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Buyer's Guide

Aligning With Academic Goals: A Higher Ed Leader's Guide to Responsible AI



Challenge

AI use is rising faster than anyone could have predicted, but most of it happens outside institutional systems, creating blind spots that drive up risk, workload, and cost.

Solution

Campuses can transform this new reality into opportunity by delivering responsible vetted AI tools, scaling personalized academic support, identifying at-risk students for early intervention, lowering DFW rates, boosting outcomes, and ensuring stronger faculty efficiency without requiring additional staffing.

An Academic Reality Check

Higher education is **experiencing a profound shift** in how students learn, and institutions are struggling to keep pace. AI is already embedded in daily academic behavior.



80% of higher ed professionals and students use generative AI tools*



Student usage has doubled since 2023*



Instructor usage has increased sixfold*

With rising DFW rates (students who drop, fail, or withdraw from a course), enrollment pressures, and growing expectations for personalized support, the gap between what students need and what institutions can support has never been wider.

Why this matters now: AI is reshaping learning, whether institutions are ready or not. Those who lead on AI will define the academic, operational, and competitive standards of the next decade, while those who react late will be forced to adapt to models set by others.

Source:

*Tyton Partners Time for Class Survey March 2025

How to Choose the Right AI Solution

Without the proper guidelines, AI tools can introduce inaccurate content, overwhelm faculty, undermine academic integrity, and worsen student outcomes. Here are the qualities that define a truly effective Higher Education AI solution.

01

Trustworthy, Vetted Academic Content

AI cannot support learning without trustworthy inputs. Institutions need a solution grounded in **high-quality, curriculum-aligned content** across key course areas.

02

Transparent and Responsible AI Guardrails

The right solution must make AI use **visible, explainable, and aligned with institutional expectations** — not a black box. Ultimately, effective guardrails keep AI academically focused, preventing off-topic or non-educational use that detracts from learning.

03

Institutional Data Protection and Privacy

The solution must **protect institutional, faculty, and student data**, with clear ownership, strict controls, and no unauthorized external use.

04

Meaningful Learning Intelligence

Most tools focus on activity and surface clicks or login data. Institutions need **real-time insight** into comprehension, risk, and learning patterns.

05

Scalable Support Without Adding Staff

Institutions cannot hire their way out of rising student needs. AI must **extend the reach of tutoring, advising, first-year programs, and faculty**. AI should relieve workload, not add to it.

06

Ability to Incorporate Institutional Content

A true institutional solution **adapts to local context**, not the other way around. This allows AI to strengthen existing academic culture rather than replace it.

07

Multi-Audience Value

The right AI platform should create value across the institution:

- **Students:** Accurate, tailored study support anytime, anywhere
- **Faculty:** Insight into learning gaps and a solution they can trust
- **Tutoring & Advising:** Scalable reinforcement and personalized support
- **Administrators:** Meaningful early-risk data and a responsible solution that improves student outcomes

08

Fast, Low-Lift Implementation

To be feasible, the solution must deploy quickly, work seamlessly across existing systems, and require minimal course redesign.

09

Dedicated Implementation & Ongoing Support

Institutions should consider the level of customer experience and on-campus support provided by an AI partner. The right solution includes **dedicated representatives who engage directly with campus teams**, support implementation, and remain involved beyond initial deployment to ensure long-term success.

A Clear Answer to the Most Urgent AI Challenges in Higher Education

Institutions must be able to **respond to these considerations quickly and effectively or risk falling behind**. Students rely heavily on AI, but institutions have limited visibility and inconsistent guardrails. At the same time, support services are overstretched, faculty lack insight into early learning gaps, and pressure to improve retention and DFW rates continues to rise.

The result is a widening disconnect between how students are actually learning and what campuses are equipped to support.

Sharpen Advantage directly addresses the core institutional needs of this moment by providing:



Ask Sharpen (AI with Guardrails): Replaces risky external AI with vetted, course-aligned answers from Sharpen and your institution and clearly identifies unverified LLM content.



