AI tools can transform how students learn—and how institutions deliver on their missions.

For today's students, the demands of college life extend far beyond attending lectures and taking exams. One of the most pressing challenges students face today is the significant time spent on tedious, repetitive, or administrative tasks required to engage with their course materials and prepare for assessments. Whether it's organizing notes, compiling readings, referencing syllabi, or navigating different platforms and file formats, these tasks often feel time-consuming and disconnected from actual learning and critical thinking.

Rather than build understanding of the subject matter, these tasks can fragment attention and reduce comprehension, making it difficult for students to form meaningful connections between ideas in ways that develop critical and creative thinking. Over time, this strain can contribute to academic burnout, lowering motivation, mental well-being, and academic performance.

This report examines how college students today are using generative AI to manage dense reading loads, organize study materials, prepare for exams, and overcome barriers to comprehension and retention. It also looks at how institutions are responding—where they provide guidance, where policies remain ambiguous, and where opportunities exist to lead with foresight rather than fear.



Key Findings

The findings from this report explore the critical role of responsibly designed AI tools in enhancing academic performance, deepening learning, and addressing widespread student burnout.

The findings are striking. More than six in ten students (61%) report that heavy reading contributes significantly to academic burnout, underscoring the cognitive demands of navigating dense and voluminous course materials. At the same time, 90% of students are already using generative AI for coursework, and those who use AI tools weekly are 17% less likely to experience debilitating academic stress compared to non-users.

Rather than replacing thinking, AI is a tool many students use to manage information overload so they can focus their energy toward analysis, synthesis, and application—precisely the skills that faculty and employers value most. Even as 80% of students express concerns about the accuracy of AI-generated content, their widespread adoption reflects a desire for more efficient, supportive, and trustworthy tools in the learning process. When implemented responsibly, AI has the potential not only to alleviate burnout but also to elevate student engagement and learning outcomes.

FIGURE 1.1

Key insights from our research

61%

of students report **heavy reading** as a major **burnout factor**.

90%

of students use **generative AI** for **coursework**.

80%

of students worry that **AI-generated content** may be misleading or **incorrect**.

77%

of students believe universities should offer **AI skills courses** to prepare them for the **workforce**.

79%

of four-year universities allow **AI for creating study materials**.

17%

of students **using AI weekly** are less likely to experience **academic stress** compared to non-users.

Research Methodology

To better understand how generative AI is reshaping the academic experience in higher education, Adobe commissioned a mixed-methods study in partnership with the strategic insight firm Journey Further.

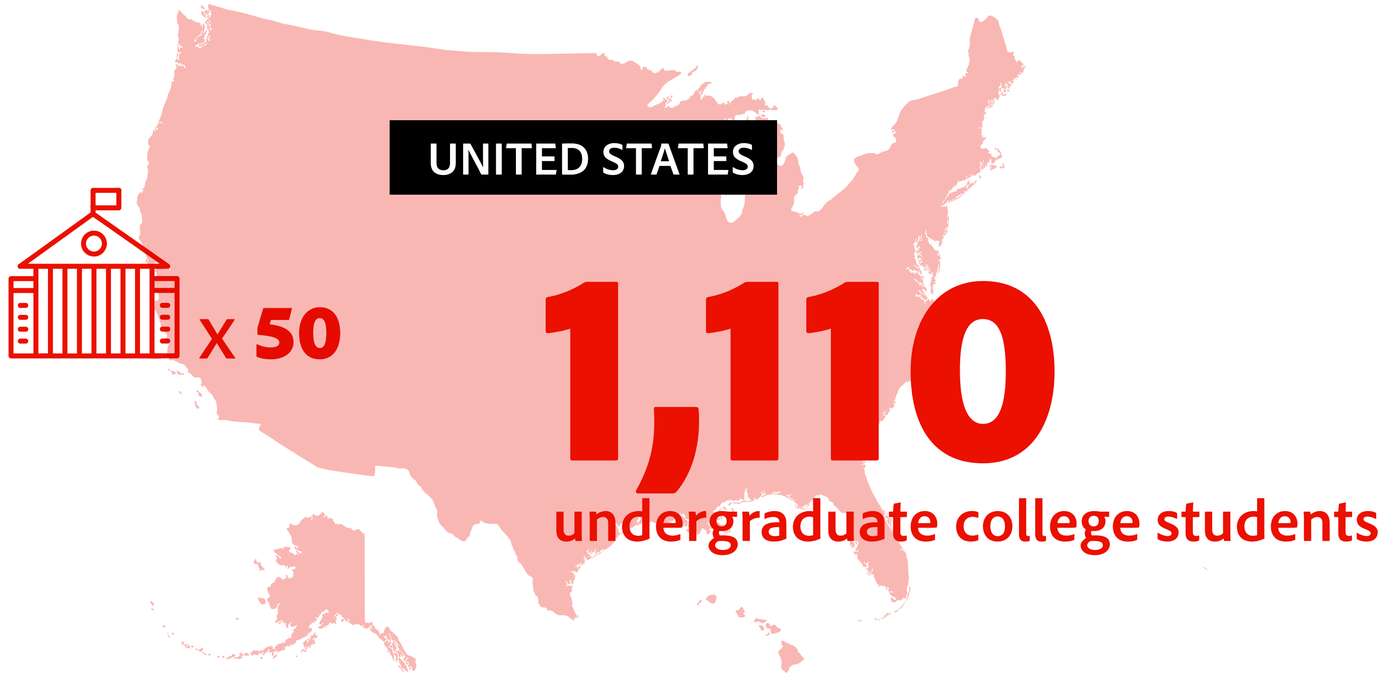
The research included both a national US survey of students and a policy review of US campuses' approaches to AI use. Together, these methods offer a dual lens: one grounded in the lived experience of students, and the other focused on the evolving frameworks that shape institutional policy and practice.

