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AI in Student Affairs?

3,200+ college students weigh in

March 2025

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly prominent role in higher education, from AI-driven tutoring to administrative AI agents. Recent surveys show that the majority of students are already using AI tools in their academic life with 86% of college students globally reporting use of AI in their studies[1].

[1] "**Survey: 86% of Students Already Use AI in Their Studies.**" *Campus Technology*, 28 Aug. 2024, https://campustechnology.com/articles/2024/08/28/survey-86-of-students-already-use-ai-in-their-studies.aspx

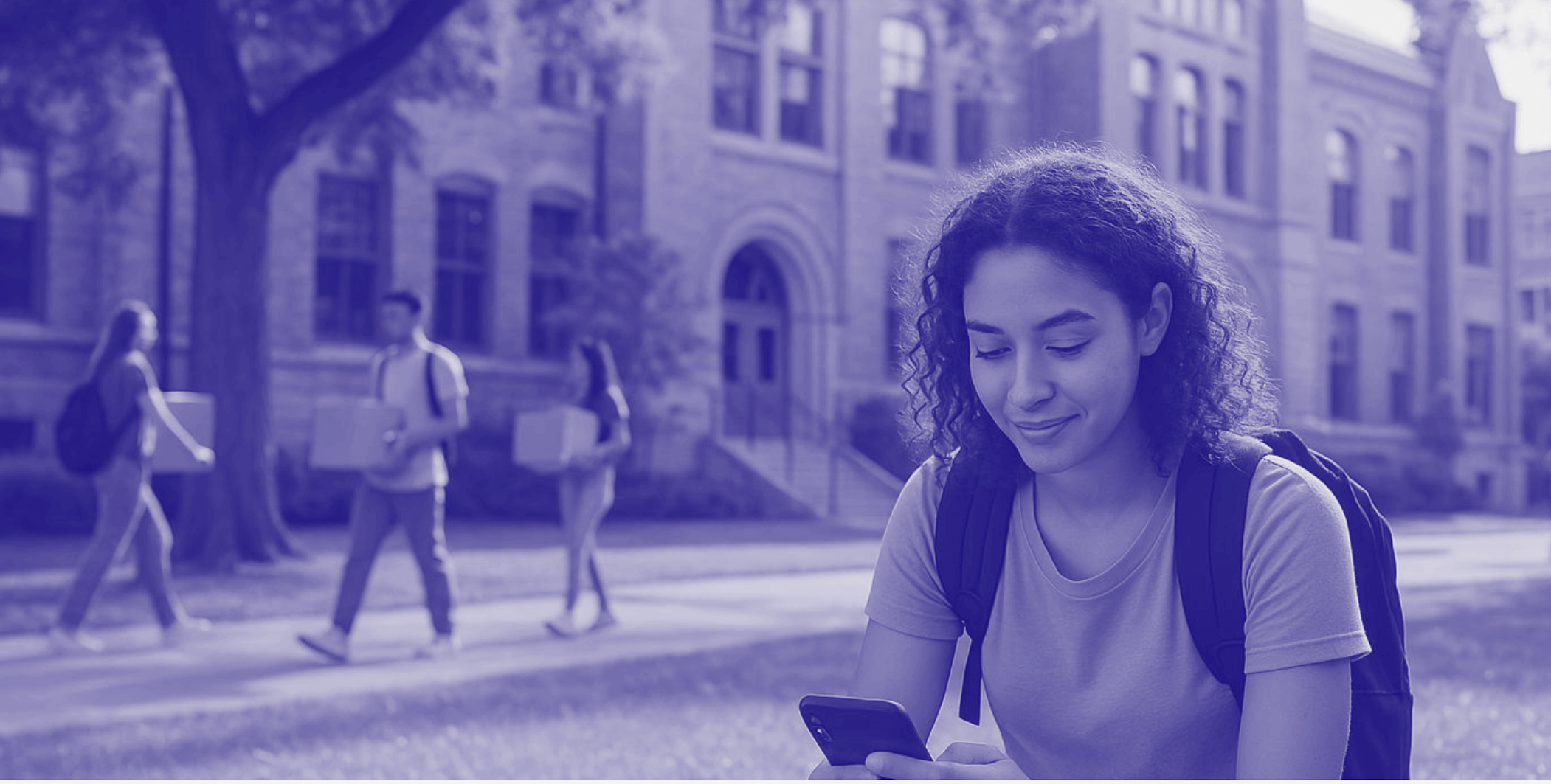
86% of students already use AI in their studies

