



DISTANCE LEARNING & STUDENT SERVICES NEWS

TOP NEWS

Florida Sets New Rules for How Students, Teachers Can Use AI. Here's What to Know.

“The Florida Board of Education approved new, sweeping rules regulating the use of artificial intelligence in Florida’s public schools, colleges and universities — for students and teachers — at its meeting on September 16. [The rules are meant to safeguard against possible harms of AI use in education](#), such as social harms, students outsourcing their own thinking to machines, privacy and more.”



“Perhaps the most important new rule is a requirement for schools to allow parents who want to limit their child’s access to AI to opt out if the school plans to have students directly use an AI tool. The rule doesn’t stop at just giving them that option; it also requires parents who want their child to access the tool to opt in...” (Source: Miami Herald)

Humanities Degrees Hit Their Lowest Numbers in Decades

“Students graduating with humanities bachelor’s degrees have hit their lowest numbers in decades — with further declines potentially on the horizon, according to an analysis released on September 8 by the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. [U.S. colleges awarded 164,847 undergraduate humanities degrees in 2025](#). That’s the smallest number since 1991 and nearly a third below 2012 levels, the most recent peak, according to the academy...” (Source: Higher Ed Dive)



Microsoft Report Highlights Trends in K–12 AI Adoption

“Artificial Intelligence use in schools continues to be hotly debated, but there’s no doubt it’s widely used: About 9 in 10 students, educators and education leaders say they’ve already used AI for school. That comes from Microsoft’s third annual AI in Education Special Report, which examines how K–12 districts and higher education institutions are adopting and using AI. The report consolidates survey results from more than 3,000 instructors, education leaders and students in K–12 and higher education environments around the world. [The findings go beyond who is using AI in education to explore how tools are being used and their effectiveness in the classroom.](#) A key takeaway: Students and educators want to use AI, but they are asking for more support to do so.”

(Source: EdTech Magazine)





DLSS UPDATES

FL-IDN's Latest Webinar Highlighted Metrics and ROI That Matter

Last week, on September 15, FL-IDN hosted a webinar, “Making Instructional Design Visible: Metrics and ROI That Matter.” In the age of AI and growing fiscal pressures in higher education, instructional design teams face increased scrutiny to demonstrate their impact. This session offered a practical framework for using KPIs, evaluation tools, and ROI measures to make that impact visible across student experience, teaching effectiveness, course quality, stakeholder satisfaction, and digital accessibility. Participants explored strategies for connecting design work to institutional priorities, strengthening accountability, and supporting continuous improvement. Participants left with adaptable tools for communicating the value of instructional design in clear, measurable terms.

Rae Mancilla and Anne Doring (University of Pittsburgh) were our guest speakers.

- [Watch the recording from the FL-IDN webinar on September 15.](#)
- [View slides from the presentation on September 15.](#)

Resource Spotlight: WCET and SAN Policy Tracker

Tired of trying to track federal regulations across dozens of tabs?

Check out the WCET & SAN Policy Tracker — [a centralized resource for higher education digital learning policy](#). The Tracker is maintained by the policy experts at WCET and SAN; this tool breaks down executive orders, Department of Education rules, judicial actions, and statutes into bite-sized summaries complete with actionable compliance steps and timeline dates.

Explore the Policy Tracker to simplify your institutional compliance planning.

The most recent additions to the Tracker include:

- AIM (Accreditation) proposed federal regulations released August 20, 2026, with public comments accepted through September 21, 2026.
- Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) proposed regulations addressing discretionary grant opportunities released August 24, 2026, with public comments accepted through September 23, 2026.

USF Faculty Secure \$1.2M NSF Grant to Advance Quantum-Secure, AI-Enabled Wireless Networks

“Wireless connectivity now underpins almost every part of daily life — which is why University of South Florida researchers say future quantum-resistant and AI-enabled security technology is needed to protect the future generation of networks.

[Recognizing the growing urgency of securing wireless networks, the U.S. National Science Foundation granted a \\$1.2 million collaborative research project](#) between USF, Purdue University, and the University of Texas at Dallas, of which USF is receiving \$559,000 over three years.

