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“Building an AI-Ready America: Higher Education in the Age of AI”

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OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you, Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me to testify today. My name is Dave Duke, Psy.D., and I serve as Chief Product Officer for McGraw Hill Higher Education. It is a privilege to appear before you to discuss *Building an AI-Ready America*. I appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to this important issue and the opportunity to share insights from McGraw Hill and the broader education technology industry.

My testimony will address:

1. Who is McGraw Hill today
2. The growing role of AI in higher education, including how students, faculty, and administrators are using AI today
3. AI's potential to expand access, reduce student costs, and personalize learning
4. The growing misalignment between how academic institutions are responding to AI and what the workforce now requires

WHO IS MCGRAW HILL TODAY

McGraw Hill is a leading global provider of education solutions, serving millions of learners across preK-12, higher education, and professional learning. We deliver high-quality instructional materials and personalized learning experiences to students in more than 12,000 school districts and 5,000 institutions of higher education. We partner with subject matter experts, including more than 50 Nobel Laureates, to develop world-class educational content designed with the highest academic rigor and proven to improve learning outcomes.

As our 138-year-old company enters a new chapter, as a leader in the development of AI-enabled education tools, earlier this year we welcomed technology executive Philip Moyer as our new Chief Executive Officer. Under his leadership, McGraw Hill is strengthening its commitment to advancing innovation in learning and the responsible integration of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, into educational environments. This leadership transition reflects our broader commitment to preparing students for a rapidly changing economy and workforce, where AI literacy and the effective use of emerging technologies are becoming increasingly important skills for success.

We have a front-row seat to the AI transformation underway in higher education and a responsibility to share the promise and the complexity of that transformation. I appear

before this Subcommittee today not to advocate for any single technology or commercial interest, but to offer what I hope will be a grounded, balanced, and candid account of where things stand, where they are going, and where the gaps in our national conversation remain uncomfortably large.

THE GROWING ROLE OF AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Artificial intelligence has transitioned from a subject of speculative conversation to an operational reality across institutions of higher education with a speed that has surprised almost everyone. Within a few short years after the introduction of large language model-based tools, AI is now embedded into the daily workflows of students, instructors, and administrators at institutions of every size and type. The reality is AI tools are quickly approaching necessity-level status for pedagogical success for students and faculty alike.

Despite the short timeframe, this is not a trend in the initial stages but a transition already in motion. Institutions are navigating this transition with widely varying levels of preparation, strategy, resources, and success.

The scale of AI tool adoption is significant. Our internal data and third-party research consistently show that the majority of college students in the United States now use generative AI tools for academic purposes. Faculty adoption is uneven but accelerating. Administrative functions like enrollment management, student advising, and financial aid processing are beginning to incorporate AI-driven tools. Virtually all major education infrastructure companies, including McGraw Hill, have integrated AI capabilities into our platforms at a pace that would have been unimaginable until recently.

This means AI is no longer a coming disruption to higher education. It is a present predicate to providing the best pathway for learning. The question before policymakers is not whether to prepare for it, but how to ensure the preparation is consistent, thoughtful, and, importantly, aligned with the nation's educational and economic interests.

How College Students Are Using AI

Students are using AI in ways that are both more nuanced and more consequential than popular narratives suggest. The common assumption is that students primarily use AI to reduce the demands of their academic work. That assumption is not entirely wrong, but it is incomplete.

Students are using AI as a study companion. They use it to explain difficult concepts, to generate practice problems, to summarize dense reading materials, and to receive instant

feedback on draft writing assignments. These capabilities can meaningfully level the playing field for several key subgroups of college students, including (1) those who did not benefit from rigorous secondary school education, (2) students to whom English is a second language, and (3) students who lack access to tutoring support and academic support services.

We observed more than 50 million generations across 2.3 million students using McGraw Hill's *AI Reader*, an embedded generative AI tool that supports active reading by allowing students to highlight passages for simplified explanations and comprehension checks, helping learners engage more deeply with the content and learn at their own pace. *Ask Sharpen* is an AI assistant inside McGraw Hill's popular study app, *Sharpen*. *Ask Sharpen* allows students to ask academic questions, generate personalized study help, and surface relevant study activities aligned with their coursework. Students are using it increasingly to support their unique study workflows and exam prep practices. We observed a 28.8% increase in *Ask Sharpen* prompts and active users were up 21.6%.