Meanwhile, universities are starting to consider the use of AI for a myriad of jobs across learning and administration, including in student affairs. This interest is driven in part by growing strains on traditional advising: many academic advisors handle hundreds of students (often 300–375 students per advisor) [2], resulting in advising that often focuses on basic course scheduling rather than individualized guidance.

[2] **Ellucian**. *Move the Needle on Student Success*. Ellucian, https://www.ellucian.com/assets/en/ebook/ebook-move-needle-student-success.pdf.

Amid the rapid adoption of AI on campus, a crucial question arises:

How do college students view the use of AI in student affairs?



This research report investigates that question by analyzing a new survey of over 3,000 college students. We examine student preferences for AI-driven advising and the perceived benefits (and drawbacks) of AI in reducing stress and enhancing support. Ultimately, we aim to illuminate whether students see AI as a welcome innovation in advising—and if so, how colleges can responsibly leverage AI to foster student success.

Key Findings

Students expect faster response times

Many believe AI can offer instant, 24/7 academic guidance, making success services more accessible.

AI could reduce communication anxiety

Students noted that AI-driven support reduces stress related to traditional advising interactions.

AI and human advising should coexist

Rather than replacing human advisors, students see AI as a way to free up human staff time by handling routine questions and administrative tasks.

AI-enabled advising could increase service usage

With AI removing barriers to engagement, students are more likely to seek advising and support services.

Digital-native students not only want but expect AI for advising.

