

UPCEA

AI Maturity Index

A Self-Assessment for Online and Professional Continuing Education

Grounded in the Capstone Foundation for AI Transformation

Part of the UPCEA self-assessment family, alongside the Credential Maturity Index

Welcome

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how online and professional continuing education units recruit and support learners, develop programs, strengthen operations, and design learning experiences. Yet units are approaching this work from very different starting points, with varying levels of strategy, infrastructure, governance, staff capacity, and readiness.

The UPCEA AI Maturity Index helps leaders assess their unit's current maturity in adopting and using AI responsibly, strategically, and effectively. It is grounded in the Capstone Foundation for AI transformation, which holds that meaningful AI adoption depends on far more than experimentation with tools. It rests on a sequence: a strong foundation of governance, ethics, data readiness, digital literacy, and infrastructure must be in place before AI delivers durable value in recruitment, student success, instruction, and institutional transformation.

Like the UPCEA Credential Maturity Index, this is a reflective planning tool, not a ranking. It is designed to help individuals and teams gauge current practice, recognize strengths, surface gaps, and prioritize future investments in policy, people, systems, and strategy. Its purpose is learning, dialogue, and continuous improvement — not comparison or judgment.

What is your full name? *

Please provide your email address: *

At the conclusion of this assessment, a copy of your unit's results will be emailed to the address you provide.

Institution / Unit (optional):

1. Are you a current UPCEA member? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

How to Use This Assessment

Plan for roughly 30–40 minutes to complete the assessment thoughtfully. Respond to each statement on behalf of your unit based on current practice, not future intent. Some units may have one leader complete it individually; many will benefit from completing it as a cross-functional team that includes leaders and staff from enrollment, marketing, learner support, instructional design, program development, operations, technology, and academic leadership. The conversation a team has while completing it is often as valuable as the score.

For each statement, select the maturity level that best describes your unit's current state. Choose the level you can evidence: if you would rate a practice "Optimized," you should be able to name the artifact, data, or routine that demonstrates it.

Maturity Level	What it means
4 – Optimized	This practice is coordinated, consistently implemented, measured, and continuously improved.
3 – Established	This practice is in place and repeatable, though there may be some gaps or uneven implementation.
2 – Initiated	This practice has begun through pilots, individual efforts, or limited adoption, but is not yet formalized or consistent.
1 – Not Started	This practice has not yet been addressed, or AI use in this area remains informal or absent.

The five Capstone layers

The ten assessment areas are organized under the five layers of the Capstone Foundation. The layers are sequential: each one is more fully realized when the layers beneath it are in place.

- 1. Foundation:** Governance, ethics, economics/ROI, infrastructure, and digital literacy — the readiness that everything else depends on. (Areas 1–4)
- 2. Recruitment:** Fit-finding, personalized outreach, enrollment, and onboarding. (Area 5)
- 3. Student Success:** Engagement, early alerts, support, and retention. (Area 6)
- 4. Instructional Design:** Course design, content, assessment, integrity, and feedback. (Areas 7–8)
- 5. The Capstone:** Operations, culture, strategy, and future trends — the visible outcome of AI transformation. (Areas 9–10)

The Capstone Rule: *AI transformation is earned, not declared. A high score in an upper layer that sits on a weak Foundation is a risk, not maturity.* Source: Ives, K. S., Cini, M. A., & Schroeder, R. (Eds.). (2026). *AI Applications in Online Higher Education Administration*. Routledge.

Cross-cutting lenses woven through every area

- **Currency:** each area asks whether the practice has been revisited recently, because AI capability has no steady state.
- **Equity & access:** AI practices are examined for their effect on non-traditional, working, and under-resourced learners.

- Quality & human oversight: a human-in-the-loop and quality-review standard applies wherever AI touches learners or instruction.
- Sustainability: practices dependent only on grant or free-tier funding should not be rated “Optimized.”

How your results work

You will receive a score for each of the ten areas, reported as the mean of its statements (1–4) so every area counts equally regardless of length, along with how your unit compares to the distribution of peer units. Results are presented bottom-up by Capstone layer, beginning with the Foundation. You will also receive an average score for all of the Foundation areas together, as well the Instructional Design areas and The Capstone areas combined.

