

The University President's AI Playbook

Six Essential Steps for Strategic and Ethical Faculty Engagement

PART 1: Set the Vision and the Vocabulary



Tone & Tempo: AI as an Ally

When we talk about AI as a **teaching ally** rather than a threat, crutch, or shortcut, we give faculty permission to explore responsibly.

Three Non-Negotiable Lexicon Elements



Opportunity, Not Mandate

Frame AI as a **pedagogical opportunity and option**, not an administrative mandate. Keep the adoption faculty-led.



Establish Guardrails

Invite faculty to establish non-negotiable academic guardrails: **integrity, creativity, and intellectual fairness**.



Center Faculty Ownership

Center faculty voices in the conversation, demonstrating their expertise is critical to responsible integration.

PART 2: Fund the First Steps



Catalyze Exploration with Investment

Faculty adoption doesn't happen by rhetoric alone. Invest in **professional development and small pilot projects** that encourage exploration without risk.

Three High-Impact Funding Moves



AI Teaching Fellows

Create a **Teaching Fellows Program** supporting cross-disciplinary teams to redesign courses or assignments using AI.



Micro-Grants & Pilots

Provide **micro-grants** for classroom-based AI pilots with built-in, mandatory assessment of learning outcomes.



Teaching Institutes

Sponsor **AI-in-Teaching Institutes** every semester so faculty can share early results and build confidence.

PART 3: Co-Construct Ethical Guardrails



The Core Principle: Contextual Intelligence

Ethical guidance is about **continually recalibrating** between possibility and prudence. Responsible AI use cannot be standardized; it must be interpreted through each discipline's unique values and learning outcomes.

Three Steps to Build a Nimble Governance System



Dialogue, Not Decree

Encourage departments to hold **structured conversations** about what "responsible AI use" looks like within their specific discipline and share insights openly.



Protected Experimentation

Create protected spaces for pilot projects to test new AI approaches, analyze outcomes, and refine guidelines **without fear of premature judgment**.



Examine Integrity

Lead honest conversations on how AI is reshaping **authorship, originality, and evidence**, ensuring the principle of integrity remains constant.

PART 4: Aim for Progress Not Perfection



The Goal: Appropriateness, Not Uniformity

Champion AI adoption by celebrating progress along a spectrum and by recognizing that **contextual variation is essential**. Uniformity is not the goal; discipline-specific discernment is.

Affirm Context, Not Conformity

Explicitly reinforce that **appropriateness, not uniformity**, is the higher aim. Celebrate examples that signal curiosity and conscience coexist when context leads the way.

Shift to Proof of Learning

Model reflective leadership: when a pilot stalls, ask what **insight emerged—not what initiative failed**. This shifts the culture from "proof of concept" to "**proof of learning**."

PART 5: Build Systems That Support Ethical Adaptation



The Aim: Adaptive Infrastructures

Innovation accelerates when experimentation is supported. Ensure that systems—budgeting, technology, staffing—**adapt to inquiry rather than constrain it**.

Three Key Areas of System Adaptation

- Negotiate **enterprise licenses** that protect privacy while enabling responsible access.
- Fund **instructional designers** fluent in AI-enhanced learning to serve as expert faculty partners.
- Develop **shared repositories** where syllabi, prompts, and reflections can evolve together (potentially through federations/shared services).

PART 6: Lead by Learning



The Stance: Sustain Inquiry

Presidents earn credibility by **modeling the same curiosity and discipline** they ask of faculty. Leading well requires learning continually.

The Human Imperative

*AI may streamline routine tasks, but it cannot reproduce discernment, empathy, or vision. The president's role is not to pronounce conclusions but to **sustain inquiry** that remains honest, ethical, and alive to context.*

Closing Reflection

Artificial intelligence is reshaping not only what students can produce but what educators must design—and what presidents must make possible. The task before senior leaders is to keep courage and care in deliberate dialogue by encouraging experimentation guided by the ethical guardrails co-created at your institution.

Presidents who chart this type of movement guide their universities to one of higher education's most coveted places—the one where innovation serves mission, where technology deepens understanding, and where humanity continues to define the measure of progress.