The student survey included responses from 1,110 undergraduate college students in the US, representing a cross-section of academic majors, institution types, and class years—from first-year students to seniors.

The survey explored how students interact with academic materials, prepare for assessments, and use AI tools to support learning. Conducted with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of ±3%, the data provide a reliable snapshot of student behavior and perception at a pivotal moment in the adoption of educational AI.

To complement these quantitative insights, researchers also conducted a detailed review of AI-related academic policies from 50 US colleges and universities. This included a representative mix of four-year public and private institutions as well as two-year community colleges. Institutional handbooks, codes of conduct, and AI-specific policy statements were analyzed to assess how institutions are responding to the growth of AI—from permitted use cases to defined consequences for misuse.

The result is a comprehensive picture of both student behavior and institutional preparedness, offering academic leaders actionable insight into the state of AI in higher education.



Institutional Insights

These insights arrive when higher education is under increasing pressure to deliver measurable outcomes. From improving retention to closing equity gaps and preparing students for a rapidly evolving job market, institutions are being asked to do more—and to do it with fewer resources.

Generative AI, when embedded within an ethical and pedagogically sound framework, offers a strategic response. It can reduce the cognitive load of repetitive academic tasks and help level the playing field for students with diverse learning needs, linguistic backgrounds, and time constraints.

Institutions that ignore or delay engagement with these technologies risk falling behind both technologically and pedagogically. Conversely, those that embrace responsible AI implementation, guided by research and aligned with academic values, will be better positioned to support students, improve outcomes, and lead the next era of education innovation.

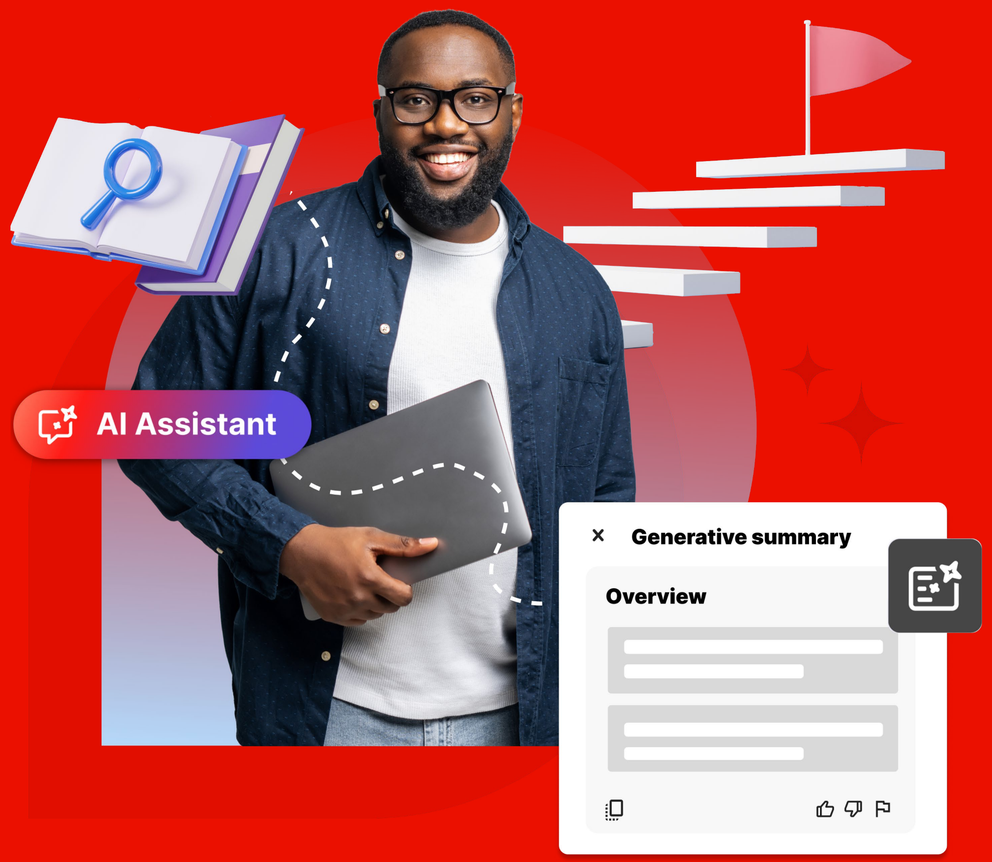
Adobe, long a trusted partner in K–12 and higher education, is ensuring that its generative AI tools are developed with responsibility, transparency, and academic integrity at their core. Adobe Acrobat AI Assistant, featured in this report, is built to enhance—not replace—student learning and critical thinking.

It allows learners to interact directly with their course materials, ask questions, get contextualized explanations, and receive citations directly tied to their documents, ensuring trust in both process and outcome.

AI is used by **9 in 10 students** for their classwork.

54% using it **at least once a week.**

2 The Rise of Generative AI in the Classroom



Across college campuses, generative AI is already changing how students approach learning—and institutional policies and pedagogical practices are rapidly evolving to keep pace.

What began as a novel curiosity has become a standard tool in the academic toolkit for many students, used to manage overwhelming reading loads, generate study aids, and make sense of difficult texts. While concerns about AI misuse persist, students are making clear-eyed decisions: not to replace learning, but to improve their ability to engage with it.

Researchers in this study found that 90% of college students already use generative AI tools for academic tasks, and one in three relies on them to summarize dense materials. These tools, including features like the chat-with-your-document functionality in Acrobat AI Assistant, allow students to interact directly with course content, asking questions and receiving contextualized summaries across multiple sources.

Rather than flipping through documents and lecture slides with little cohesion, students are now able to generate concise, synthesized outputs that improve their comprehension and focus.