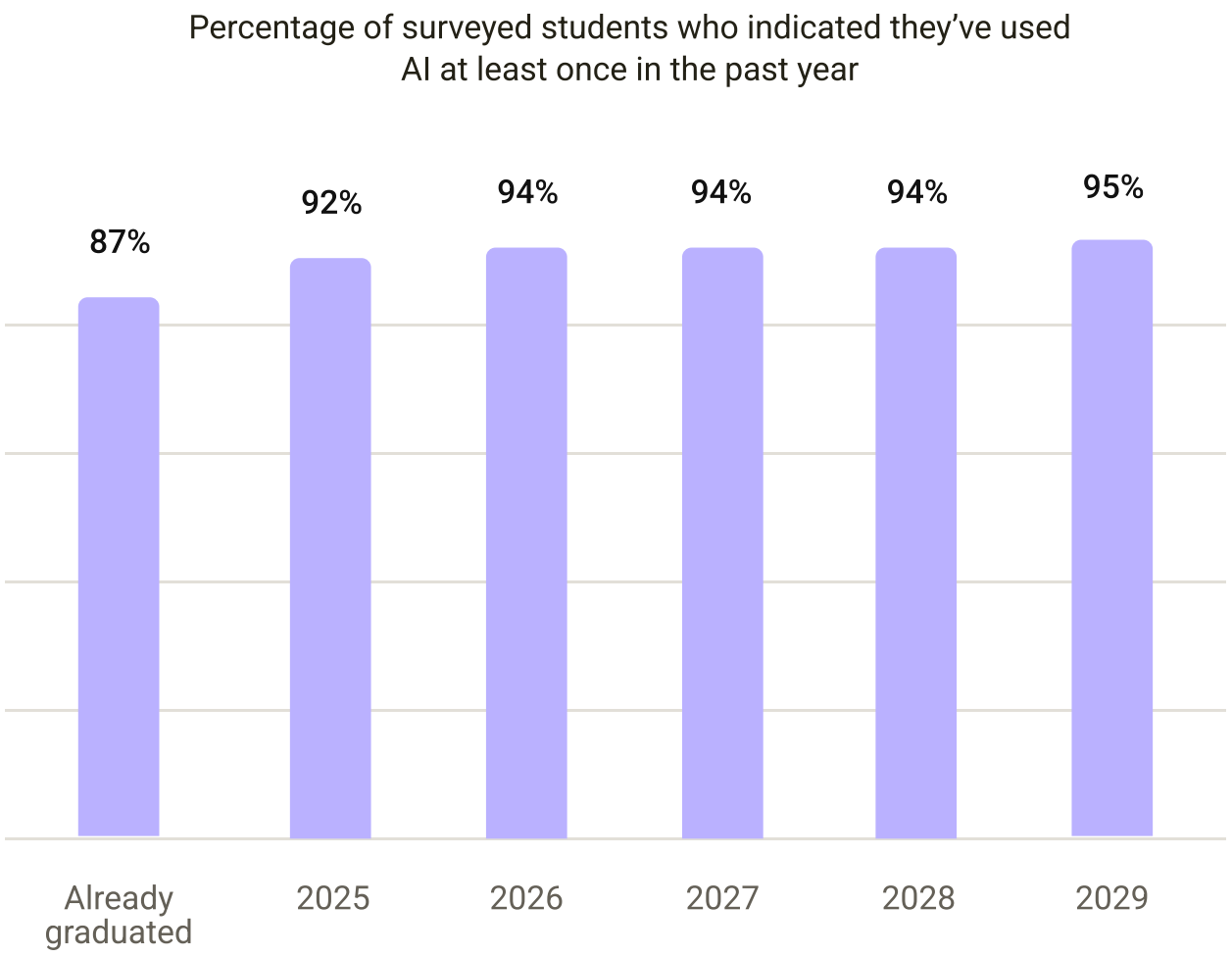
Today's college students have grown up with digital tools seamlessly integrated into their lives. From personalized streaming services to AI-powered search engines, they expect instant, personalized, and data-driven interactions in all aspects of their experience—including academic advising.

Indeed, in a recent national study by Tyton Partners, students slightly preferred engaging with technology for course registration (average rating 2.79 out of 5) and even for academic advising (2.66/5) when given the option of AI services vs. in-person help.

[3] **Whitford, Emma**. "Survey: College Advisers Could Benefit From AI Assistance." *Inside Higher Ed*, 5 Sept. 2024, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/academic-life/2024/09/05/survey-college-advisers-could-benefit-ai-assistance

