Optimism and Anxiety
Views on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Higher Education’s Response

In the coming AI revolution, higher education must change to meet America’s workforce needs.

Smart machines will transform society—and Americans are generally optimistic about AI.

76% “Agree” or “strongly agree” AI will fundamentally change life and work in the next decade.

77% Of those Americans are “mostly positive” or “very positive” regarding AI’s anticipated impact.

Optimism regarding AI’s impact in the next 10 years varies by demographic group.

MORE OPTIMISTIC

+ Ages 66+
+ White-collar
+ Have a bachelor’s degree or higher
+ Very liberal
+ Reside in the South
+ Hail from a suburb near a large city or a small city or town

LESS OPTIMISTIC

+ Ages 51–65
+ Blue-collar
+ Have less than a bachelor’s degree
+ Very conservative
+ Reside in the Midwest
+ Hail from rural areas

Americans expect many jobs to be lost—but not their own.

73% Expect AI to eliminate more jobs than it creates.

77% Are “not too worried” or “not at all worried” that their own jobs are at risk.
Workers are divided regarding which skills are most important.

Based on a random national sample of 3,297 U.S. adults aged 18+ across the United States, surveyed from Sept. 15 to Oct. 10, 2017, by mail. For additional data and analysis, visit northeastern.edu/gallup.

Most workers feel ill-prepared for the AI economy.

Higher education must change to help Americans prepare and retool.

Workers are divided regarding which skills are most important.

Only 22% say hard skills: math, science, coding, working with data.

Only 18% say soft skills: critical thinking, teamwork, communication, creativity.

Opinions differ starkly by age

66+
- 62% stress hard skills
- 62% stress soft skills

18–35
- 51% stress hard skills
- 49% stress soft skills

37% Of employed Americans who lost a job to AI would turn to a college or university to upskill.

49% Of those employed would prefer to get on-the-job training.

61% Believe employers should pay for this retraining.