A JOINT PERSPECTIVE FROM IPX & PURDUE UNIVERSITY

The Future Is Unwritten

How CM2 certification can help college students and recent graduates navigate an AI-driven world.

By **Staci Hegarty**, IpX · **Travis Fuerst**, Purdue University

THE QUESTION

As artificial intelligence reshapes the workforce, a college degree remains an important foundation, but graduates also need practical skills to manage complexity, adapt to change, and help organizations succeed. CM2 certification offers a way to help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the realities of the modern workplace.

The question facing the next generation of professionals

For college students preparing to graduate and recent graduates entering the workforce, the future has never felt more uncertain.

For generations, the path to a career seemed relatively straightforward: choose a trade, earn a degree, develop expertise, secure a position, and build experience. Students were encouraged to choose a field they enjoyed, invest in their education, and trust that their qualifications would open doors.

> **Artificial intelligence has complicated that equation.**

Students are watching AI write code, analyze data, generate reports, create designs, and perform tasks that once required years of specialized training. They hear predictions about entry-level positions disappearing, entire industries changing, and technical skills becoming outdated faster than ever.

These are not simply questions about technology. They are questions about professional relevance, opportunity, and the return on an investment in education.

Colleges and universities have a responsibility to help students navigate these concerns, not by predicting exactly which jobs will survive, but by equipping graduates with capabilities that can help them adapt as industries evolve.

One opportunity is to rethink career readiness and the role industry-recognized credentials can play in connecting higher education with workforce needs.

NATURALLY, THEY HAVE QUESTIONS

What students and new graduates are asking

Will the career I studied for still exist in five years?

How do I compete in a job market increasingly influenced by AI?

Is my degree enough to differentiate me from other candidates?

What skills will employers actually value when I graduate?

THE AUTHORS



Staci Hegarty
Executive Director of Research, Compliance and Academic Affairs
IpX – Institute for Process Excellence



Travis Fuerst, PMP, CM2
Associate Professor of Practice
School of Engineering Technology, Purdue University

THE SHIFT

The answer isn't to compete with AI. It's to learn how to work in an AI-enabled world.

AI will change how work gets done. Some tasks will be automated, some jobs will evolve, and new roles will emerge. The pace and impact of these changes will vary across industries. But organizations will still need professionals who can understand complex problems, coordinate work across teams, make informed decisions, and ensure changes produce the intended results.

AI CAN GENERATE AN ANSWER

Someone must judge it

But someone must determine whether that answer is accurate, meets established requirements, introduces risk, and aligns with organizational objectives.

AI CAN ACCELERATE A PROCESS

Someone must control it

But someone must understand that process, establish appropriate controls, evaluate the consequences of changes, and verify the outcome.

AI CAN PRODUCE INFORMATION

Someone must trust it

But organizations still need reliable ways to identify authoritative information, document decisions, and maintain relationships among requirements, data, products, and processes.

> **These are fundamental organizational challenges. They do not disappear as technology advances. In many cases, they become even more important.**
>
> This is where CM2 offers an important perspective.

THE FRAMEWORK

What is CM2, and why should college students care?

CM2 is an enterprise framework for managing requirements, data, documents, records, and change through a controlled, closed-loop process. It helps organizations maintain a reliable single source of truth, establish accountability, and understand how changes affect interconnected systems.

Although configuration management has traditionally been associated with engineering and manufacturing, CM2 addresses challenges that extend far beyond those fields. It supports the processes organizations use to make decisions, manage complexity, maintain consistency, and deliver reliable outcomes.

In an increasingly digital world, these capabilities matter across business, technology, healthcare, government, aerospace, manufacturing, and many other industries.

For college students and recent graduates, the value of CM2 is not that it prepares everyone for one specific job. Its value is that it introduces a disciplined way of thinking about how organizations operate and how change can be managed effectively.

CONSIDER THE QUESTIONS CM2 HELPS PROFESSIONALS ADDRESS

- What information can we trust, and how do we know it is current?
- What happens when one decision affects multiple departments, systems, or deliverables?
- How can we introduce change without losing control of the process?
- How do we ensure that teams are working from the same requirements?
- How do we document decisions and maintain accountability?
- How do we verify that a result meets its intended requirements?

These questions are relevant whether a graduate becomes an engineer, business analyst, project manager, entrepreneur, healthcare professional, technology specialist, or organizational leader. CM2 helps emerging professionals see organizations as interconnected systems rather than collections of isolated tasks.

That perspective can add value from day one on the job.

THE VALUE

Why a CM2 certification can add value to a college degree

A college degree demonstrates academic achievement and provides a foundation of knowledge in a chosen discipline. But employers also need graduates who can apply that knowledge in complex, collaborative, and rapidly changing environments. Industry-recognized certifications can help bridge that gap by introducing practical frameworks and professional methods that complement academic learning. A CM2 certification can add value in several important ways.