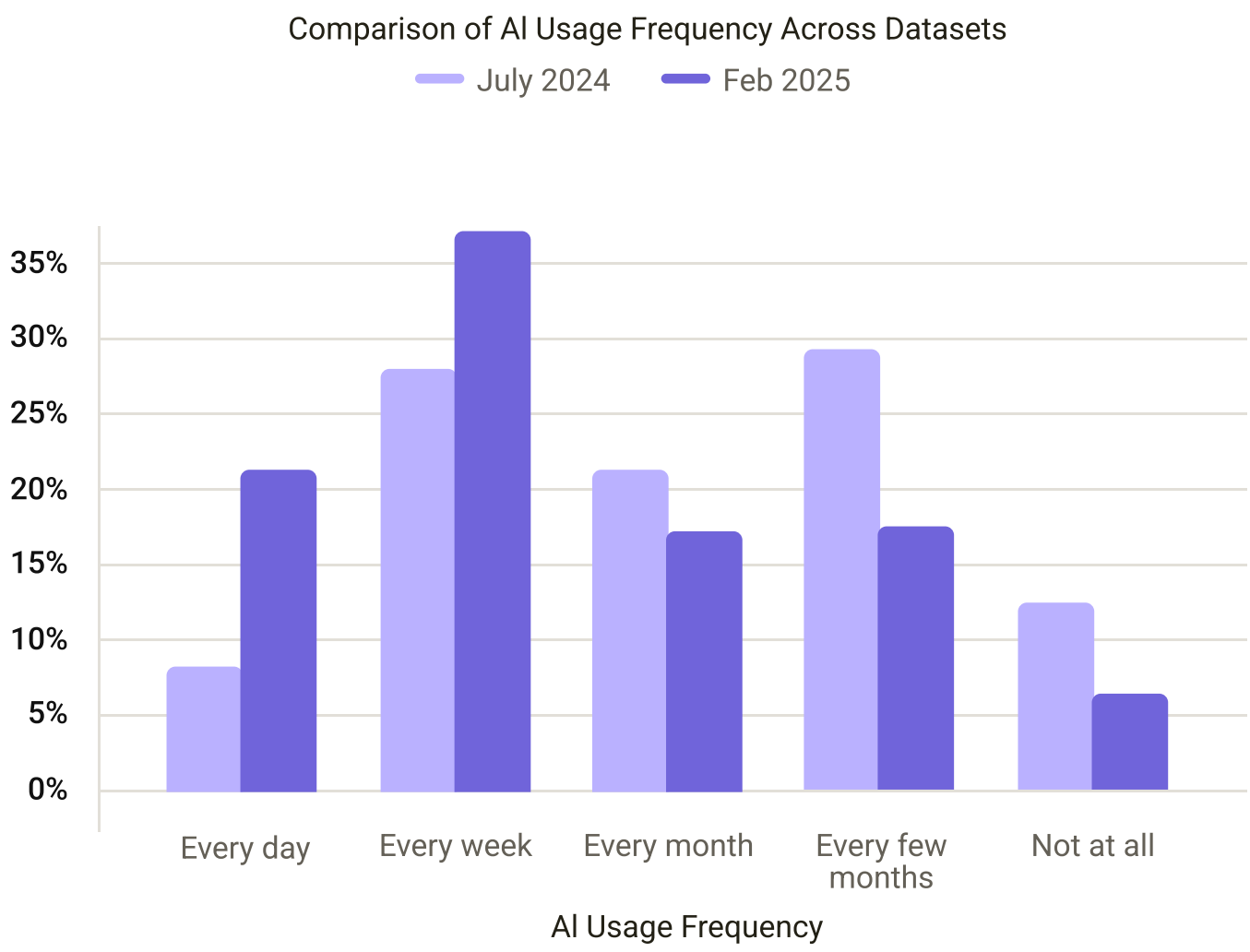
Unsurprisingly, we found that students who had prior experience using academic AI tools (such as course recommendation systems or extensive use of ChatGPT for academic help) were more enthusiastic about AI advising.

There was a moderate positive correlation ($r \approx 0.45$, $p < 0.001$) between a student's familiarity/comfort with AI and their rating of AI's helpfulness in advising. This suggests that the more students know AI, the more they want to use it. We anticipate that familiarity with AI will only continue to increase over time.



The rate of AI adoption in young people has been astronomically fast.

94% of students said they've used AI at least once compared to 87% from when we asked high school students the same question last July. Frequency of usage is also rapidly increasing, with the percentage of students who say they use AI every day increasing almost 3-fold from 8% to 21%.



Perhaps the most frequently mentioned advantage of AI advisors was round-the-clock availability.

Students generally believe that AI could provide faster responses than traditional student success and academic advising departments who rely on humans to reply to all inquiries (mean ~6.65 on a Likert scale of 10). However, they are less convinced that AI would provide more helpful responses than their human counterparts (mean ~5.73).

Students highlighted that academic and personal concerns are not confined to business hours – one might be working on course registration at midnight or stressing about an issue on a Sunday afternoon. With human staff, help at those odd hours is usually not available, but an AI advisor could be. This 24/7 demand links with today's student lifestyles, which are often busy and not aligned with 9-to-5 schedules. Some students pointed out that even when human advisors are technically available, scheduling a meeting might take days, whereas an AI is on whenever you log in.

