Executive **Voice**

Tech Outlook for Higher Education: Doing More with Less

While higher ed IT teams face more demands than ever before, there's never been a better time to benchmark and upskill.

The freight train that is artificial intelligence now dominates conversations and planning in higher education, on the academic side as well as in IT. As AI technology shifts and evolves, everyone is rushing to learn more — a new guiding principle on many campuses.

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IT teams have their own AI-related questions, ranging from understanding the basics of the technology to working with large language models (LLMs), from ethical concerns around research and academic uses to building solutions using AI, all while keeping data secure. Data security represents another major challenge for higher education leaders. As AI and other in-demand applications proliferate, protecting student data and personally identifiable information (PII) has become an increasingly complex undertaking for IT.

These trends have converged with the all-too-familiar IT staffing challenges, flat or shrinking IT budgets and an abiding need to do more — everything! — with less. Yet IT professionals must remain vigilant in learning and upskilling to not only tackle emerging threats but also take charge of their career development and advancement. Here's why IT skills training has never been more important in higher education than right now.

Start with Benchmarking

While leading campus-wide technology initiatives and providing ongoing support for students and staff, IT teams see critical needs pop up daily. To continuously meet those needs, wide-ranging skills are required. When teams take stock of and benchmark skills within their ranks, individual members can start down personalized learning paths that highlight opportunities to improve in their desired areas as well as in the areas they may require more advanced knowledge.

Teams that benchmark frequently uncover hidden talents in areas where a team member hasn't spent much time before. Surfacing those skills is a nice surprise, helping leaders to properly balance workloads among diverse talents and better serve their campus's many competing projects.

By revealing areas where team members should pursue certifications or promotions, benchmarking also enhances IT career development. Team leads can see progress, not only in skills development but also in project timelines and outcomes. Where benchmarking and upskilling are offered, and learning is not only welcomed but also encouraged and rewarded, higher education teams gain an edge in the marketplace and retain top talent. As teams gain clarity around their career paths, their job satisfaction improves. Truly, the longest-tenured employees feel more connected to their work, and see that work has led to something important, or has an impact on campus as well as the broader community.

Faced with an enormous list of growing technology and cybersecurity needs, colleges and universities face a critical choice: either build up their IT talent, borrow, or buy it. Building talent within existing employees is always the most sustainable option over sourcing contractors or working with a managed service provider, particularly where IT budgets already feel the pinch. To accomplish and accelerate all that's ahead of them, and gain longer-term ROI, campuses must invest in their own talent.

Progress in Action

Pluralsight recently worked with an East Coast campus to define and align skills to a software development role, and detail a strategy for growth

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through coursework that would establish a clear career path for IT staff assigned to that role. As team members complete these modules, they advance in their departments while also accelerating projects. The work not only helped individual team members to raise their understanding of new development skills and best practices, it also helped the institution clarify exactly what would be required for success and advancement in the software development role, which previously was not easily defined.

Pluralsight has been working with the IT organization within another large university to build out requirements for a wide variety of roles, including software development, project management and more. As role requirements are set, they are assigned to specific team members, allowing leads to assess skills as well as interests among their teams. Robust analytics around course completion, success rates and comprehension are showing where those team members will shine, and where essential projects can now be started or accelerated.

Keeping Up

Of course, 2025 will continue to find teams tackling the hard work of maintaining the connected campus through seamless integrations, improving and enhancing cybersecurity, and delivering a smoother, optimized user experience for every stakeholder — applicants, students, faculty, staff, alumni, affiliated research and health organizations, and beyond. Many universities are either now on the brink of success or just getting started by retiring legacy applications and systems, or completing a full migration to the cloud. No matter where they are in their digital transformation or modernization journey, having more agile teams who can respond to those essential needs and keep it all together improves the experience for everyone on campus. Ensuring user satisfaction is a mission-critical priority for any campus. Staying on top of their training and maintaining up-to-the-minute skills ensures teams can continue to deliver on their connected campus mission.