UPCEA encourages units to treat the AI Maturity Index as a starting point for dialogue: share and discuss results with relevant teams and campus partners, revisit the assessment as your practice and the technology evolve, and use the findings to move from isolated experimentation toward coordinated, ethical, and sustainable AI-enabled transformation.

This edition is current as of June 2026. Because the technology moves quickly, UPCEA recommends revisiting the assessment approximately every 6-12 months.

The Assessment

Capstone Layer 1 — Foundation

Governance, ethics, economics/ROI, infrastructure, and digital literacy: the readiness everything else depends on.

2. AI Leadership, Strategy & Change Capacity

Capstone layer: Foundation

Recognizing that AI adoption succeeds or fails on leadership clarity rather than tool access, those guiding the unit must be able to articulate why AI matters, where it is headed, and how its adoption will be governed, resourced, and sustained.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Strategy Alignment: AI goals are documented and tied to the unit's strategic plan and mission.	()	()	()	()
Decision Rights: Roles and decision rights for approving AI pilots, tools, and scaling decisions are defined and known to staff.	()	()	()	()
Pilot-to-Scale: A documented process exists for moving AI pilots to scaled practice or retiring them when value is not demonstrated.	()	()	()	()
Change Management: Leaders communicate how AI will affect roles, workflows, and learner experience, and address staff concerns transparently.	()	()	()	()
Institutional Positioning: The unit understands and actively manages its AI standing relative to its parent institution, IT, the provost, and accreditors.	()	()	()	()
Currency: In the last 12 months the unit revised an AI goal, policy, or practice in response to new tools, evidence, or external signals.	()	()	()	()

3. AI Literacy & Workforce Readiness

Capstone layer: Foundation

Recognizing that a unit can only use AI as well as its people can, and that faculty partners carry their own governance and academic-freedom concerns, those leading must build literacy, expectations, and safe space to learn.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Role-Based Training: Staff in AI-touching roles complete role-specific AI training on a defined schedule.	()	()	()	()

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Expectations: Staff understand the AI competencies, behaviors, and judgment expected in their respective roles.	()	()	()	()
Accountability: Responsible AI use is reflected in professional development plans and in annual performance reviews.	()	()	()	()
Supervisory Capacity: Supervisors are prepared to evaluate responsible and effective AI use in day-to-day work.	()	()	()	()
Faculty Governance: Faculty partners have a defined voice in how AI is used in their courses, including academic-freedom and labor considerations.	()	()	()	()
Protected Practice: Staff have protected time and safe environments to experiment with AI tools, supported by peer-sharing of use cases and risks.	()	()	()	()

4. Data Readiness, Infrastructure & Vendor Strategy

Capstone layer: Foundation

Recognizing that AI is only as trustworthy as the data and systems beneath it, and that most AI capability is now bought rather than built, those leading must ready their data, integrate their systems, and govern their vendors and investment.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Data Quality & Governance: Data needed for AI use cases is accessible, accurate, current, and appropriately governed.	()	()	()	()
Systems Integration: Core institutional systems and data environments are sufficiently integrated and interoperable to support future AI use.	()	()	()	()
Stewardship: Data definitions, ownership, and stewardship responsibilities are clear across the unit and institution.	()	()	()	()
Output Validation: A process exists for validating AI outputs against trusted institutional data sources.	()	()	()	()
Vendor & Procurement Governance: AI tools are reviewed before adoption for privacy, security, accessibility, data portability/exit, and lock-in risk.	()	()	()	()

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Sustained Investment: Recurring costs (licensing, integration, human review, retraining) are modeled beyond the pilot rather than relying on grant or free-tier funding.	()	()	()	()

5. Governance, Ethics & Risk Management

Capstone layer: Foundation

Recognizing that the trust of learners, faculty, and the public is the unit's most valuable and most fragile asset, those leading must ensure AI is used transparently, securely, and in alignment with policy.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Use Guidelines: Formal responsible-AI standards govern approved uses, prohibited uses, required safeguards, and accountability.	()	()	()	()
Tool Inventory: The unit maintains an inventory of approved AI tools and use cases.	()	()	()	()
Policy Alignment: AI use aligns with institutional policy on data privacy, student records, intellectual property, accessibility, and academic integrity.	()	()	()	()
Human Oversight: The unit classifies AI uses by risk and requires proportionate human review, approval, and accountability for higher-risk applications..	()	()	()	()
Incident Response: A process exists to identify, report, and respond to AI errors, bias, misuse, or learner harm.	()	()	()	()
Equity & Access: AI practices are reviewed for their effect on access and equity for non-traditional, working, and under-resourced learners.	()	()	()	()

Capstone Layer 2 — Recruitment

Fit-finding, personalized outreach, enrollment, and onboarding.