Students are also using AI to accelerate research, to code, to test their arguments, and to navigate bureaucratic processes they find confusing. At its best, AI is functioning as an always-available academic support tool that many institutions have never been able to provide to their students at scale.

And yes, students are also using AI to complete assignments they should be completing themselves, to generate text they submit as their own with no edits, and to shortcut cognitive processes that are the whole point of the assignment. This is a genuine problem that threatens to undermine confidence in the educational system on multiple levels. I will address it directly in a later section.

I would ask the Subcommittee to hold both truths simultaneously. The same tool that enables a non-traditional student to access academic support unavailable at her institution also enables a more traditional student to disengage from learning. The policy and institutional response have to be sophisticated enough to address both realities.

How Faculty and Instructors Are Using AI

Faculty adoption of AI is real, but uneven, and insufficiently supported by most institutions. As with many technological advancements in society, adoption is faster and more in-depth with younger populations such as students, and lags behind in older populations such as faculty members. We recommend the creation of an institutional AI framework that

provides clear guidance to faculty about how they should use AI to teach, engage students, and manage their classrooms.

There is a group of forward-looking faculty who are using AI to redesign their courses, rethinking assessments that can no longer function as intended in an AI-enabled world, developing new pedagogical approaches, and experimenting with AI as a teaching tool. These educators are doing important and innovative work, often with minimal institutional support, and limited time. Higher education institutions that figure out how to recognize and reward educators who are using AI to innovate will see more innovation than peer institutions who are indifferent to how AI evolves on their campus.

A much larger segment of faculty are in a reactive posture, adapting existing practices, updating honor codes, deploying detection methods of questionable reliability, and trying to hold the line on academic standards while the ground shifts beneath them. This is an understandable response, but it is not a sustainable one.

A third group has not yet substantively engaged. Their courses continue largely as before, either by choice or by institutional inertia.

Across all three groups, what is most notably absent is a coherent institutional framework. Faculty are making individual decisions in a policy vacuum. They are asked to navigate questions of academic integrity, pedagogical appropriateness, and professional ethics without clear guidance, adequate professional development, or the time required to think through the implications carefully.

Faculty are also beginning to use AI tools to manage the administrative dimensions of teaching. Things like creating rubrics, drafting supplemental course materials, providing preliminary feedback on student work, and managing communications. These applications carry their own risks and require their own ethical frameworks. The conversation within the faculty community about where AI assistance ends and faculty professional judgment must begin is ongoing and, in many institutions, has just started.

How Institutional Administrators Are Using AI

Administrators are exploring AI with interest, and in many cases, are moving meaningfully faster than the academic side of the house.

Enrollment management offices are among the most active early adopters, using AI-driven analytics to identify prospective students, model financial aid packages, and predict enrollment. Student success and retention functions are deploying AI tools to identify at-

risk students earlier and intervene more effectively. Advising offices are beginning to integrate AI-assisted tools that can handle routine information queries, freeing human advisors to focus on higher-complexity student needs.

Financial and operational functions like facilities management, procurement, and institutional research are finding AI-enabled efficiencies that have real favorable budget implications. Policymakers have long been concerned with higher education institutions where growth in administrative jobs grow much faster than teaching positions, and AI is poised to potentially alter that equation going forward. At a moment when many institutions face serious financial pressure, this is not a trivial consideration for them.

What is less developed in most institutions is the governance infrastructure to match these adoption levels. Questions about data privacy, student consent, algorithmic bias, and institutional liability are navigated on an ad hoc basis in most places. The gap between the pace of administrative AI adoption and the pace of thoughtful governance is a legitimate concern. We recommend creating guidance for AI data governance and best practices related to administrative use cases at institutions of higher education to protect student data and privacy, while encouraging the efficiency benefits of AI.

There are also significant variations in AI readiness that deserve explicit attention. Well-organized research universities have advantages in AI adoption that smaller regional and community colleges do not. If the goal is to ensure that AI benefits in higher education are broadly shared, considerations regarding how to enable all types and sizes of institutions should be considered.