Together, the three institutions are tackling different but complementary pieces of the same research efforts. The project, titled ‘Quantum-Ready and AI-Enabled by Design: Resilient and Deployable Next-Gen Cellular Networks,’ brings together researchers with expertise in cybersecurity, post-quantum cryptography, artificial intelligence, and wireless systems.” (Source: USF News)

This University Built an AI Curriculum Before ChatGPT. Now It Wants to Help Other Schools Do the Same

“Ethan Pecora has a team of 15 specialized artificial intelligence agents assisting him with his work. That includes helping to manage his calendar and various tasks related to the mental wellness app he’s building. Also, his schoolwork. Pecora’s setup may sound like that of a tech startup. But he’s actually a senior at the University of Florida, studying business and communications. ‘Some people call it a second brain,’ he told CNN about his swarm of AI agents, but he said he doesn’t like that term because ‘it seems a little dystopian.’

The University of Florida has been incorporating AI into its curriculum since 2022, before ChatGPT’s arrival, thanks in part to investments from chipmaking giant Nvidia. [The university said it aims to teach students how to apply the tech across all disciplines professionally and in their coursework](#), not just technical ones. Students have used AI to train chatbots to assist them on exams and catalogue dance moves to help the dancers protect their intellectual property.” (Source: CNN)



UP NEXT

FL-IDN's Upcoming Webinar Will Explore Leveraging AI to Strengthen Practice

Next month, on October 13, FL-IDN will host a webinar, “Evidence-Informed Instructional Design: Leveraging AI to Strengthen Practice.” Instructional design is often described as both an art and a science; however, in practice, many design decisions are influenced more by intuition, past experience, or trends than by rigorous evidence. This webinar explores what it means to approach instructional design as a science by grounding decisions in empirical research and systematic inquiry. Participants will examine the role of evidence in instructional design, including how to distinguish between scientific and anecdotal evidence and how each informs practice. The session will also introduce practical strategies for using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to efficiently locate, synthesize, and critically appraise research to support instructional decisions. In this session, Dr. Efren will integrate evidence-informed approaches with AI capabilities, helping instructional designers to enhance the quality, effectiveness, and credibility of their work while making more transparent and defensible design choices.

Efren de la Mora Velasco (University of Central Florida) will be our guest speaker.

- October 13, 2026
- 2:00 – 2:50 PM (ET)
- [Registration for the FL-IDN webinar on October 13 is free.](#)

The recordings and other resources related to these webinars will be sent to the FL-IDN and MCDLSS listservs as soon as they are made available.

WCET's Upcoming "Closer Conversation" Will Bust Myths of Online Learning in Higher Education

Tomorrow, on September 25, WCET will host an online event, "Busting the Myths of Online Learning in Higher Education." Despite decades of growth, innovation, and research in digital learning, persistent misperceptions continue to shape how online education is viewed, discussed, and supported. Some of these beliefs reflect outdated experiences with online learning or the experience of remote learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. While others point to legitimate questions about quality, engagement, access, and student success.

This interactive Closer Conversation will discuss some of the most enduring myths about online learning and how preliminary research supported by WCET debunks these myths.

Together, participants will discuss how myths influence institutional decisions, faculty practices, student experiences, and the future of digital learning.

Tanya Joosten (Founder and Executive Director, National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements) will be our discussion leader.

- September 25, 2026
- 2:00 – 3:00 PM (ET)
- [Registration for the WCET webinar on September 25 is free.](#)

National Events on Our Radar

- EDUCAUSE Annual Conference 2026 (Denver, CO): September 29 – October 2, 2026
- Convergence: Credential Innovation in Higher Education (Arlington, VA): October 13 – 15, 2026
- EDUCAUSE Annual Conference 2026 (Online): October 14 – 15, 2026
- WCET Annual Conference (Minneapolis, MN): October 14 – 16, 2026
- Gartner IT Symposium/Xpo (Orlando, FL): October 19 – 22, 2026
- EdgeCon Autumn (Montclair, NJ): October 22, 2026
- Internet2 Technology Exchange (Minneapolis, MN): October 26 – 30, 2026
- QM Connect (Jacksonville, FL): October 26 – 28, 2026
- SC EdTech Conference (Myrtle Beach, SC): October 27 – 30, 2026

29th Annual Accessing Higher Ground: Accessible Media, Web & Technology Conference

Accessing Higher Ground focuses on the implementation and benefits of:

- Accessible media, Universal Design and Assistive Technology in the university, business and public setting;
- Legal and policy issues, including ADA and 508 compliance;
- The creation of accessible media and information resources, including Web pages and library resources.