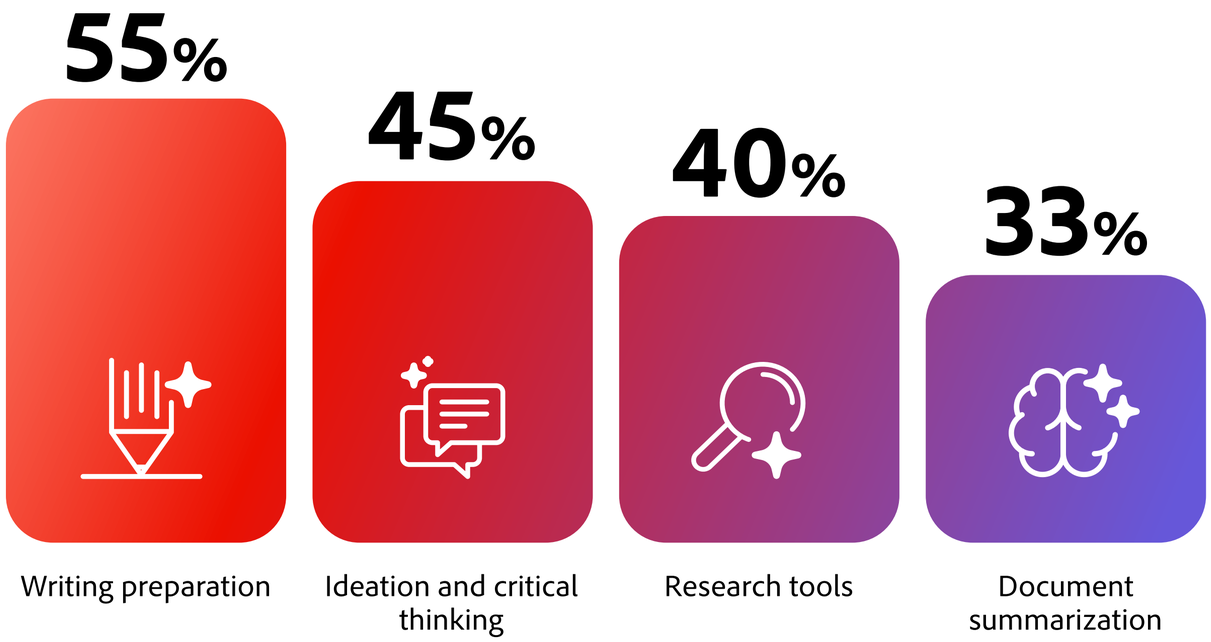
This shift in student behavior is part of a larger trend in education: the redefinition of what it means to be "literate" in a digital age. As EDUCAUSE noted in its 2024 Horizon Report, AI literacy—the ability to effectively use, evaluate, and collaborate with AI tools—is rapidly becoming an essential skill, on par with written communication or critical thinking.[1]

The World Economic Forum echoes this urgency, ranking analytical thinking; AI and big data; and a combination of resilience, flexibility, and agility among the top ten skills employers demand in 2025.[2] Institutions that treat AI solely as a compliance risk may miss the broader opportunity: preparing students for a future where fluency with intelligent systems is both a differentiator and a baseline expectation.

Students themselves seem to recognize this. In this study, nearly 80% of respondents expressed interest in taking courses focused on AI tools and applications. They're not only using AI to navigate current academic demands—they're also trying to understand it, question it, and master it as part of their career preparation.

FIGURE 2.1

According to our findings, these are the **top types of AI capabilities** that students rely on to assist with their studies.



For colleges and universities, this presents a strategic opportunity to move from reactive policy creation to proactive skill development, aligning AI integration with institutional goals for equity, engagement, and workforce readiness.

Despite the growing enthusiasm for AI, concerns around accuracy and trust remain. Students who've never used AI tools are 25% more likely to express worry about the potential for incorrect or misleading information—a concern not unfounded, given that some tools rely on unverified web content. That's why source reliability is still in students' minds: 78% emphasize the importance of citing credible sources in their academic work.

Some worry that AI may erode students' ability to think independently, though the opposite often appears to be true in practice. When students use AI to reduce cognitive overload and surface key insights from their materials, they often spend more time on the kind of higher-order thinking that matters most—interpreting, questioning, and applying what they've learned. Especially for students managing full course loads, part-time jobs, or caregiving responsibilities, generative AI offers a low-friction way to stay connected to their learning in moments when traditional support may not be available or accessible.

The rapid rise of generative AI in the classroom isn't a passing trend. It's a signal of a larger transformation in how students learn and what they expect from their academic experience. Institutions that understand this shift and respond with both guardrails and guidance will be better positioned to support student success in an era defined by both uncertainty and possibility.

More than 1 in 7 college students are unaware of their school's AI policy.

Recommendations for Academic Leaders

To lead in this moment of transformation, institutions are recognizing the classroom use of AI not as a workaround, but as a working model of the future of learning. Rather than banning or resisting these tools, academic leaders have the opportunity to shape how they're used—reinforcing academic integrity while also building student capacity in essential, future-ready skills.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Recognize generative AI as a literacy issue, not just a policy concern; begin **integrating AI literacy** into **digital fluency** frameworks.
- Audit student-facing technology and academic workflows to ensure that AI tools can **integrate meaningfully and securely** intostudents'existinglearningenvironments.
- **Offer guidance**—not just rules—on how students can use AI tools ethically and effectively in coursework.
- Highlight examples where **AI** supports—but does not replace—core academic skills like **reading comprehension, synthesis,** and study strategies.
- Signal to **faculty** and **departments** that the use of **AI** doesn't require curricular overhaul but can begin with small steps like study aids, citation tools, or guided critical engagement.

3 Combating Academic Burnout with Generative AI

Burnout has become one of the most widespread and underaddressed challenges in higher education. As students attempt to balance heavy academic loads with part-time work, caregiving responsibilities, extracurriculars, and personal well-being, the strain on their cognitive and emotional capacity can be overwhelming.