It helps bridge the gap between academic knowledge and workplace application

College students spend years developing knowledge in their chosen fields. Yet academic understanding is not always the same as applying that knowledge within an organization.

An engineering graduate may understand product design but have limited exposure to requirements management and controlling changes across a product's lifecycle. A business graduate may understand organizational strategy but have limited experience with the processes that ensure policies, decisions, and operational changes are implemented consistently. An information technology graduate may understand software development but need additional experience with data integrity, traceability, and the downstream consequences of system changes.

CM2 introduces a framework for understanding these connections. By pairing their degree with education in CM2, students can begin to connect what they have learned in the classroom with the processes that enable organizations to operate reliably.

It develops capabilities that complement AI

The conversation about AI often focuses on technical proficiency: knowing how to use new tools, write effective prompts, or automate tasks. Those skills matter. But knowing how to operate a tool is different from knowing how to integrate its output into a reliable organizational process.

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in business operations, professionals will need to evaluate outputs, validate information, understand requirements, manage changes, and recognize when human judgment is necessary. CM2 introduces structured approaches to information management, traceability, change control, and process discipline that complement these responsibilities.

It does not replace AI literacy, technical expertise, or professional judgment. Instead, it can help graduates understand the organizational structures and controls that support effective technology adoption.

> The opportunity is to prepare graduates not only to use emerging technology, but also to understand how to apply it responsibly within complex systems.

It helps graduates understand the bigger picture

New graduates often enter the workforce focused on learning their immediate responsibilities. They may be responsible for a specific analysis, project, product component, or business process without yet understanding how their work affects the larger organization.

CM2 encourages a broader perspective, regardless of their discipline. It helps professionals consider how requirements, information, decisions, and changes connect across teams and functions. This perspective can help graduates ask better questions, recognize dependencies, communicate more effectively, and understand why consistency and accountability matter. These are valuable capabilities for individual contributors and can provide a foundation for future leadership responsibilities.

THE VALUE, CONTINUED

It can help candidates differentiate themselves

Employers hiring early-career professionals often evaluate candidates with similar degrees, academic records, and internship experiences. A relevant industry certification can provide an additional way for a candidate to demonstrate initiative and an interest in practical workplace methods. A CM2 certification can signal exposure to structured approaches for managing change, maintaining traceability, and working within enterprise processes.

Its value depends on the role, certification level, and employer expectations. It is not a substitute for a degree, practical experience, or technical expertise, nor does it guarantee employment. However, paired with academic credentials, internships, projects, or other applied learning, CM2 can help a candidate communicate a broader understanding of how organizations work and accelerate their ability to make an impact. For graduates seeking their first professional opportunity, that additional dimension may be worth exploring.

It supports continuous learning and career adaptability

One of the biggest challenges facing today's graduates is that technical knowledge and tools can change rapidly. A skill learned during the first year of college may require significant updating by the time a student graduates. New platforms emerge, industry practices evolve, and AI changes how familiar tasks are performed.

No certification can eliminate uncertainty about the future. But developing a structured and disciplined approach to managing complexity can help graduates navigate it.

Graduates therefore need more than a fixed set of technical skills. They need the ability to learn, adapt, and apply sound methods in new circumstances. CM2 provides a structured framework for understanding how organizations maintain reliable information and manage change across disciplines. These concepts can help graduates approach unfamiliar environments with a clearer understanding of the relationships between requirements, processes, decisions, and outcomes.

IN PRACTICE

From AI anxiety to career confidence

Consider two graduates entering different fields.

THE ENGINEERING GRADUATE

Working on a product development team. AI tools can accelerate design, analysis, and documentation. But the product must still meet requirements, component specifications must remain aligned, and changes must be evaluated for their impact on the larger system.

Understanding configuration management helps the graduate see how individual engineering decisions connect to product reliability and organizational accountability.

THE BUSINESS GRADUATE

Working in operations. AI can help analyze performance, generate reports, and identify potential improvements. But the organization still needs reliable data, documented decisions, controlled process changes, and confidence that improvements achieve their intended outcomes.

CM2 can help the graduate understand the processes that connect analysis to implementation.

Neither graduate needs to become an AI researcher or a configuration management specialist to benefit from these concepts. Both can use this broader understanding to contribute more effectively in their respective fields.

> **Professional value comes not only from knowing how to perform a task, but also from understanding how that task fits into a larger system.**
>
> The lesson is straightforward

THE MODEL

What would it look like to bring CM2 into higher education?

If CM2 can bridge academic knowledge and workplace practices, colleges and universities have an opportunity to make it more accessible to students before they enter the workforce. Rather than treating configuration management exclusively as a specialized engineering topic or something to learn on the job, institutions could explore how CM2 concepts fit within business, engineering, technology, project management, supply chain, and other relevant academic programs.

