

Jason Altmire (00:04):

Hello again, and welcome to another edition of Career Education Report. I'm Jason Altmire, and we are going to talk today about artificial intelligence. And I can honestly say, and this podcast has really taken off, we have a very loyal listener base, and when I travel around the schools, people talk about issues that we should cover. And I can honestly say there's no issue that people ask more about having a podcast to talk about is artificial intelligence. And to bring that conversation forward today, we have Dr. Van Davis. He is the Chief Strategy Officer for the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies. And he co-authored what I think is one of the better papers that has been presented on the use of artificial intelligence in higher education, in particular, than anything I've seen. Dr. Davis, thank you for being with us.

Dr. Van Davis (01:02):

Oh, I'm happy to be with y'all and talking about this today.

Jason Altmire (01:05):

I mentioned your affiliation, WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, and WICHE is an acronym. Can you explain a little bit about the organization that you represent?

Dr. Van Davis (01:15):

Sure. So WICHE is the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and there's several of these congressionally created regional commissions for education, WICHE happens to focus on higher education in the western states. And WCET is a part of WICHE. We are a membership organization. We have a little over 400 members, colleges, universities, different educational technology organizations. And what we focus on is digital learning, and specifically we focus on the intersection between policy and practice. We are probably best known for our work on digital learning regulatory policy, particularly on the federal level, although we work on the state level and we also work on institutional policies and practices.

Jason Altmire (02:00):

And I think with regard to artificial intelligence, the unique research that you have done, because there's been so much written about the use by students in higher education and how they can misuse the technology or use it to their advantage, whatever it might be. But very little has been written or studied about institutional use of AI. And you, in the spring, through your organization, undertook a national survey to look at how and why post-secondary institutions use AI. Do they use it to support instruction and learning, what policies are in place to govern it, what are the barriers and so forth. What made you want to go forward with that research and what were some of the interesting findings?

Dr. Van Davis (02:48):

Well, we were interested in trying to get a better handle on what the institutional conversation around generative artificial intelligence is. When ChatGPT really blew up in the popular imagination back in November and December of 2022, the focus was initially on a lot of hand wringing that this somehow meant the end of certain types of assessments in higher education, the end of the college essay as we know it, the end of the high school essay as we know it, that cheating was going to be rampant amongst students and that higher ed would never be the same. We think that part of that is right, higher ed's

never going to be the same with this technology. But we were less concerned with this conversation around, "Oh my gosh, is the sky falling and what are we going to do about cheating students?" Because A, we don't think that students are going to necessarily use it to cheat as much as what folks are afraid of. But B, what we were really interested in are the policy conversations on campuses.

[\(03:53\)](#):

It's one thing for a faculty member here they are to think about artificial intelligence in their classroom and to develop classroom policies or to think about what is the pedagogical case for using generative AI. It's another thing though for institutions to really think about how this impacts their work as an institution, both on the classroom side and the non-academic side of the house. And what we see is that there's a number of related policy questions that institutions really need to grapple with, and we were curious to see if institutions were actually doing that. And what we found was that sadly they're not. We think that we're beginning to see institutions thinking about some of these bigger policy issues like accessibility, intellectual property, data security, and privacy, but we really wanted to get a handle on what does the institutional conversation around generative AI look like and sound like at schools.

Jason Altmire [\(04:50\)](#):

For those who are more interested in the methodology of how you went across this study, just for the validity, how many responses did you get? Was this a nationwide study? How did you pick the audience of folks who were going to participate?

Dr. Van Davis [\(05:06\)](#):

Sure. This was a nationwide study. We sent the request to participate out to all of the chief academic officers and chief digital learning officers at institutions throughout the United States, both two year and four year public and private institutions. And we got back a little over 600 responses, so we were pretty happy with the response rate. A pretty good mix of four year and two year institutions, an okay mix of public and private institutions, although we had more public institutions than private institutions participate. And predominantly institutions that were offering associate's degrees, baccalaureate degrees, and a few institutions that were R1 institutions offering master's and doctoral degrees as well. And we also had a really nice spread in terms of institutional size. We had small institutions, medium-sized institutions, and then large institutions as well. So we felt like that we got a pretty representative sample of what higher education in the United States looks like right now.