According to the Lumina Foundation and Gallup's State of Higher Education 2023 report, more than half of college students have considered stopping out of college due to emotional stress, and 44% report feeling frequent burnout—a significant risk to persistence, performance, and long-term success.[3]

While institutions have invested in student wellness initiatives, academic resource centers, and faculty support, these services aren't always accessed as often or as early as needed.

Students may hesitate to seek help due to stigma, scheduling conflicts, or a perception that support is too far removed from the immediate demands of studying. Generative AI offers a different kind of support—an always-available, low-pressure companion that can help lighten the cognitive load of studying and improve confidence in academic preparation.

Full-time students often dedicate a significant amount of time to preparing for exams through reading and actively creating their own learning materials. This includes summarizing, synthesizing, and organizing course content to support memorization and long-term retention. This research report found that students often spend upwards of 28 hours per month reading course materials and an additional 24 hours crafting study aids like outlines, flashcards, and charts.

Despite these efforts, more than half of the students surveyed admitted to beginning their exam preparation less than four days before a test or final. This last-minute approach leaves little room for in-depth review, increasing stress and potentially impacting academic outcomes. The combination of tight schedules, multiple deadlines, and a high volume of course content often pushes students into reactive rather than proactive learning.

By optimizing how they create their study materials—through structured workflows or AI-supported tools—students can reclaim valuable time and shift their focus from repetitive tasks to meaningful learning. Smarter preparation methods improve exam readiness and promote greater confidence and academic resilience. For students under time pressure, AI-powered tools like Acrobat AI Assistant can significantly streamline these tasks—helping them summarize dense texts, organize key takeaways, and generate personalized study materials in minutes rather than hours.

The findings of this report also show that students who use AI tools weekly are 17% less likely to experience academic stress than those who don't, highlighting AI's potential as a meaningful support system.

24h

a month are spent on average by students **crafting new study materials** to prepare for their exams.

<4d

before an exam or final is when over half of respondents say they begin to study.

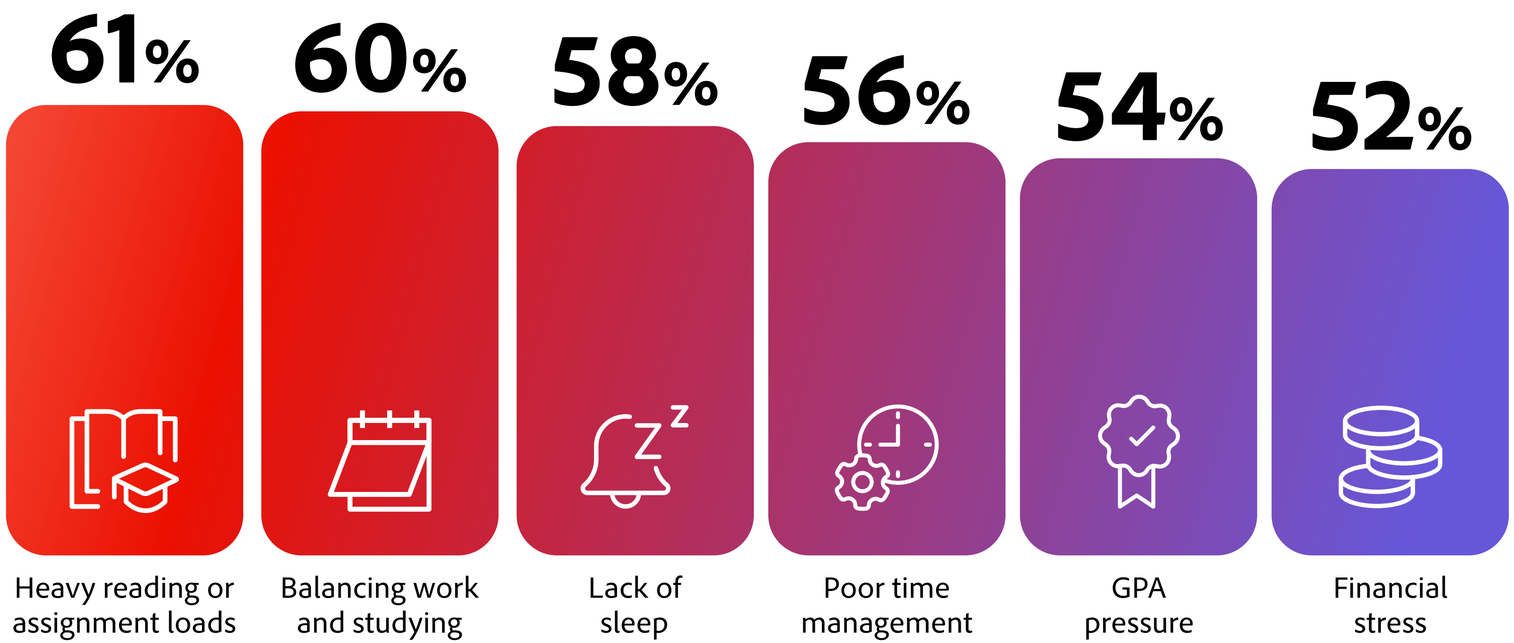
Rather than replacing learning, these tools give students more space for it. By offloading repetitive tasks like condensing readings or formatting notes, AI enables students to redirect their time and attention to higher-order thinking. This matters particularly during high-stress periods like midterms and finals, when last-minute studying and information overload can compromise both performance and mental well-being.

AI can also help bridge accessibility gaps. Students who are neurodiverse, managing invisible disabilities, working long hours, or studying in non-native languages often find traditional academic environments to be inflexible or unintentionally exclusive. Generative AI tools allow students to engage with course content on their own terms and timelines, enhancing autonomy and reducing the anxiety that comes from falling behind or failing to keep pace.