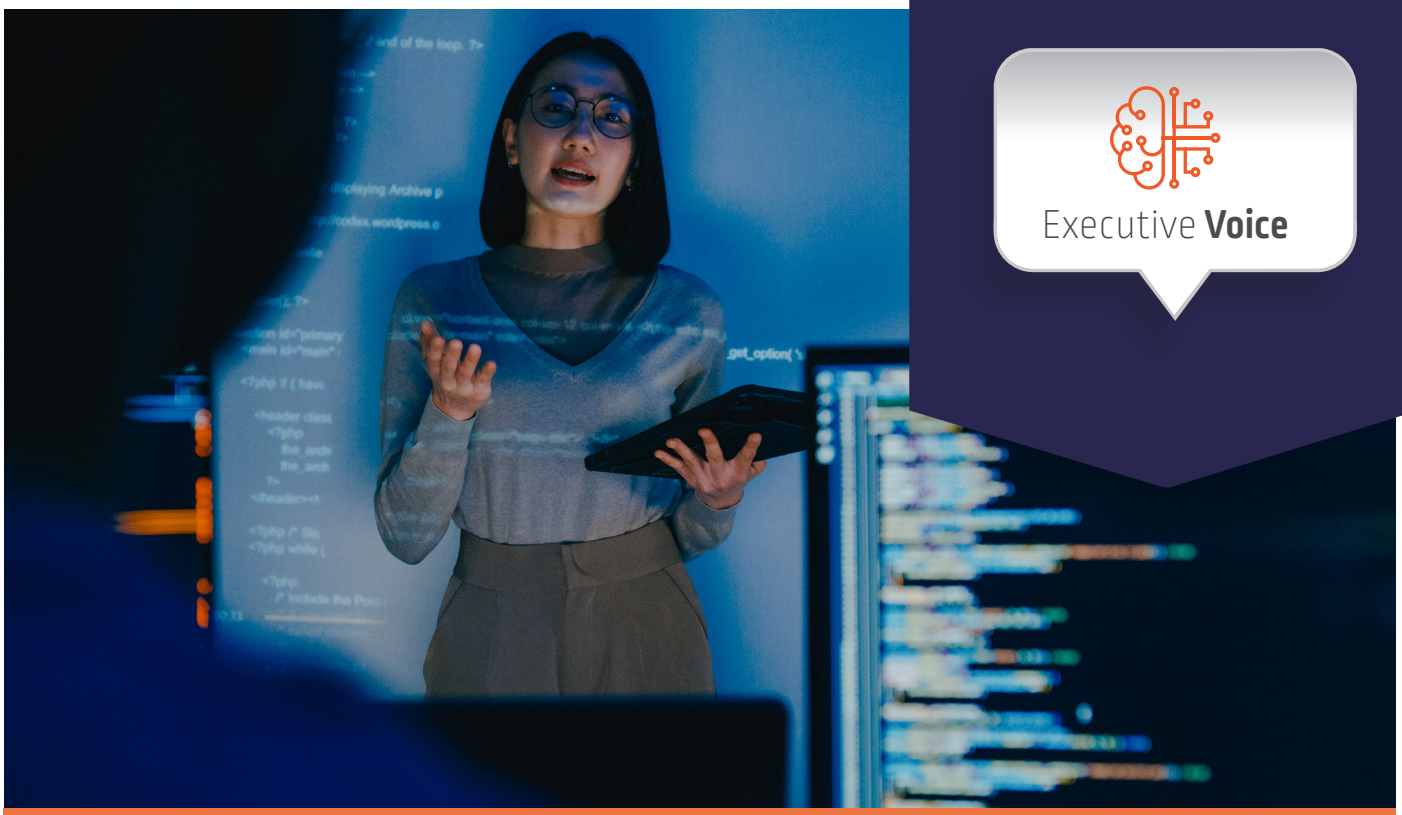
Learn by Doing

Pluralsight also allows teams to experiment with new technologies like AI, and test out their newest skills in sandbox environments, which keep everything secure, away from critical infrastructure. This hands-on training helps teams to learn and expand their knowledge while also gaining confidence in their new tactics. In the case of student learners, training in emerging technologies prepares them to be workforce-ready, and more competitive against technology talents now emerging around the globe.