Students want more human facetime — AI can enable that.

While students express strong support for AI in advising, they also desire more quality time with human advisors. AI can free up advisors to focus on the deeper, more meaningful aspects of student success.

Students overwhelmingly see AI as ideal for handling routine, factual inquiries and for nudging them proactively on upcoming deadlines and decisions. A large portion of freeform comments revolved around using an AI chatbot or advisor to get quick answers to common questions. Rather than emailing an advisor and waiting for a reply about which form to fill out or how many credits a minor requires, students could get an instant answer from AI. They expect that an AI system would be loaded with the university's information (academic calendars, course catalogs, rules) and thus be able to provide accurate answers on demand. This theme ties closely to efficiency – students don't want to waste time for questions that block day-to-day decisions. By automating FAQ-style questions, AI can free up human advisors' time for more in-depth discussions. Advising experts note that offloading such prescriptive tasks to technology can indeed give advisors more capacity to focus on complex student needs.[4]

[4] **"Trendsetting in Academic Advising."**
NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising,
https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Trendsetting-in-Academic-Advising.aspx.

Students envision a collaborative system where AI handles certain tasks and humans handle others.

For instance, a typical expected scenario might be: the AI proactively reminds the student to draft a semester schedule or answer a list of preliminary questions, and then the student meets with a human advisor to discuss finer points or get mentorship. Many explicitly said they do not want AI to completely replace face-to-face advising, because they value the human connection for important guidance.

Students gave examples of what should be left to humans: complex academic planning, mental health or personal issues, exceptions to rules, etc., whereas things like credit checks, deadline reminders, pointing to resources could be offloaded to AI.

Student preferences for how to handle tasks

Human

- Face-to-face connection
- Career networking
- Complex academic planning
- Mental health concerns
- Personal issues
- Reviewing or requesting exceptions to rules

AI-assisted

- Preparing for a productive human advisor interaction
- Credit checks
- Deadline reminders
- Logistics
- Scheduling sessions with advisors

The consensus expectation is a hybrid advising model, where AI is integrated as an assistant or preliminary advisor, with humans providing oversight and deeper engagement.

This theme is encouraging for implementation because it shows students are thinking in terms of augmentation: they are likely to accept AI tools that are clearly positioned as supplements to advisors.

Select quotes from students:

“They should use AI frequently as an aid for student advisors, as students may have multiple questions that advisors may not have time for.”

White male in the Northeast (Class of 2029)

“AI should be used as a road map, to give information on what's available. I think it SHOULD NOT be a replacement for support, especially in regards to personal problems.”

White male in the Northeast (Class of 2029)

“When AI knows the specific details of the universities, its clubs, and ways to be involved on campus, then it would be extremely helpful towards students. I think it would greatly reduce the anxiety and stress put onto students when trying to reach out to new people. Using AI to support student success and advising would also greatly reduce the time it takes to gather information about various activities, clubs, or classes. AI would immediately give detailed feedback, advising the student and ultimately promoting more success.”

White female student in the Midwest, class of 2026

AI advising could reduce student anxiety and improve retention.

Many students report that approaching human advisors can be intimidating, leading to avoidance of success services. AI has the potential to break down these barriers.

Students rated AI's ability to reduce anxiety at an average of 6.17 on a 10-point scale. Many students mentioned that they would feel more comfortable asking sensitive questions to an AI tool before approaching an advisor. Approximately 62% of surveyed students agreed that they would turn to AI to ask questions that they'd hesitate to ask a human advisor. Of interest: international students reported higher levels of stress when communicating with advisors and were more likely to favor AI-driven solutions.

62% surveyed students agreed they would turn to AI to ask questions they wouldn't ask a human advisor.

Many students said that an AI feels “non-judgmental.”