For institutions of Higher Education:

- There is a strong focus on campus accommodation and policies, alternate format production, Universal Design, and curriculum accessibility.

This conference is intended for:

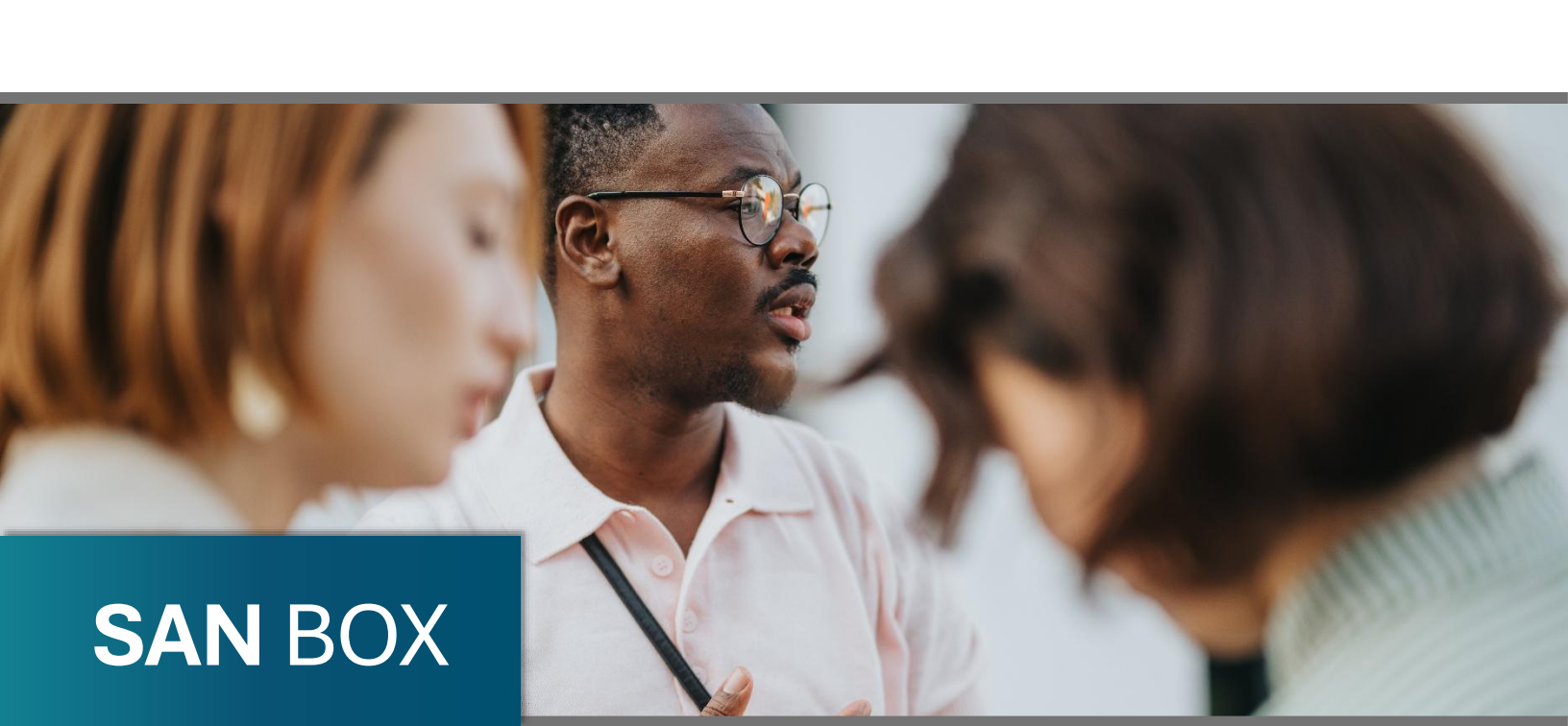
- Individuals who need to design or provide accessible Web, media, information resources and technology in the academic and business environment;
- Faculty and administrators interested in ADA & Section 508 compliance;
- Faculty and other professionals interested in incorporating Universal Design content or UDL into curriculum;
- Faculty and other professionals who wish to ensure that their curriculum is accessible.