Jason Altmire [\(06:11\)](#):

I think the top line that most people would be interested in is just the utilization on the higher education side. We all know that students are using it in all type of ways, but what is the utilization rate among post-secondary institutions? What did you find relating to that?

Dr. Van Davis [\(06:31\)](#):

Well, what we found was that about 94% of the respondents reported that their institutions... In some way, generative AI, and we were specifically asking about generative AI, which are these large language models like ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, et cetera, that about 94% of the institutions indicated that somehow this was being used on their campuses.

[\(06:58\)](#):

What was interesting to us was not that that many institutions were reporting campus use, and in most cases, that use was scattered, it wasn't a deliberate institutional use of the technologies. But what we found that was really interesting was that there was 6% of the respondents said, "We're not doing it and we're not planning on doing it and we're not interested in it." And when we drilled down, what we saw was those were predominantly small private institutions, and we think that these were probably liberal arts and sciences colleges that carry that sort of niche of a small private liberal arts and sciences, high touch, non-digital learning on campus face-to-face learning that were probably the least interested in this. But the technology is overwhelmingly on our college and university campuses, it's just a question of how it's showing up and a question of the extent to which there are institutional policies that are being set around it.

Jason Altmire [\(08:03\)](#):

And so much has been focused upon the prevention of cheating, that aspect of it. But how many institutions, or what percentage of your respondents use AI to support instruction to support learning at the institution rather than just as a method to prevent cheating?

Dr. Van Davis [\(08:24\)](#):

Well, so a couple of interesting things there. One of the things that we found was that when we asked institutions either how they were using AI or how they planned on using AI, 56% of them said that they either were using it to detect plagiarism or we're planning to use it to detect plagiarism. And so what we really see is that there continues to be this focus on academic integrity. Hopefully, I think. We saw that there were a lot of schools though that were also thinking about other use cases for generative AI.

[\(09:00\)](#):

52% of them said that they were thinking about either they were using or thinking about using generative AI for editing. 44% talked about it in terms of content creation. 37% talked about it in terms of assessment and feedback. So this idea that there are some use cases around not only assessing student knowledge but providing more robust feedback to students around those assessments and preferably lower stake assessments. And then 34% said that they were interested in accessibility. And I want to put a pin in that and perhaps come back to that later and talk a little bit about some of the opportunities and challenges specifically around accessibility. And then some of the other use cases that we saw at institutions were research, primarily probably on the faculty side, personalized and adaptive learning, tutoring and virtual assistants. And then a few schools were thinking about game-based learning and a few institutions were thinking about data visualization and predictive learning. And then very, very few were thinking about proctor.

Jason Altmire [\(10:08\)](#):

I think part of the issue with institutions is because this is so new, there's no position within the leadership or within academia that has oversight over this, in rolling it out, in authorizing it or incentivizing it. What did you find with regard to institutions incentivizing faculty and administrators to take an interest in this and do training and development? And what type of staff at an institution of higher education would have oversight over this? Who should take the lead in an administrative capacity?

Dr. Van Davis ([10:48](#)):

I think who takes the lead in an administrative capacity really depends upon what the aspect is that the institution is looking like. If you're talking about generative AI in the classroom, in the academic space, that really should be the purview of academic affairs, provosts, college deans, department chairs really need to be involved in those conversations. If you're talking about some of the data security issues and the privacy issues, you really need to make sure that you're involving your chief information officer.