Academic burnout doesn't have a single solution, but technology that's thoughtfully designed and aligned with pedagogical goals can be part of a meaningful response. By integrating generative AI into the academic workflow, institutions can help students not only make it through the semester but also build more sustainable, self-directed approaches to learning.

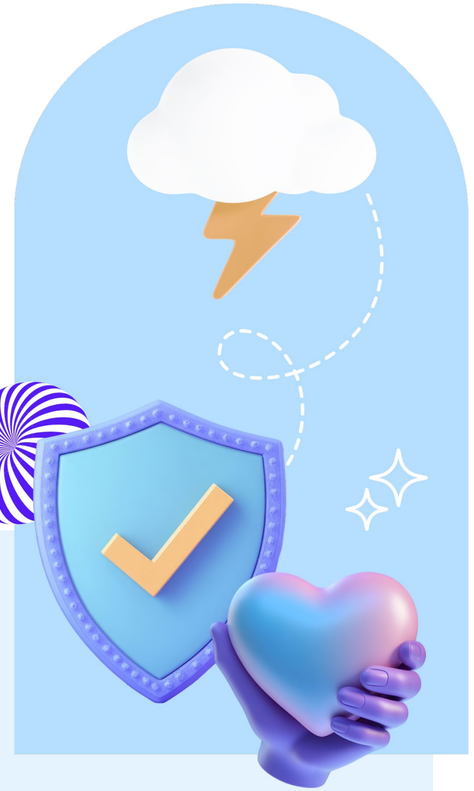
FIGURE 3.1

Top causes of student academic burnout



Recommendations for Academic Leaders

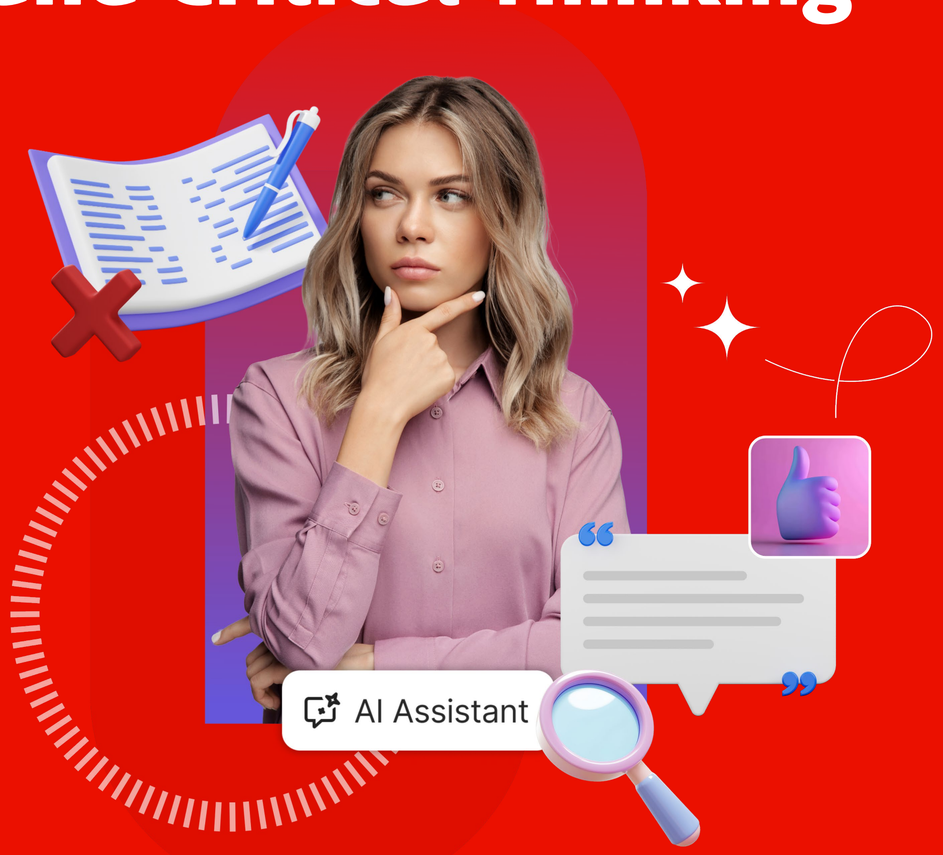
Addressing academic burnout requires more than wellness campaigns. It demands structural support that helps students manage cognitive overload, engage more confidently with their studies, and access help when they need it—without stigma or delay. Generative AI offers scalable, student-centered tools that can play a role in institutional strategies to promote mental well-being and academic resilience.



RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Recognize burnout as both an academic and equity issue, and include generative AI in your institution's strategy to **reduce student attrition and disengagement**.
- **Provide guidance** on how AI can be used ethically to create **study aids**, summarize materials, and support spaced repetition and self-assessment.
- Promote **AI-supported study tools** that help students manage information overload and prepare for exams more effectively.
- Collaborate with faculty to identify ways that **AI tools can complement** traditional **support systems** like office hours and tutoring.
- **Monitor** patterns of **AI usage** to identify **at-risk students** who may benefit from additional academic or wellness outreach.

4 AI's Role in Improving Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking



Reading comprehension has long been a foundational skill for academic success. Yet for many college students, it's also a persistent barrier.

Dense scholarly texts, complex theoretical frameworks, and discipline-specific language can make academic reading slow, disjointed, and cognitively exhausting—especially for students still developing advanced literacy skills. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than half of US adults between the ages of 16 and 74—approximately 130 million people—read below a sixth-grade level.[4] For institutions committed to both access and excellence, this poses a serious equity and instructional challenge.

In the national student survey conducted for this report, 84% of students reported frequent difficulty understanding their course materials, with 55% specifically citing long and densely written texts as their greatest obstacle.

This often translates into unproductive hours spent rereading, underlining, and struggling to identify core concepts—leaving little time for synthesis or application. For students who are first-generation or non-native English speakers, or for students who are juggling multiple responsibilities, these obstacles are compounded by limited access to tutoring or faculty support. Many are left feeling isolated from the learning process, despite investing significant effort.

