

Opening Statement of Rep. Burgess Owens (R-UT)
Education and Workforce Committee
Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee
Building an AI-Ready America: Higher Education in the Age of AI
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(As prepared for delivery)

In just a few years, AI use has grown dramatically across every segment of campus life. Students are using it to study, write, and problem-solve. Faculty are using it to redesign courses and rethink instruction, and administrators are using it to reduce paperwork burdens. This is not a passing trend—it is a seismic shift in how learning happens and how institutions operate.

"This shift brings extraordinary opportunities. AI can personalize instruction in ways that a single instructor teaching many students simply cannot do. It can identify students who are struggling before they fall behind. It can reduce the administrative burdens that consume faculty and staff time, freeing them to focus on students.

AI can also help better align academic programs with the knowledge and skills employers need. The students in classrooms today will need to understand not only how to use AI, but also how to evaluate it critically, recognize its limitations, and exercise the kind of judgment that

automation cannot replace.

At the same time, the challenges of AI are significant. If students can produce polished work without genuine learning, the value of a credential is diminished for employers, institutions, and students. Academic integrity frameworks built for a previous era are under significant strain, and institutions are still working out how to respond. Concerns about bias, data privacy, and cybersecurity remain unresolved. And many educators are rightly asking what widespread use of AI could mean for foundational skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving.

The right response is neither knee-jerk prohibition, nor careless adoption. It is thoughtful leadership, grounded in a commitment to student success. Some institutions are already demonstrating what that looks like with AI literacy initiatives, faculty development programs, and partnerships with employers designed around evolving workforce needs.

Our global competitors are investing heavily in AI and integrating it into their educational systems. Employers are building their operations around it. Higher education has both the opportunity and the obligation to help lead this transition rather than simply endure it.

Today's hearing gives us an opportunity to examine how higher education can rise to this challenge, uphold the core mission of higher education, and ensure students are prepared to succeed in an AI-driven world.