([11:19](#)):

What we recommend to our members is that they form task forces on their institutions that are representative of all of the stakeholders, faculty, staff, academic affairs. Students, accessibility officers, academic integrity officers, if your institution has one of those, certainly your CIO and your IT department and that all of those individuals need to be a part of, first of all, determining what policies are necessary on your campus and then crafting those policies and reviewing them continuously to make sure that they're appropriate for your environment and for the exponential changes in technology. I say this as a former faculty member and academic administrator, I think a lot of times when we craft policy at our institutions, we tend to do a set it and forget it approach. You get it done, and then you kind of put it in your policy manual in your faculty handbook or your student handbook, it goes on a shelf and you pull it off whenever you think that somebody's violating it, but you're not continuously revisiting to make sure that it's appropriate.

([12:29](#)):

One of our interviewees for this study, so in addition to the survey results, we also did a handful of interviews with representatives from different institutions and I love what one of them, talked about how policies need to be written in pencil now whenever it comes to generative AI. And so what we recommend is not only do you use a task force to set those policies, but you make sure that you have a continuous improvement cycle in place, that that task force is not setting and forgetting policy, but it's continuously reviewing it to make sure that those are still appropriate policies that match the technology and match the emerging use cases that your institution may be developing.

Jason Altmire ([13:14](#)):

You had a huge section in your report about the challenges, the barriers to institutions moving forward with a more strategic plan regarding AI. What are some of the significant challenges that schools face?

Dr. Van Davis ([13:30](#)):

Well, funding for one, really you need to have faculty professional development around generative AI in its pedagogical use cases as well as how you shouldn't use it. We've heard horror stories of faculty members that have used ChatGPT to try to figure out if their students were cheating and they get false positives. These technologies hallucinate all the time. The information that you get from them isn't always correct, and it is particularly inaccurate whenever you start asking it whether or not something has been generated from artificial intelligence or is human generated. So training is a really important aspect for institutions, but it comes at a cost, both economic cost as well as the human cost in terms of the hours that are necessary to create and conduct the training. So I think that's one of the challenges.

[\(14:24\)](#):

I think the rapidity at which the technology is evolving is a challenge. Folks think that they get a handle on it and then a month later things have completely changed. And so having somebody on your campus that's tasked with keeping up with what's going on is a challenge, particularly for institutions that already may be stretched thin in terms of their personnel workload.

[\(14:47\)](#):

One of the other challenges that we found was that institutions simply are not communicating within themselves. What happens on the academic side of the house is oftentimes not discussed on the administrative side of the house and vice versa. And that's another reason why we've been recommending to our institutions that they create task forces with all of the stakeholders present because you have to make sure that you're talking to all of the different units within an institution that are going to be impacted by these technologies, and particularly IT and academic affairs.

[\(15:21\)](#):

And I think that there is quite a bit of excitement amongst some faculty, there's also a lot of fear. Generative AI really is going to force us to rethink how we assess students and faculty members are experts in their subjects, they're not necessarily experts in assessment practices or pedagogical practices. I was a faculty member for a decade and an academic administrator, I came out of a R1 institution with my PhD. I received a day and a half of training on how to teach. I walked into the classroom, and really feel like I ought to track down those students that I had that first year and apologized to them because I didn't know how to teach, nobody had taught me how to do that.

[\(16:07\)](#):

And so especially when we start talking about assessment practices, I think one of our challenges is faculty don't know yet how to change assessment practices. That's one reason why the reaction amongst some faculty has been, "Fine, we're just going to go back to Blue Books." That's not a long-term sustainable strategy, but I understand the urge to do that if you don't know how else to assess your students and don't have that training to think about alternative assessments, especially authentic assessments and experiential assessments. So I think that those are some of the challenges.

[\(16:45\)](#):

I think another challenge that institutions are just starting to grapple with has to do with data security and privacy. We found that not nearly enough schools, were talking about data security. I'll pick on OpenAI, but ChatGPT and OpenAI, what you put into it gets used to train that model. Unless you go in and specifically change the settings, you're providing it with training data. Your data is not secure. It's one thing for me to put in a request for ChatGPT to create a rubric. It's another thing if I start trying to put in personally identifiable information, that's going to be insecure. And so I think that there's some challenges that institutions are facing around data security and privacy.