HOW AI WILL EXPAND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Access to higher education in the United States has always been shaped by geography, economics, and the availability of support structures. AI has demonstrated potential to address each of these dimensions, but the realization of this potential will require investment and intentional design.

The most direct access expansion comes through AI-enabled tutoring and academic support. A student at a community college in a rural county who cannot afford private tutoring and whose institution cannot staff adequate academic support services can, through the use of AI, access a sophisticated, responsive, always-available academic support tool at no or low cost. This support is critical, especially for students with no other option.

AI can also meaningfully expand access for adult learners. These students often face the challenges of time, scheduling, and competing life demands that traditional educational structures were not designed to accommodate. AI-enabled flexibility of pacing, feedback, and support could make completion meaningfully more achievable for this population. This is not a peripheral concern. Given the more than 30 million US adults who have "some college but no degree," this is a significant national workforce challenge and economic opportunity.

Longer-term, AI has the ability to be a more important educational impact than the invention of the Internet has been. We envision a future in which the where, when, how, and what of educational opportunities are available to our citizens are more directly in their control than ever before.

HOW AI WILL REDUCE COSTS

Conversations on this topic tend to be overly optimistic or excessively cautious.

AI will reduce certain costs in higher education. The operational efficiencies in administrative functions are promising and measurable. AI-assisted content development and assessment design can reduce the cost of acquiring or producing high-quality educational materials. AI-enabled early intervention in student success can reduce the cost (human and financial) of students who struggle, and ultimately leave, without completing their degrees.

Cost reduction in higher education is a complex matter, and there are several important qualifications that intellectual honesty requires me to offer.

First, the upfront investment in AI infrastructure (technology, people training, data governance, change management) is not small. Some institutions are better positioned to make this investment than others.

Second, some of the costs that AI might reduce are costs associated with human connection, mentorship, and judgment that are valuable in educational contexts. Efficient is not always better in education (and particularly learning). Policymakers should be attentive to the difference between cost reductions that represent good efficiency (more time for teachers to interact with students) and cost reductions that represent the degradation of educational quality.

Third, generative AI has a persistent and variable cost called "compute," or the processing power needed to generate outputs. Compute costs are felt by every individual, every

institution, and every state. When AI "does work," that work costs someone-somewhere-something. The value and cost reduction driven by AI must be understood in the context of the compute costs, which are only now being observed as usage scales. Increasing compute costs could limit the cost reduction impact if not managed. In particular, energy costs to power and cool computing power threaten to be massive new expenses that are not part of higher education's current budget.

HOW AI WILL INCREASE PERSONALIZED LEARNING AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES

Personalized learning historically meant adaptive systems that could adjust the difficulty and sequence of content based on student performance. These systems have demonstrated measurable learning gains over many years of research. They work because they address a real problem. Traditional instruction delivers content at a uniform pace that is too fast for some students and too slow for others and provides feedback on a schedule that is rarely as immediate as learning requires.

Machine learning (ML) may not generate flashy headlines, but it's the engine that powers many of the most effective personalized learning experiences in education. For students tackling subjects like math, where concepts build sequentially and mastery is critical, ML offers a proven and practical way to make learning more adaptive, efficient, and confidence-building.

At its core, ML is about teaching computers to recognize patterns in data and use those patterns to make predictions. Unlike traditional software, which follows explicit rules, ML systems learn from experience. Every interaction, every student response, hesitation, or error becomes part of the system's ability to refine future recommendations.

Generative AI adds dimensions that these earlier adaptive systems did not have like natural language interaction, the ability to explain concepts multiple ways, and the capacity to respond to the specific confusion a specific student is experiencing rather than routing them through a pre-determined content sequence. The early evidence of AI-enabled tutoring is promising. It is not yet definitive at scale, but the theoretical mechanisms are sound and the practical results in early implementations are encouraging.