This is where generative AI has begun to shift the landscape. Tools like Acrobat AI Assistant allow students to ask targeted questions of their reading materials, request summaries of complex passages, and get real-time explanations of unfamiliar terms—all directly within the document environment. Rather than outsourcing comprehension, these tools scaffold it—helping students locate key themes, track logical arguments, and focus on what matters most. This kind of support doesn't diminish the reading experience. It makes it more active, empowering students to engage with their learning rather than endure it.

FIGURE 4.1

Students struggle with dense reading materials

54%

of US **adults lack** proficient **literacy skills**.

84%

of students **struggle** with **reading comprehension**.

55%

cite **lengthy, dense texts** as the biggest **challenge**.

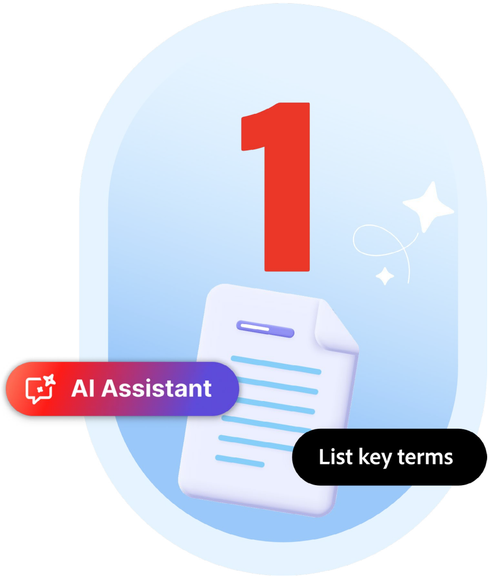
But comprehension is only one part of the equation. The deeper promise of AI lies in its ability to support the development of critical thinking—the capacity to evaluate evidence, make logical inferences, question assumptions, and integrate new ideas.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, critical thinking involves the "habit of mind" to analyze, interpret, and synthesize information from a variety of sources.[5] In this context, AI tools can serve as a metacognitive partner that prompts students to clarify their understanding, ask more insightful questions, and reflect on what they know and what they don't.

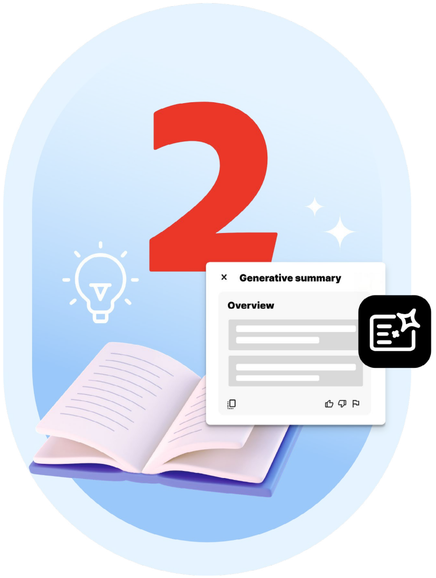
This kind of reflective learning is especially important in an era of information overload. When students face a deluge of readings, videos, assignments, and online materials, it becomes difficult to distinguish what's essential from what's peripheral. Generative AI can help students build internal frameworks for navigating this complexity.

FIGURE 4.2

AI as a reading comprehension aid



AI **breaks down** complex vocabulary.



Summarization tools **improve understanding**.

Adobe Acrobat AI Assistant supports document navigation.

Rather than simply consuming information, they're prompted to make meaning from it—comparing sources, identifying contradictions, and testing their own reasoning. These are the same skills employers now rank among the most valuable for workplace readiness, with McKinsey identifying cognitive flexibility, mental agility, and the ability to learn how to learn as key traits for the future of work.[6]

By supporting both comprehension and cognition, AI can do more than improve academic performance—it can increase student agency. The students most at risk of falling behind are often the ones least likely to ask for help. Generative AI gives them a low-stakes way to re-enter the conversation, engage with their coursework on their own terms, and develop confidence in their ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and learn continuously.

Over 1 in 2 students who experience reading challenges are using **AI weekly** to get help and additional support.

Recommendations for Academic Leaders

Institutions that want their graduates to be both informed and intellectually agile should view AI not as an adversary to critical thinking but as an accelerant. By integrating responsible AI tools into the reading and learning process, colleges and universities can help students build the foundational skills that matter most in today's knowledge economy.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Frame AI as a scaffolding tool that **supports rather than replaces** reading comprehension, analysis, and synthesis.
- Integrate AI literacy into **student success and academic support programs**, especially in reading- and writing-intensive disciplines.
- Encourage faculty and academic support staff to use AI tools to promote **metacognitive strategies:** asking questions, testing understanding, and reflecting on learning.
- Monitor usage patterns and feedback to ensure that AI tools are helping students **build transferable cognitive skills,** not just complete tasks faster.
- Reaffirm that **academic rigor** and **AI support** aren't mutually exclusive—they can coexist to create deeper, more equitable learning environments.

5 Insights from US College AI Policies for Students

As generative AI tools become embedded in everyday academic life, institutions face increasing pressure to define what responsible use looks like in practice.

Faculty and students alike are seeking guidance, both on what's prohibited and what's permitted. Yet many AI policies across US colleges and universities remain either overly vague or heavily focused on academic misconduct, leaving a gap between institutional intent and classroom reality.

To better understand how institutions are navigating this transition, Adobe partnered with Journey Further to conduct a review of AI-related student conduct and academic integrity policies from 50 US colleges and universities. The sample included public and private four-year institutions as well as two-year institutions, providing a snapshot of the broader landscape.

The findings reveal a clear trend: While institutions are rightly concerned about maintaining academic integrity, many are already beginning to recognize the value of AI in supporting student learning—especially when it comes to study preparation and research.