This aligns with observations from other research on student behavior. A Harvard Project Zero report on teens and AI found that young people often turn to AI to get answers for questions they are too afraid to ask adults.[5]

The idea that “there’s no stupid question with an AI” came up repeatedly in our survey’s comments. Students feel that AI can provide a safe, private space to admit confusion or seek help, which in turn can reduce stress.

[5] **Harvard Graduate School of Education.** "Students Are Using AI Already. Here's What They Think Adults Should Know." *Usable Knowledge*, Sept. 2024, https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/usable-knowledge/24/09/students-are-using-ai-already-heres-what-they-think-adults-should-know

We've included some quotes from surveyed students on the use of AI for reducing anxiety:

"AI robots around the campus could help support students for their success in the future ... not letting the student miss out on stuff just because they were lost in the campus. I think if they realize that, introverted students' life would get or become much more better."

Asian female student in the South (Class of 2028)

"AI could be used to provide students with faster, more reliable answers while also reducing the amount of stress or anxiety that a student may feel from reaching out and asking for help."

Female student in the Northeast (Class of 2027)

"Universities should use AI to support students with social anxiety, need additional explanations (if in-person support cannot explain with additional details), and overall have simple answers that in-person support may not be able to provide. (e.g: in-person support might over-explain and confuse the individual asking said question.)"

Hispanic female student in the West (Class of 2025)

"It's helpful in a way that you can ask weird questions and it understands automatically. Having one that is strictly for school use, whether it's in the schools home page website or a website everyone may seek for college is entirely helpful. As someone who struggles with anxiety or think they are going to ask a weird question, AI has help give me ideas on what paths to take and what is the best route. Having AIi that is connected to the school, students would be easily able to ask it about certain classes or help with a problem without solving it for them and guiding them through by how the college teaches it."

White non-binary student in the South (class of 2028)

Conclusion

We are entering a new era for student success and advising, one in which artificial intelligence will play a pivotal role.

The question was whether students actually want AI's help — our research indicates **that students are not only open to it, but many are eager for the additional support AI can provide.** They see AI as a means to a more efficient, responsive, and personalized college experience.

Crucially, though, they envision AI as part of a collaborative effort, not a solitary solution. In this new era, **the optimal scenario is one where AI and human advisors work in harmony**: the AI offers its strengths (proactivity, speed, information, 24/7 availability, personalization at scale) and the humans offer theirs (empathy, understanding, nuanced judgment).

If universities can strike this balance, the potential upside is tremendous — improved student satisfaction, reduced anxiety, better academic planning, and ultimately, stronger student success outcomes.

Appendix

Methodology

The study analyzed responses from a survey of 3,212 college students. The survey was conducted in February 2025 across multiple institutions, capturing a diverse sample from first-year undergraduates to graduate students. Respondents represented various regions of the United States (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). The survey included both quantitative questions (Likert-scale and multiple-choice items) and qualitative open-ended prompts.

Data Collection

Participants answered questions about their willingness to use AI for academic advising and other campus services, their level of trust in AI vs. human advisors, and any anxiety or comfort factors affecting these interactions. Demographic information (year in school, region, etc.) was also collected to examine subgroup differences.

Data Analysis

We used a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics to explore the survey results. First, we calculated summary statistics (means, percentages) for key questions to gauge overall trends. Next, we examined relationships between variables:

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess associations between key measures. For example, we correlated students' trust in AI with their willingness to use AI for advising, and we looked at whether anxiety in face-to-face advising was linked to preference for AI help. This helped quantify trends (e.g., whether students who are more anxious with human advisors tend to favor AI).

Regression Analysis: To dig deeper, we conducted a multiple regression with preference for AI-driven advising as the dependent variable. Independent variables included graduation year, region, and prior usage of AI (a self-reported frequency of using tools like ChatGPT). This regression tested which factors significantly predict openness to AI, while controlling for other variables.

For the qualitative data, we performed a thematic analysis of the open-ended responses. All responses to questions like "What do you expect an AI advisor to do for you?" were coded for recurring themes.

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