[\(17:32\)](#):

And then the other thing that I think is a challenge that schools are just beginning to grapple with is accessibility. These technologies have tremendous opportunities to improve accessibility on campus,

especially as we begin to develop better speech recognition. But by that same token, if you run some of these large language models, these generative AI models like ChatGPT through an accessibility checker, you find very quickly that they're not conducive to screen readers, that they're not conducive to many of the same accessibility concerns and needs that other digital learning on institutions are required to adhere to. And so I think trying to understand both the promise and the challenges around accessibility are also challenges that institutions are starting to realize are very significant.

Jason Altmire ([18:30](#)):

I don't want to leave this episode with a negative of outlining all of the hurdles and the burdens and the challenges and all the reasons why schools might be resistant to doing this, there are enormous benefits to pursuing AI in the classroom setting and in the educational setting. And I think the innovative educational leader can see that this can be a huge asset to institutions, to schools, and to teachers in the classroom. What do you see as the top benefits to implementing an AI strategy?

Dr. Van Davis ([19:04](#)):

Well, probably the most important benefit is everything that we are looking at in terms of economic forecasting and the impact that AI is going to have on labor indicates that what is going to matter increasingly for students, especially students that are going into traditional white collar fields in entry level positions is going to be that they need to know how to use generative AI. If they don't know how to use it, they're not going to find a job, period. And so I think that one of most profound benefits of having an institutional AI policy is making sure that you are setting your students up for success after they leave your institutions. If we want to see a more equitable society, we have to make sure that AI does not exacerbate current digital divides. And so I think that that is a huge boon for institutions and one of the most important use cases is just workforce preparation.

[\(20:01\)](#):

I think another use case though is that there are certain efficiencies that AI is poised to assist with that can free up your staff to spend more time focusing on student development and working independently with students. And then we also have this opportunity to personalize learning. We know that students are the most successful whenever you can personalize learning for them, whenever they have a stake and are interested in the learning, when you can present information to them in the terms and the manner in which they are going to learn the best, and that there is no one size instructional fit all. And so generative AI has the ability, I think, to really help us begin to personalize learning for students.

[\(20:48\)](#):

And then accessibility. There was a op-ed that was done in Inside Higher Ed earlier this year, a faculty member who is ADHD who talked about what a boon generative AI, in this case ChatGPT was for her to help her focus as she was doing work. And so I think that there's some real accessibility benefits as well for the technology if we can just take care of some of these other challenges. But what's going to matter at the end of the day is institutions that adopt an institutional AI policy are going to be better poised to support their students. Their students are going to be more successful. Successful students means that they're going to be able to do a better job of recruiting more students, and they'll be able to navigate the enrollment challenges that's facing higher education institutions right now.

Jason Altmire ([21:41](#)):

Our guest today has been Dr. Van Davis, chief Strategy Officer for WCET. Dr. Davis, if somebody wanted to learn more about this report or the work that you're doing, how would they find more about you?

Dr. Van Davis ([21:56](#)):

They can go to WCET's homepage, wcet.W-I-C-H-E.edu, wcet.wiche.edu. One of the banners on the page will link directly to the report. We also have an AI page that is linked to our homepage that has a link to the report, as well as a number of webcasts and blogs. And then one other shameless plug, for our members, we are working on an institutional policy toolkit. So if you're not a member of WCET, we would love to have you become a member, and you'll be able to access that institutional policy toolkit to help you create that institutional policy around generative AI.

Jason Altmire ([22:38](#)):

Dr. Van Davis, thank you for being with us.

Dr. Van Davis ([22:41](#)):

It's been my pleasure. I'm always excited to talk about this. This is fun stuff.

Jason Altmire ([22:47](#)):

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