The most commonly permitted use case in current policy language is the use of AI to generate study materials—such as summaries, outlines, or flashcards—from student-uploaded course content. This reflects a growing consensus that academic support tools, particularly those that scaffold comprehension and exam prep, are beneficial and fundamentally different from generative tools used to write papers or complete graded assignments.

At the same time, the review found that consequences for AI misuse vary widely. To better understand the severity of institutional responses, we developed a three-tiered consequence score:

Score 1: Academic penalties or disciplinary actions (e.g., warnings and grade deductions)
Score 2: Consequences related to course failure (e.g., failing the assignment or class)
Score 3: Expulsion or dismissal from the institution

Half of the community colleges researchers reviewed consider course failure a realistic outcome of improper AI use (Score 2). More strikingly, 25% of those colleges are prepared to escalate violations to expulsion (Score 3). Among four-year universities, the policies tend to be even stricter: 86% explicitly warn students that breaching AI guidelines may result in expulsion, the highest consequence level. Meanwhile, only 7% of those institutions limit consequences to course failure, without the risk of dismissal.

On the positive side, this analysis also uncovered increasing openness toward AI integration, especially in the context of academic research and study planning.

Every community college in our sample permits AI for research, but only 50% allow it for citation support. Among four-year universities, 86% support AI tools for research purposes, and 64% allow students to use AI to assist with citations, reflecting a stronger push toward technological inclusion in academic practice.

79% of four-year institutions **officially permit using AI** to prepare study materials such as summaries, outlines, and learning aids.

Regarding study preparation and planning, the results show a remarkable alignment: 79% of four-year institutions officially permit using AI to prepare study materials such as summaries, outlines, and learning aids. Similarly, 100% of the community colleges studied acknowledged the value of AI tools in supporting students' learning strategies, particularly in organizing and structuring course content for review.

Without clear, consistent, and accessible guidance, students may feel anxious about using AI at all, even for tasks that are broadly supported by faculty. In environments where policy clarity is lacking, a culture of low trust can develop, placing unnecessary emotional strain on students who are already under pressure. This lack of clarity not only undermines student confidence but also places a burden on faculty, who must interpret or enforce ambiguous rules in real time.

As EDUCAUSE noted in its 2023 report, 7 Things you Should Know About AI in Education, institutions need policies that are both ethical and actionable—clearly outlining permitted uses, promoting equitable access, and aligning with educational outcomes.[7] The most effective AI policies don't just guard against misconduct; they empower students and instructors to use AI thoughtfully and transparently in support of learning.

Adobe has taken this approach seriously in the design of its own AI tools. Acrobat AI Assistant includes safeguards to ensure that all generative responses are linked to student-uploaded content and cited transparently—an intentional design choice that aligns with academic norms and supports institutional policy enforcement. While each institution must craft its own policies, responsibly built tools can help reduce ambiguity, improve trust, and promote a healthy learning culture in which students feel confident using AI in appropriate and impactful ways.

86% of four-year universities support AI tools for **research purposes.**

Recommendations for Academic Leaders

To support both academic integrity and student well-being, institutions should move quickly to clarify their AI policies—especially around non-graded study support. Doing so will not only help them align with emerging national norms, but it will also reduce student anxiety, strengthen faculty trust, and promote responsible innovation.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

- Clearly define permitted uses of **AI tools** for **study preparation**, including creating **summaries, flashcards**, and **outlines** derived from **course content.**
- Communicate **AI policies** clearly to both **students and faculty** to minimize **confusion** and inconsistent **enforcement**.
- **Distinguish** between AI use for **learning support** and AI use for **graded assignments** in **policy language** and **classroom guidelines**.
- Consider a **tiered consequence framework** for **AI misuse** that reflects **intent, context, and impact** rather than blanket penalties.
- Look for **AI tools**, like Acrobat AI Assistant, that are designed with **attribution, transparency, and academic alignment** in mind.

6 Study Smarter with Adobe Acrobat AI Assistant

In today's fast-paced academic environment, students constantly navigate dense materials, tight deadlines, and high expectations.

To succeed, they need tools that help them organize and understand complex information, optimize their time, and boost their confidence in learning.

Enter the Acrobat AI Assistant, a powerful, intuitive tool that's a smart study companion. It enables students to interact directly with their course content, extract key insights, and get personalized support for their learning needs.

With slides or textbook chapters, students doing study preparation and planning can ask questions in plain language and receive immediate, relevant answers directly within the document. This makes the study process more engaging, focused, and efficient.

These use cases go far beyond convenience. They address some of the core challenges students face, including:

- **Information overload:** Acrobat AI Assistant filters what's essential, allowing students to focus on the most relevant material.
- **Time constraints:** For students balancing coursework with part-time jobs, internships, or caregiving, quick and meaningful answers make studying more manageable.
- **Study structure:** Many students struggle with organizing their learning. Acrobat AI Assistant helps break down material into digestible chunks and offers logical next steps.
- **Conceptual clarity:** Acrobat AI Assistant simplifies without dumbing down, whether helping students decipher academic jargon or understand a complicated theory.

HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLE PROMPTS STUDENTS CAN USE IN ACROBAT AI ASSISTANT TO HELP THEM IN THEIR ACADEMIC STUDIES

Create a study guide: *"Summarize these chapters into a succinct study guide."*
→ Ideal for preparing for midterms or finals by organizing key themes and concepts into a clear format they can easily review.

Summarize lecture notes: *"Give me the top 5 takeaways from last week's lecture."*
→ Perfect when students have missed a lecture, need a quick refresher, or want to reinforce what they've learned.

Identify differences between complex concepts: *"What is the difference between [concept 1] and [concept 2]?"*
→ Useful for clearing up confusion around similar or overlapping terms—especially important in technical or theory-heavy courses.

