UPCEA AI HUB

RESOURCES. INSIGHTS. COMMUNITY.

CASE STUDY

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Building an AI Adoption Community Through TIGER Tech Leaders

AT A GLANCE

Institution:
Auburn University

Unit/Department:
Cross-functional initiative involving the Office of Information Technology, University Human Resources, and the Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

Use Case Category:
Faculty and staff development; administrative efficiency; teaching and learning; AI literacy; change management; enterprise AI adoption

Primary AI Tool(s):
Microsoft 365 Copilot; Microsoft Teams; LinkedIn Learning; additional exploration or partnerships involving Google Gemini, Claude, ChatGPT, Box AI, Adobe, and other enterprise-supported tools

Stage of Implementation:
Scaled community model following a beta program

Primary Benefit:
Building a secure, supported, socially connected AI adoption ecosystem for faculty, and staff

Human Oversight:
High; participants use AI in their own work, share examples, receive training, and engage in peer learning

Time to Launch:
Began as the Microsoft 365 Copilot Beta Program in spring 2024; evolved into the TIGER Tech Leaders community

Transferability:
High for institutions seeking to scale AI adoption through training, community, enterprise data protection, and change management

Contact for Review:
Email Katelyn Nelson and Hannah Carroll at tigertl@auburn.edu

TIGER Tech Leaders website:
aub.ie/tigertechleaders

UPCEA

AUBURN UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

BRIEF INSTITUTIONAL DESCRIPTION

Auburn University is a public land-grant university with a broad teaching, research, and service mission. Its AI work reflects that land-grant orientation: Auburn's approach is not limited to internal technology adoption, but also includes faculty, staff, students, K–12 connections, and broader community-facing efforts. Auburn representatives described TIGER Tech Leaders as one branch of a larger institutional effort to help faculty and staff leverage emerging AI tools, alongside related initiatives such as Teaching with AI, AI Day, and external partnerships.

The TIGER Tech Leaders initiative is especially notable because it combines enterprise AI access, required training, a social learning community, feedback loops, and active change management. Rather than treating AI adoption as a one-time software rollout, Auburn built a community-based model designed to support experimentation, responsible use, and practical application across academic and administrative units.

DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIT

TIGER Tech Leaders is a cross-campus AI community with more than 960 faculty, and staff using AI in their work at Auburn University.

The name **"TIGER"** stands for **Technology, Innovation, Growth, Efficiency, and Results,** and the community selected the name itself after beginning as the Microsoft 365 Copilot Beta Program in spring 2024.

THE CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY

Auburn's AI adoption work emerged from a rapidly changing environment in which faculty, staff, and students were already encountering generative AI tools. The Biggio Center began developing Teaching with AI resources in 2023 as ChatGPT and similar tools became widely accessible. Auburn's Teaching with AI course launched in March 2023 and has since become an internationally used resource with more than 15,000 faculty and staff participants around the world.

The opportunity was to help the Auburn community use AI productively and responsibly while reducing the risk of unsupported or unsecure tool use. Auburn leaders recognized that people across campus were curious about AI, but they needed training, examples, secure platforms, and a psychologically safe place to ask questions and share practices. The goal was not simply to distribute licenses. It was to create a structured, supported environment where faculty, staff, and student workers could learn, experiment, and shape the future of AI use at the university.

AUBURN UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

THE AI USE CASE

TIGER Tech Leaders is Auburn University's community-based model for enterprise AI adoption. The initiative began with approximately 100 hand-selected beta users for Microsoft 365 Copilot. Participants were invited into the beta program, but access came with expectations: they had to complete required training, use the tool, and contribute actively to the community.

The original training included two parts. The first was an internally built Auburn course covering cybersecurity, existing policies and procedures, enterprise-level data protection, and example prompts. The second was a LinkedIn Learning pathway focused on Microsoft Copilot across applications such as Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Teams, and Outlook. Together, the training took approximately three and a half hours.

Once participants completed training, they were welcomed into the TIGER Tech Leaders community. The community uses Microsoft Teams as an ongoing hub where participants ask questions, share prompts, discuss what is and is not working, post professional development opportunities, and learn from peers across departments. The model is intentionally social: examples from one unit often spark adaptations in another, such as a nursing faculty member's GPT for practicing rapport with elderly patients inspiring an emotionally intelligent language GPT for supervisor training.

IMPLEMENTATION SNAPSHOT

Auburn's broader AI work began with the Biggio Center's Teaching with AI course in March 2023. In January 2024, Auburn hosted an AI Day with Microsoft and Salesforce, drawing approximately 800 faculty, staff, and students. During that event, deans and executive leaders were invited to identify potential beta testers for what became the Microsoft 365 Copilot Beta Program.

The beta program began in spring 2024 with about 100 selected users. Of those initial participants, approximately 50 completed the training and joined the community. Auburn later expanded access to interested participants who completed the training, and eventually secured funding to allow up to 1,000 users to participate in the beta program with centrally paid licenses.

The implementation framework became cyclical: **communication, required training, social learning, and feedback.** Feedback from participants informed additional training and social learning needs. Auburn describes this as the TIGER Tech Leaders Framework, grounded in change management principles and adult learning instructional design.

The community continues to meet every other Friday from 8:30–9:00 a.m. on Microsoft Teams for recorded 30-minute check-ins focused on one relevant AI use case.