A PRACTICAL APPROACH COULD INCLUDE

1. **Integrating CM2 into existing courses.** Introduce relevant concepts within business operations, systems engineering, information management, project management, and technology programs.
2. **Offering stackable credentials.** Explore pathways that allow students to earn CM2 credentials alongside their degree and build on that learning over time.
3. **Connecting learning with industry.** Partner with employers and industry professionals to provide applied projects, case studies, mentorship, and exposure to real organizational challenges.
4. **Aligning credentials with career pathways.** Help students understand how CM2 concepts apply to different industries and professional roles.
5. **Supporting faculty engagement.** Provide educators with opportunities to explore CM2 and identify how its principles complement existing learning objectives.

Implementation should be grounded in academic quality, employer input, and clear learning outcomes. The objective is not to add credentials simply to increase the number of qualifications on a student's résumé. It is to provide meaningful, applicable knowledge that complements a degree and supports workforce readiness. With thoughtful integration, CM2 could help institutions strengthen the connection between what students learn and what they will be expected to do.

THE BIGGER OPPORTUNITY

Rethinking career readiness

The AI conversation often focuses on what graduates might lose: familiar entry-level roles, established career paths, or the long-term value of specific technical skills. We also need to focus on how higher education can prepare graduates to participate in an evolving economy.

That means expanding our definition of career readiness. Technical expertise remains essential. So do critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. But graduates also benefit from understanding how organizations manage information, coordinate work, maintain accountability, and implement change.

CM2 can contribute to this broader approach by introducing a disciplined, enterprise-wide framework for managing requirements, data, processes, and change.

For colleges and universities, it offers an opportunity to strengthen the connection between academic programs and industry practices. **For employers,** it offers a potential way to introduce emerging professionals to the frameworks that support reliable organizational performance. **For students and recent graduates,** it offers another way to translate academic achievement into practical workplace understanding.

The goal is not to prepare graduates for one narrowly defined job. It is to help them build capabilities they can apply across roles, industries, and stages of their careers.

THE FOUNDATION

Students don't need a crystal ball. They need the right foundation.

The uncertainty surrounding AI is real. We should not dismiss graduates' concerns or promise that any degree, certification, or set of skills will guarantee career success. Instead, higher education and industry should work together to help emerging professionals build adaptable capabilities, explore meaningful career pathways, and develop confidence in their ability to contribute.

A CM2 certification is one potential part of that foundation. It can introduce graduates to a disciplined approach to managing information, requirements, processes, and change, capabilities that complement technical education and support learning across multiple career paths.

The future will demand people who can do more than operate technology.

> **It will demand people who understand how technology fits into complex systems, how decisions affect outcomes, and how organizations can change without losing control of what matters.**

We should help students develop that understanding before they enter the workforce, not wait until they encounter these challenges on the job. The goal isn't to prepare graduates for the world as it exists today. It's to give them the capabilities to help shape the world they'll enter tomorrow.

THE CALL TO ACTION — MAKE CM2 PART OF THE CONVERSATION ABOUT CAREER READINESS

We cannot eliminate uncertainty about the future of work, but we can give emerging professionals better tools to navigate it. College and university leaders, faculty members, industry partners, and workforce development organizations: now is the time to explore how CM2 can help bridge the gap between higher education and the demands of an AI-enabled workforce.

1. **Higher education leaders.** Explore opportunities to integrate CM2 education and certification into existing degree programs and stackable credential pathways.
2. **Faculty members.** Identify courses and applied learning experiences where CM2 principles can strengthen students' understanding of enterprise processes and change management.
3. **Industry partners.** Work with academic institutions to connect students with practical applications, mentorship, and the capabilities employers need.
4. **Students and recent graduates.** Explore how CM2 can complement your degree, expand your understanding of organizational processes, and strengthen your professional development.
5. **Workforce development organizations.** Consider how CM2 can support career pathways that prepare emerging professionals for a changing economy.

At the Institute for Process Excellence (IpX), we believe that preparing the next generation requires more than teaching students how to use today's technology. It requires helping them understand the processes, systems, and disciplines that enable organizations to adapt and succeed. We invite colleges, universities, employers, and workforce development partners to join us in exploring how CM2 education and certification can become part of a stronger, more future-ready approach to higher education and workforce development.

Let's move beyond asking graduates whether AI will replace their jobs. Let's equip them with the knowledge and capabilities to create value in an AI-driven world.
The future is unwritten. Let's prepare the next generation to help shape it.

Connect with the authors
Staci Hegarty · staci@ipxhq.com
Travis Fuerst · fuerstt@purdue.edu

IpX works with universities to embed CM2 into existing engineering and engineering technology programs, and maintains a job board for roles requiring CM2 certification.
ipxhq.com/resources/academics/purdue-university