Comprehend concepts: *"Explain [concept] in more simple terms."*
→ Great for tackling challenging or abstract topics in subjects like philosophy, economics, science, or law.

Create practice tests: *"Provide 10 sample test questions my professor could ask me."*
→ Helps students actively test their knowledge and anticipate exam-style questions, boosting recall and exam confidence.

Create a study plan: *"Create a list of concepts from this semester for me to study."*
→ A great way for students to stay organized and ensure that they're reviewing all the necessary material throughout the semester or before finals week.

Acrobat AI Assistant integrates directly within students' learning materials so there's no need to copy and paste into external apps—everything happens inside the document. This creates a more fluid, distraction-free workflow, which is especially valuable for deep reading, writing assignments, and exam prep.

And most importantly, Acrobat AI Assistant is built with trust and academic integrity in mind, making it a reliable ally in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

FIGURE 6.1

The future of learning with AI

AI is **transforming** the student **learning experience.**

Responsible AI use is essential for **accuracy and ethics.**

Students should **check** their **universities' AI policies** before use.

The Importance of Accessible Document Tools for College Students

Access to learning isn't just about having the right content. It's also about how that content is presented and experienced. With 86% of college students receiving their materials in PDF format, the need for digital accessibility has become a foundational aspect of higher education.

Acrobat provides robust accessibility features that make it easier for students with different learning styles and abilities to engage with course materials in a way that works best for them.

Key accessibility features include:

- Enhanced screen reader compatibility, allowing blind and visually impaired students to access content
- Text reflow and magnification options for easier reading
- High-contrast display settings to reduce visual strain
- Auto-tagging of documents, which supports structured navigation and better comprehension
- Compatibility with keyboard-only navigation and speech-to-text tools

These tools are particularly beneficial for:

- Students with dyslexia or other reading disorders
- Neurodivergent learners who prefer structured or minimal layouts
- International students who may need extra visual cues for comprehension
- Any student who simply learns better with customizable content presentation

Liquid Mode in the Acrobat mobile app also transforms standard PDFs into mobile-friendly documents with a responsive layout. This makes studying more manageable on the go, whether a student is in the library or riding the bus on the way to campus. With features like collapsible outlines, students can quickly locate what they need and focus on what's important.

Accessible design isn't a nice-to-have. It's a necessary part of educational equity. By supporting students with diverse needs, Acrobat helps ensure that no one is left behind in the digital classroom.

How AI is transforming Education

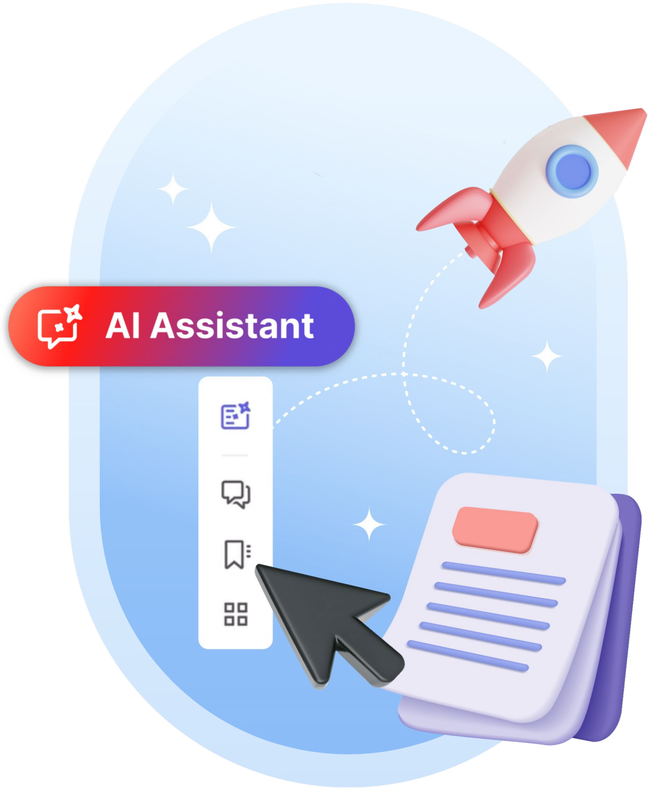
Higher education stands at a crossroads. As institutions strive to expand access, improve outcomes, and prepare students for an increasingly complex world, one thing is clear: Artificial intelligence is no longer optional—it's foundational. Generative AI is rapidly becoming central to how students read, write, study, and think. For colleges and universities, the question isn't whether AI will shape learning, but how intentionally and how equitably that transformation will unfold.

At its best, AI isn't a shortcut. It's a scaffold—a smart companion that helps students manage cognitive overload, deepen comprehension, build critical thinking, and engage more confidently with their learning. But like any powerful tool, its impact depends on how thoughtfully it's designed and deployed. The path forward is neither to resist AI nor to embrace it blindly, but to shape its role with clarity, integrity, and shared purpose.

That's why Adobe has taken a distinctly education-first approach to generative AI. Acrobat AI Assistant is built from the ground up to reflect the values of higher education: accountability, transparency, and academic integrity. Every response it generates is tied to student-uploaded content and linked to its source. Every feature undergoes rigorous internal review. And every design choice reflects a core belief: that technology should empower students to learn more deeply, not just faster.

This philosophy extends beyond product. Adobe partners with educators, researchers, and institutions to better understand what students truly need and to build tools that align with the real conditions of academic life. From our ethics framework to our curriculum resources and faculty development initiatives, Adobe is committed to supporting colleges and universities not just in adopting AI but also in leading with it. With Adobe, institutions don't have to choose between innovation and integrity.

The opportunity before higher education is immense. With the right tools and policies, institutions can make learning more inclusive, personalized, and sustainable—especially for students balancing work, caregiving, and other barriers. They can equip graduates not only with degrees but also with the digital and cognitive fluency to thrive in a technology-driven future.



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