6. Enrollment, Marketing, Recruitment & Onboarding

Capstone layer: Recruitment

Recognizing that AI is already reshaping how prospective learners find programs and how units respond, those leading must use AI to understand markets, reach learners, and reduce friction without sacrificing trust or equity.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Market Intelligence: AI supports audience segmentation and demand analysis for marketing and recruitment of existing programs.	()	()	()	()
Content & Outreach: AI supports marketing content and recruitment communications, with human review for accuracy, tone, brand, and equity.	()	()	()	()
Funnel Performance: AI-supported recruitment is evaluated using conversion, yield, cost-per-inquiry, cost-per-enrollment, and learner-fit measures.	()	()	()	()
Inquiry Integrity: The unit monitors how AI (chatbots, agentic search) affects inquiry quality and the human touchpoints that convert adult learners.	()	()	()	()
Onboarding: AI is used to reduce friction between inquiry, admission/registration, payment, and course start.	()	()	()	()
Disclosure & Consent: Clear standards govern disclosure, consent, and appropriate use of prospect and learner data in AI-enabled outreach.	()	()	()	()

Capstone Layer 3 — Student Success

Engagement, early alerts, support, and retention.

7. Student & Learner Support

Capstone layer: Student Success

Recognizing that adult and professional learners extend trust conditionally and expect human help when it matters, those leading must use AI to improve navigation and responsiveness while protecting access to people.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Personalized Navigation: AI supports learner communications and navigation across integrated systems (SIS, CRM, LMS).	()	()	()	()
Responsiveness: AI improves response times and frees staff to focus on higher-value student assistance.	()	()	()	()

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Early Alerts: AI helps identify learners at risk of disengagement, non-completion, or administrative stop-out.	()	()	()	()
Human Escalation: AI-enabled support tools have clear, reliable escalation pathways to human staff.	()	()	()	()
Learner Trust & Disclosure: Learners are informed when AI is used in advising, administrative support, or service communications, and the unit monitors learner trust.	()	()	()	()
Accessibility & Bias: Learner-facing AI is reviewed for accessibility, language clarity, cultural responsiveness, and bias.	()	()	()	()

Capstone Layer 4 — Instructional Design

Course design, content creation, assessment, integrity, and feedback.

8. Teaching, Learning & Instructional Design

Capstone layer: Instructional Design

Recognizing that quality is non-negotiable and that AI can erode it as easily as enhance it, those leading must support faculty and instructional teams in using AI to strengthen — never substitute for — learning.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Faculty Guidance & PD: Faculty receive guidance and professional development on appropriate AI use in their courses.	()	()	()	()
Course Development: AI supports course and content development in collaboration with instructional designers and faculty.	()	()	()	()
Inclusive Quality Review: AI-supported course design and content are reviewed for accuracy, accessibility, bias, copyright/IP, and alignment with learning outcomes.	()	()	()	()
Meaningful Feedback: AI-supported feedback preserves instructor presence, academic standards, and genuine learner engagement.	()	()	()	()
Disclosure: Learners are informed when AI tools are used in instruction, feedback, or tutoring.	()	()	()	()

9. Academic Integrity & Authentic Assessment

Capstone layer: Instructional Design

Recognizing that AI has unsettled the meaning of student work and that detection alone is a losing strategy, those leading must redesign assessment for an AI-saturated environment and set clear expectations for learners.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Assessment Redesign: Assessments are being redesigned for authenticity and relevance in an AI-enabled environment, rather than relying on detection.	()	()	()	()
Learner Expectations: Faculty and learners have clear, course-level guidance on appropriate and inappropriate use of AI.	()	()	()	()
Integrity Practice: The unit has a defined, consistent response when student work raises AI-related integrity questions.	()	()	()	()
Disclosure Norms: Norms for student disclosure of AI use are established and communicated.	()	()	()	()
Assessment Quality & Consistency: The unit applies consistent standards for authentic assessment and AI-related academic integrity that align with learning outcomes, disciplinary expectations, and established quality frameworks.	()	()	()	()

Capstone Layer 5 — The Capstone

Operations, culture, strategy, and future trends: the visible outcome of AI transformation.