Highlights of the 2026 program include:

- [Beyond VPATs: Accessibility Roadmaps and Vendor Maturity in the Title II Era](#)
- [From Compliance to Culture: Scaling Accessibility in Brightspace & Canvas](#)
- [What Is Actually on Your Website? Discovery, Inventory, and First Steps](#)
- [Using AI Without Making Things Worse: A Practical Accessibility Approach](#)

Registration Information:

- November 16-20, 2026
- In-Person or Virtual
- Hilton Denver City Center, Denver, CO
- [Register for the Accessing Higher Ground Conference online.](#)



SAN BOX

Florida State Authorization Network Listserv

FLVC has launched the Florida State Authorization Network Listserv to help institutional contacts stay informed with timely updates, alerts, and developments related to state authorization. We also encourage you to use this Listserv to ask questions, share resources, and exchange best practices with your colleagues across the state. As a reminder, the Florida Virtual Campus provides an annual group membership to the State Authorization Network (SAN) for all Florida College System (FCS) and State University System (SUS) institutions.

- [SAN Member Portal Access](#)
- **Username:** Florida Virtual Campus
- **Password:** SANhelps1819

Save the Date: Foundations of State Authorization Series

SAN will host a three-part “Foundations of State Authorization” webinar series in November. Each 90-minute session will run from 1:30 – 3:00 PM (ET). Attend all three sessions and receive a complimentary copy of the new *SAN Blue Book; State Authorization of Colleges and Universities: A Handbook for Institutions and Agencies, Third Edition!*

FLVC will send out registration details once they become available.

- November 3: Principles of Out-of-State Activity Compliance
- November 4: Management and Implementation of Compliance Requirements
- November 5: Key Stakeholders



ARTICLE DIGESTS

What a Faculty-Student Collaboration Learned Building an AI Tutor for College Math

“Crenshaw began building the tool in ChatGPT, but she found it struggled with inconsistency in its answers. The learning assistant would work perfectly on one example, then break down on the next one, even when the examples were nearly identical. ‘One of the worst things I could do was to present this new tool to students and then have it give the wrong answer,’ says Crenshaw.

Initially, she tried to solve this by writing and rewriting the prompts, but when Escalante looked at her work, he pointed out that the AI was behaving unpredictably because it was getting lost in multiple sets of instructions. Instead of a prompt that delivered all instructions at the same time, he explained, [they needed to build a modular system that sent different instructions according to how the conversation was moving.](#)

Crenshaw says her student ‘gave me homework that week.’ He had her transfer her work off the ChatGPT platform and instead use OpenAI’s API to build their own platform. Then the pair sat down and used pencil and paper to block out exactly what they were trying to do.

Ultimately, they built an architecture for the instructions that began with a foundational layer and then routed student requests into the appropriate instructional mode. For example, in different pathways called worked example, guided practice, and error analysis, the learning assistant offers three levels of support so students can seek help in different ways.”

(Source: Every Learner Everywhere)

What Could Brain-Computer Interfaces Mean for Students with Disabilities?

“Picture this: A college student sits at their desk, staring at a cursor blinking on a blank document, and suddenly, words start appearing on the screen — without the student touching the keyboard. It’s not science fiction; it’s happening now with the use of brain-computer interface technology, which interprets electrical brain activity through an EEG headset or an implanted chip and sends those signals to a connected computer — or in this case, a word processor.

For students with ALS, severe cerebral palsy or spinal cord injuries, [BCI could eventually replace or augment assistive tools such as eye-tracking software and switch controls](#), offering a faster, more intuitive way to navigate technology, compose written work and participate in class.”

(Source: EdTech Magazine)

Artificial Intelligence as a Pedagogical Tool in Higher Education: Enhancing Reflection and Formative Assessment

“The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has generated both enthusiasm and apprehension among educators. This article argues that AI can serve as an adaptive pedagogical partner, enhancing formative assessment, reflection, and metacognitive learning. Through illustrative examples, the study demonstrates how AI can provide individualized feedback and foster deeper conceptual understanding. [The discussion emphasizes the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI integration, positioning it as a catalyst for reflective and responsible learning practices](#). The article concludes that AI, when employed intentionally, can amplify human instruction and promote the development of digitally literate, critically engaged learners.”

(Source: Faculty Focus)

AI Adoption in the Workplace Accelerates, but Trust Gap Remains

“As employees increasingly use AI tools, many organizations face a persisting challenge: building the trust needed to sustain adoption.