Adaptive Study Activities: Delivers personalized quizzes, flashcards, and videos that boost comprehension without adding faculty workload.



Instructor Playlists: Lets faculty push targeted study support directly to students' devices.



Early Warning Signs: Surfaces real-time learning gaps and at-risk students in your Radar dashboard weeks before major assessments.



Unified Support Analytics: Connects tutoring, advising, and instruction with shared, actionable insight.



Trusted McGraw Hill Content + Transparent Attribution: Ensures AI use is credible, visible, and maintains academic integrity.



Institutional Data Protection & Control: Keeps institutional, faculty, and student data fully owned by the institution and not used to train external LLMs.



Fast, Scalable Deployment: Expands support across courses and campuses without new staff or course redesign.

Built for Higher Education, Trusted & Verified by Humans

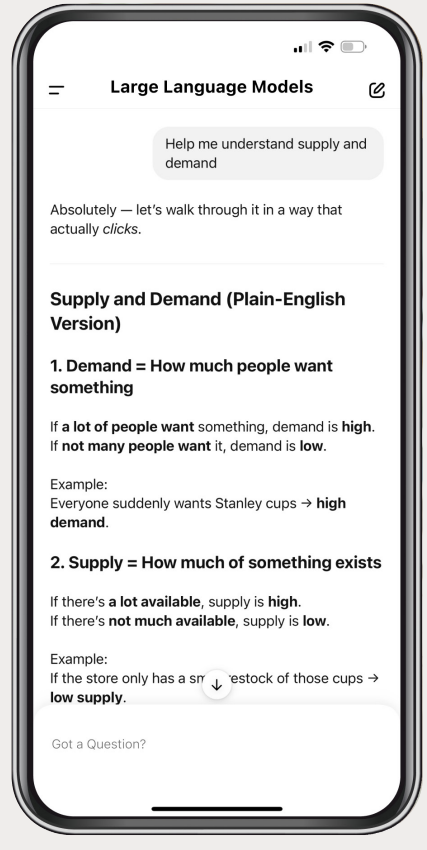
Institutions don't benefit from AI licenses for open-ended platforms that cannot be vetted or relied upon to deliver academic success. Instead, they need **responsible and mission-aligned AI** that modernizes the learning experience and supports strategic goals.

And unlike generic AI tools, **Sharpen Advantage** is built on one of the deepest, most academically rigorous AI-ready content libraries in higher education: **over 180 courses (and growing) across STEM, business, social sciences, health sciences, and general education.**

Sharpen Advantage fills the gap that has emerged in the AI era: turning widespread, unregulated student AI use into safer, measurable, academically meaningful learning. This is just the beginning: Sharpen is the **easy-to-adopt entry point that helps students and faculty get comfortable with an AI ecosystem** intentionally built for higher education, and ready to grow with it. All developed by the trusted team at McGraw Hill.

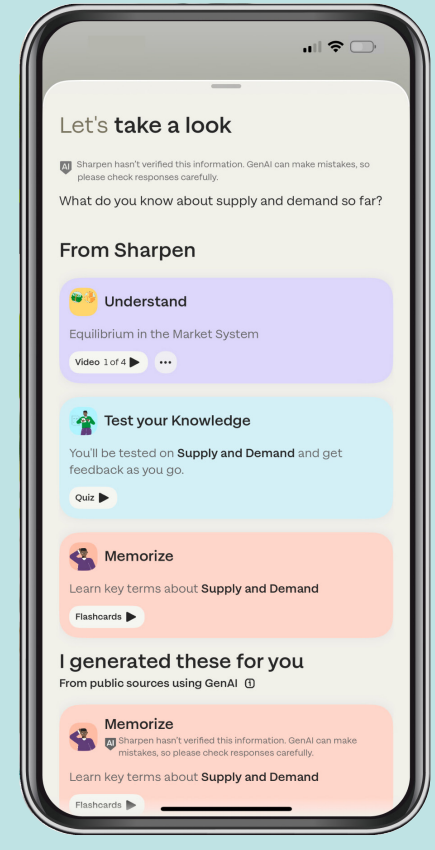
Non-specialized LLM

Built for Anyone



sharpen.