UPCEA®

RESULTS, BENEFITS, AND EARLY SIGNALS

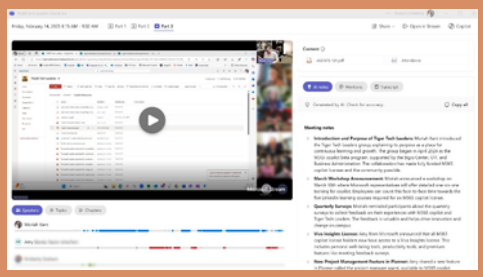
TIGER Tech Leaders has produced strong evidence of adoption, engagement, and perceived value. In the final month of the Copilot Beta Program, Auburn reported an **84% adoption rate** for Copilot Premium. Telemetry also indicated almost **2,000 hours of AI-assisted work,** valued at more than **$83,000.**

Participant feedback also showed strong support for the community model. Auburn reported that **91% of TIGER Tech Leaders felt the 30-minute check-ins were a valuable use of time,** and **98% felt that access to the tools and the online social learning community empowered them to help Auburn advance its strategic plan goal related to excellence and innovation.**

The community has also helped break down institutional silos. Auburn described examples of faculty and staff from different units helping one another with AI questions, including people who had never previously worked together. Channels organized by specific tools or topics allow participants to find relevant conversations, ask questions, share files, access recordings, and review prior agendas and resources.







WHAT MADE IT WORK

Auburn's success came from treating AI adoption as a community-building and change management effort, not simply a software deployment. The required training established a baseline for responsible use, cybersecurity awareness, and enterprise-supported tools. The Teams-based community then created a place where users could keep learning after initial onboarding.

The synchronous check-ins were especially important because they made AI use practical and visible. Each 30-minute session focused on a real use case from Auburn work, helping participants see how AI could apply across different roles and departments.

The cross-functional partnership also mattered. University Human Resources (UHR), Office of Information Technology (OIT), the Biggio Center, and external partners each brought different expertise. OIT helped evaluate enterprise data protection, while faculty development and instructional design partners helped frame AI adoption in ways that supported learning and behavior change.

UPCEA

RISKS, GUARDRAILS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Auburn's approach to AI risk management emphasized support, transparency, and enterprise-level data protection. Microsoft was an early partner in part because Auburn was already a Microsoft campus and because Microsoft offered enterprise-level data protection for AI use. Auburn representatives described data protection as a major determining factor in deciding which tools the university can provide to faculty, staff, and students.

Auburn also intentionally avoided a punitive culture around AI use. Rather than discouraging disclosure or pushing people toward workarounds, the TIGER Tech Leaders team wanted faculty, staff, and students to be open about what tools they were using so the university could help them do so safely. This approach allowed Auburn to say, in effect, "We want to support what you are trying to do, while also helping you protect institutional data, personal data, and intellectual property."

The community model itself functions as a guardrail. Members have access to training, vetted guidance, peer support, enterprise-protected tools, recorded examples, and a place to ask questions before going too far down an unsupported path.

LESSONS LEARNED

Auburn's experience offers several lessons for other institutions.

First, be a good steward of AI licenses. Auburn monitored usage and followed up with people who had not used their licenses in several months. Sometimes users needed support and reminders; in other cases, the license could be reprovisioned to someone waiting for access.

Second, reduce barriers to training. Auburn initially required a three-and-a-half-hour self-paced learning path but discovered that it could be a barrier for busy faculty and staff. In response, the team expanded training options, including department-level sessions, 30-minute executive onboarding, and partner-led campus events.

Third, meet people where they are. Auburn supported users across a spectrum of AI adoption, from early enthusiasts to cautious beginners. The community structure allowed people to ask questions, revisit recordings, follow specific channels, and learn through examples from peers.

UPCEA

TRANSFERABILITY FOR OTHER INSTITUTIONS

TIGER Tech Leaders is highly transferable for institutions that want to scale AI adoption responsibly without relying only on top-down policy or one-time training. The model is especially relevant for universities with existing Microsoft, Google, or other enterprise technology environments; institutions seeking to create AI communities of practice; and campuses where faculty and staff are already experimenting with AI tools.

To replicate the model, another institution would need cross-functional leadership, a secure enterprise-supported AI tool or set of tools, a training pathway, a collaboration platform, a feedback process, and a plan for synchronous and asynchronous social learning. Institutions should also plan for license management, onboarding, ongoing communications, and executive engagement.

The most important transferable element is the framework: communication, required training, social learning, and feedback. The specific tools may vary, but the structure can help institutions move from scattered AI experimentation to a supported, strategic adoption model.

> "TIGER Tech Leaders shows that AI adoption is not just about providing access to a tool. It is about creating a community where people can learn together, ask questions safely, share real examples, and shape how AI supports the work of the university."
>
> — Auburn University TIGER Tech Leaders

OUTLOOK AND NEXT STEPS

Auburn is continuing to evolve TIGER Tech Leaders beyond the original Microsoft 365 Copilot Beta Program. At the end of the year-long beta, users who wanted to retain Copilot Premium moved to a distributed cost model through their departments. Auburn is also exploring broader enterprise AI access, including Google Gemini for campus-wide rollout and opt-in enterprise licenses for Claude and ChatGPT.

Future development will likely include continued check-ins, expanded partner events, additional tool-specific channels, ongoing feedback collection, and further refinement of onboarding and training.

UPCEA®