10. Program Development & Market Innovation

Capstone layer: The Capstone

Recognizing that the unit's core value matches real workforce demand to relevant programs, those leading must use AI to sense the market and accelerate quality program development — validated, not merely generated.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Market & Labor Sensing: AI supports environmental scanning to identify, prioritize, and validate opportunities for new or revised programs.	()	()	()	()

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Validated Ideation: AI supports program ideation with subject-matter experts; concepts are validated with employers, learners, faculty, and market data before launch.	()	()	()	()
Employer-Aligned Competencies: AI helps ensure programs teach the AI fluency and skills employers now expect of graduates.	()	()	()	()
Business Case: AI supports business-case development, including audience, pricing, enrollment projections, staffing, and sustainability.	()	()	()	()
Process Integration: AI-supported development is integrated with institutional approval, quality assurance, and compliance processes.	()	()	()	()
Outcome Tracking: The unit tracks whether AI-supported development improves time-to-market, relevance, enrollment, and outcomes.	()	()	()	()

11. Operational Effectiveness, ROI & Continuous Improvement

Capstone layer: The Capstone

Recognizing that AI value is earned through redesigned work and measured results rather than tool counts, those leading must move from isolated experiments to sustainable, measured improvement.

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
Workflow Targeting: The unit has identified high-volume, high-friction workflows where AI can improve speed, quality, or consistency.	()	()	()	()
Process Redesign: AI adoption is accompanied by process redesign rather than layering tools onto inefficient workflows.	()	()	()	()
Measured Value: The unit measures productivity gains, cost avoidance, and staff capacity created, against modeled costs.	()	()	()	()
System Integration: AI tools are embedded within active operational workflows and connected to the systems staff use to complete the work.	()	()	()	()
Operational Outcome Linkage: The unit can connect AI-enabled workflow changes to	()	()	()	()

Assessment Statement	Optimized	Established	Initiated	Not Started
improvements in turnaround time, quality, consistency, staff capacity, or cost.				
Operational Adoption: Successful AI pilots have been incorporated into standard workflows, assigned clear ownership, and are routinely evaluated after implementation.	()	()	()	()

12. Are you interested in learning more about the ways that UPCEA's experts and network of Strategic Advisors can assist you with your organizational needs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

13. If yes, what is your preferred contact method?

Your Results: AI Maturity by Capstone Layer

Record your mean score (1–4) for each area below. Read your profile from the bottom up: a strong Foundation makes every score above it meaningful.

Capstone Layer	Assessment Area	Your Mean (1–4)
Foundation	1. AI Leadership, Strategy & Change Capacity	
	2. AI Literacy & Workforce Readiness	
	3. Data Readiness, Infrastructure & Vendor Strategy	
	4. Governance, Ethics & Risk Management	
Recruitment	5. Enrollment, Marketing, Recruitment & Onboarding	
Student Success	6. Student & Learner Support	
Instructional Design	7. Teaching, Learning & Instructional Design	
	8. Academic Integrity & Authentic Assessment	
The Capstone	9. Program Development & Market Innovation	
	10. Operational Effectiveness, ROI & Continuous Improvement	

Reading your profile

- Foundation Gate: if any Foundation area (1–4) is below 3.0 (Established), treat upper-layer scores as provisional and start there.
- Crawl → Walk → Run: Crawl = close the Foundation gaps; Walk = bring one adjacent layer to Established; Run = optimize across layers.
- One move per layer: choose a single, proportional next step in each layer rather than a long backlog.
- Most units start with several areas at Initiated or Not Started. That is a beginning, not a deficiency.

Looking Ahead: Your Next Horizon

Before you close the assessment, take a moment to look outward and forward — the dimension a snapshot cannot capture:

- Which external signal (an employer need, a competitor move, a demographic shift, a new tool) is most likely to change your AI priorities in the next year?
- Where is your unit's AI maturity most dependent on decisions made above it — by central IT, the provost, or institutional policy?
- If you revisited this assessment in six to twelve months, which single area would you most want to have moved — and what would it take?

Thank You

A copy of your results will be emailed to you. Share them, discuss them, and revisit them as your practice grows.