Built for Higher Education



How Institutions Are Already Putting Sharpen Advantage to Work

AI is reshaping every corner of higher education. Across campuses, Sharpen Advantage turns that momentum into measurable learning gains, operational efficiency, and systemwide insight. Below are the clearest, highest-value use cases where institutions see immediate return.



01. Personalized Learning
Helping every student learn more effectively, at scale. Students engage Sharpen for on-demand explanations, practice, and study support aligned to their actual coursework.

Sharpen delivers measurable impact across gateway courses, first-year experience programs, high-enrollment STEM classes, and for students studying outside standard support hours. Students who used Sharpen saw better outcomes, including **47% higher final exam scores**, **27% higher quiz performance, 21% higher overall grades** in comparison to non-users, and a **96% student recommendation rate**.



02. Empowering Educators
Giving faculty clarity, insight, and tools that reinforce—not replace—their teaching. **Sharpen's Radar analytics make student understanding visible** long before midterms, allowing educators to adjust instruction, target support, and identify risk early.

Sharpen delivers meaningful support in multi-section courses that need alignment, for faculty who want early indicators of student confusion, in courses with persistent high DFW patterns, and across programs that require consistent reinforcement for adjunct-taught sections.



03. Improving Campus Operations
Scaling support services without scaling staffing. Academic support teams are stretched thin. Sharpen provides **reinforcement at scale** by making vetted study help and structured guidance available 24/7.

Sharpen proves especially valuable for tutoring centers looking to extend their reach, advising teams that need to prioritize outreach, student success initiatives that rely on early risk signals, and institutions aiming to maintain systemwide consistency across multiple campuses.



04. Research & Institutional Innovation
Powering academic innovation and strengthening governance in the AI era. Sharpen gives leaders a responsible way to introduce AI across the academic ecosystem while maintaining guardrails, transparency, and institutional control.

Sharpen supports systemwide AI governance pilots, strengthens AI literacy initiatives with targeted content, equips teaching and learning centers with **structured, vetted tools**, and provides institutional research and analytics teams with the insight needed to guide **responsible, data-informed innovation.**

Implementing Sharpen: Fast, Low-Lift, High ROI

Institutions need solutions that deliver meaningful change without adding operational burden. Sharpen Advantage was designed with that exact reality in mind. Implementation is fast, technically simple, and does not require course redesign or large-scale system overhauls.

What institutions gain immediately:



Real academic insight through Radar's early signals and comprehension patterns



Safer AI use through vetted content, guardrails, and transparent attribution



Scalable support that expands tutoring, advising, and first-year programs without adding staff



Consistent student experience across departments, modalities, and campuses



Better outcomes in the courses that matter most



Guided onboarding, smooth implementation, and ongoing support from a dedicated customer success partner

The return on investment is clear as institutions see **improved retention and persistence, fewer repeat course attempts, stronger academic confidence** across student populations, and a more efficient use of faculty and support team time.

Sharpen Advantage helps campuses move from reactive responses to proactive strategy. It aligns AI with institutional mission, strengthens academic integrity, and delivers the kind of measurable improvement that students, faculty, and administrators can feel immediately.

Institutions are already embracing AI. Sharpen Advantage ensures they do so responsibly, and with outcomes that truly matter.

Lead the AI Era With Confidence

Higher education does not have the luxury of waiting. AI is already shaping how students learn, how faculty teach, and how institutions operate. Whether campuses are prepared or not, Sharpen Advantage gives institutions a responsible, academically grounded way to lead in this new era.

If your campus is ready to modernize learning, strengthen academic integrity, and deliver measurable gains in student retention and performance, now is the moment to act. Start the transition from reactive AI usage to strategic, mission-aligned impact.

Your students are already using AI, make sure they're using the right one.

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Discover why Sharpen Advantage is valued by institutions, trusted by educators, and loved by students!

Learn more about **Sharpen Advantage**



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