A new Pulse of the Workforce Special Topic Report published by Idealis and CivicScience [found that while AI adoption is accelerating across the U.S. workforce, confidence is not growing at the same pace](#).

The report points to a central tension: AI is becoming common at work before many organizations have built the policies, training, and leadership practices employees need to use it with confidence.”

(Source: Campus Technology)

How Campus IT Leaders Can Innovate Despite AI Pushback

“Most colleges and universities are asking IT and academic technology leaders to integrate artificial intelligence tools across campus. But that job may be easier said than done, as negative sentiment toward generative AI technology is growing, particularly among college-aged Americans.

A recent Gallup survey found that excitement about AI among U.S. 14- to 29-year-olds has dropped 14 percentage points since 2025, to 22 percent. Hopefulness has fallen 9 points, to 18 percent, and anger has increased 9 points, to 31 percent. Anxiety remained unchanged, at 42 percent.

As students and other members of the campus community voice increasing skepticism about AI, IT leaders must find practical ways to innovate with the technology without ostracizing their campus communities.

‘Skepticism should not be treated as resistance; it often identifies genuine concerns that responsible implementation needs to address,’ says Jean-Francois Coget, dean of the College of Business at Sacramento State University. ‘Trust must be earned through transparency, participation and evidence. [Institutions should explain what tools are being used, how information is protected, where AI is permitted and where it is not, and who remains accountable for the outcome.](#) Faculty, staff and students should also have meaningful opportunities to question proposed uses and help shape institutional practices.’”

(Source: EdTech Magazine)

Teaching With Humanity: What Students Need Most in the AI Era

“We have to talk about what it’s going to mean, in an increasingly AI-saturated landscape, to teach without AI. Because one thing it won’t be is what we’re used to.

As we know, many people have serious concerns about the rapid spread of this new technology through our educational spaces. Some cite the wide array of dangers (environmental, economic, cognitive, democratic, etc.) it poses; others are skeptical of the wealthy and unregulated corporations designing and aggressively disseminating AI; still others simply note that there’s a lot we don’t know about this technology, and that we need to approach it with caution rather than a rush to implement. Altogether, many of us are saying — at the very least — *slow down*.

This is an uphill battle, perhaps, and one that might take a while.

In the meantime, though, I’m arguing that we need to do something that sounds simple but isn’t: [we need to learn how to teach without AI](#). And the reason that this isn’t simple is because teaching without AI means — *has to mean* — something different from what it used to mean back when this tech was unavailable.”

(Source: Faculty Focus)



FUN STUFF

Movie Must-See: The Weight

[“In Oregon in 1933, Samuel Murphy is torn from his daughter and sent to a brutal work camp. Warden Clancy tempts him with early release if he smuggles gold through deadly wilderness, but betrayal festers within the crew, and Murphy questions how far he'll go to see his child again.”](#) Russell Crowe and Ethan Hawke. In theaters now.

(Source: Rotten Tomatoes)



Spine-Benders: Monthly Picks for September 2026

“With autumn on the way, there is no better time to update your bookshelf and get ready for cozy weather with a cozy book. [Our September Picks bring you magic, mystery, music and more.](#)”

(Source: Barnes & Noble)



You Gotta Try It: Mad Dogs and Englishmen

“Tucked away in South Tampa, [Mad Dogs and Englishmen](#) has been serving up a fun mix of British and American pub fare since 1991. With cozy indoor rooms, a bright conservatory, and a dog-friendly patio, it’s the perfect spot to relax with friends. Stop by on trivia nights, music bingo, or bar tastings to catch the place at its most lively.”

(Source: Visit Tampa Bay; Mad Dogs and Englishmen)



You Gotta Go: Rosemary Beach

“Teeming with cobblestone streets, winding paths and late lunches al fresco, it’s no wonder Rosemary Beach was named one of “America’s Most Romantic Small Towns.” Combining an architectural style reminiscent of the Dutch West Indies with coastal joie de vivre, this beach neighborhood is a breath of fresh, salty air. [From welcoming patios to romantic courtyards, beach homes to a boutique hotel, every detail of Rosemary Beach is designed with wanderers in mind.](#) And with everything just a short walk from the town center, adventure is always close at hand.”

(Source: Visit South Walton; Rosemary Beach POA)