The long-term success of effective and trusted personalized learning experiences requires the ongoing protection of copyrighted content and intellectual property. McGraw Hill and others in our industry continually invest significant sums in developing and maintaining content and other intellectual property that are embedded in our instructional materials. It's essential that US copyright law maintains the necessary protections against

unauthorized use of that content, in order to encourage continued investment and innovation by providers of instructional materials. Additionally, the combination of high-quality, vetted content and the power of generative AI is what creates the value and impact to the learning process. If we erode the quality of the inputs to generative AI, we degrade the trust in the education it supports.

We recently saw this impact in action at Rowan College at Burlington County in New Jersey, where our *Sharpen* study app dramatically improved exam scores and overall course grades. Students studying microeconomics were given the choice to use *Sharpen* or not. Approximately 60% of students chose to use it. At the end of the course, the performance of both groups (those who used *Sharpen* and those who did not) was compared. For *Sharpen* users, in-class quiz performance was 27% higher, final exam scores were 47% higher, and overall course grades were 21% higher. World class content plus powerful AI capabilities, designed for how students learn, can be a powerfully impactful combination.

THE WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT GAP AND THE PROFICIENCY DILEMMA

The American labor market has moved. Employers across all major sectors now expect AI proficiency from college graduates. They are not only expecting basic AI fluency (although that is important), they are expecting the ability to work with AI tools productively, critically, and responsibly, within a specific skill domain. This is not a future expectation. It now shows up in job descriptions for entry level jobs all over the country.

Many institutions are not preparing their graduates for this expectation. The response has been fragmented, inconsistent, and in some cases avoidant. Graduates have used AI extensively but often have not been taught how to use it professionally, with the ability to demonstrate proficiency in creating a work product. This is a gap between what the education institution is producing and what the economy requires, and it is growing.

I call this the “proficiency dilemma,” and it has two sides that are in tension.

On one side, students are using AI constantly. They are developing practical fluency through use. However, fluency through unsupervised use is not the same as cultivated professional competency. A student who has learned to use AI to avoid the productive struggle of thinking through a hard problem has not developed judgment, the capacity to think critically, or the domain expertise that AI will require of them as a professional. They have learned to produce outputs without developing the capability to evaluate them. This is a serious deficit.

On the other side, academic institutions that respond to AI adoption primarily through restriction and detection are producing graduates who have been told that AI is something to be managed and avoided, rather than something to be understood and used responsibly. These graduates will enter a workforce that expects them to embrace AI technology, and to know how to enable themselves with AI.

The proficiency dilemma is this: the right answer is neither unrestricted use nor aggressive restriction. It is intentional, structured, pedagogically sophisticated integration of AI into the curriculum, one that teaches students not only how to use these tools but when, why, and with what critical judgment. Very few institutions are doing this well. And although some groups have established AI use frameworks (e.g., The US Air Force Academy), there is not a consistent and agreed-upon national standard, expectation, or framework.

We recommend the Subcommittee treat AI proficiency as a core educational competency, just like information literacy, quantitative reasoning, or financial literacy. Not treating it like a single course or a single department's responsibility but treating it like an institution-wide commitment to ensuring graduates can navigate and succeed in an AI-influenced economy.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Members of the Subcommittee, the through line of my testimony is that AI in higher education is not a problem to be solved or a threat to be neutralized. It is a profound and accelerating transformation that requires attention, investment, and thoughtful governance that transformations of this magnitude demand.

The institutions that will serve their students best in the years ahead are those that approach AI with clarity, curiosity, and institutional seriousness; not those that move fastest, and not those that resist longest, but those that invest in understanding it deeply and deploying it responsibly in service of student learning.

The federal government has a meaningful role to play in ensuring our great higher education institutions are not left behind, in supporting research that will tell us what works and what doesn't, in providing the policy frameworks that allow institutions to navigate AI governance with confidence, and in signaling that AI proficiency is a national educational priority.

McGraw Hill appreciates the opportunity to testify today on the role of artificial intelligence in higher education. We share the Subcommittee's commitment to expanding meaningful learning opportunities that prepare students to succeed in an increasingly AI-ready workforce. We believe thoughtful policy can help ensure these technologies are

implemented responsibly and in ways that strengthen teaching, learning, and workforce readiness.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee to advance policies that encourage responsible innovation, support educators and learners, and help create pathways to real-world opportunities for the next generation of American workers. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome your questions.