PREPARE FOR SUCCESS

Pluralsight offers more than 6,500 technology courses and 3,500 hands-on labs to help teams keep their IT talent skills up-to-date and give students the skills they need for success as they enter the workforce. Learn more about what Pluralsight can help your campus achieve.

https://campustechnology.com/pages/landing-page/ct-pluralsight-executive-voice.aspx



Executive **Voice**

The Evolving IT Skillset: Addressing Data, Security and AI in Higher Education

Hannah Aldine, Senior SLED Solutions Consultant for Pluralsight, shares insights on where IT leaders should focus attention to help teams grow.

Higher ed IT teams face near-constant pressure to keep pace with technology shifts and meet demands for new infrastructure while navigating growing cybersecurity threats. As artificial intelligence threatens to engulf every facet of higher ed operations, administration, teaching and learning, and research and recruiting, upskilling and preparing for the next wave of disruptions becomes even more essential for success. IT teams that facilitate a culture of learning — and benchmark skills to ensure ongoing support for learning progress — are better equipped to navigate this new era of tech uncertainty. Campus Technology recently spoke with Hannah Aldine, Senior State, Local, and Higher Education Solutions Consultant for Pluralsight, about the skills now most needed from higher ed IT teams, and how campuses can ensure teams commit to a growth mindset while riding the latest wave of change and digital transformation.

What skills are campuses now looking to IT teams to bring to work each day?

The top four skills center on data, security, cloud, and AI. These are all very connected. When we think about skills around data architecture and data hygiene, these are hugely valuable to campuses and IT teams because there are huge amounts of sensitive data on campuses: student PII, which often includes health information, which falls under HIPAA, and all the research data that faculty and students work with. All of that needs to be organized and secure so that campuses maintain trust with stakeholders.

To that point, up-to-date security skills are another essential. Campuses are a constant target for hacking, given all that data, and IT teams are on the frontlines, making sure the information is secure. That data is largely stored in the cloud, so cloud skills are also key here. If that data isn't already in the cloud, many campuses are in the process of moving from on-premises to cloud. Campuses are also working on becoming cloud-native, and they really have to be both to see the efficiencies they've been seeking within the cloud, and the cost savings they're hoping to achieve.

Looking forward, they need to be cloud-native to truly leverage AI tools. Campuses are really grappling with AI, so that's why it's the fourth big skill. There are a few different areas, more tool-specific, such as Microsoft Copilot — teams are integrating tools like Copilot into their workflows — and they're also helping campus-wide to evaluate AI for use in research and coursework. From a big picture standpoint, they're helping advise campus policies on governance and ethics. At the core today, it's those four skills.

How else has AI changed the landscape for IT teams?

Whether faculty or staff want it or not, it's here, and it's not going away. Students are very aware that they will be using it, not only now, for personal reasons, but also in their future careers. It's key for students, faculty, staff — everyone — to figure out how to navigate this new landscape. IT teams are not only tasked now with helping with policies around governance and advising on strategy, but they're also evaluating the tools that can help them do their jobs better, needs like security monitoring. AI is creating some of the threats, but it's also helping to improve monitoring. Teams are also helping faculty and staff evaluate AI tools and think through how to use them in their teaching.

AI is bringing a huge opportunity for universities who are competing to stay relevant. Students are demanding and really expecting that personalization.

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Universities are looking to their IT teams to help them roll out tools to personalize the student experience, around tutoring or advising, for example. They need clean data and the AI to do that. AI has really brought the importance of data to the forefront, just as cloud did, and institutions are overwhelmingly behind in clearing up that data pipeline. The "2024 EDUCAUSE AI Landscape Study" also showed that IT teams are more worried about data quality and governance than we've seen in the past. Implementation and integration used to be the main obstacles to AI adoption; now it's data.

Has this been one of the things keeping IT leaders up at night? I'm sure there are more.

Yes. AI is rapidly changing campuses compared to previous tech revolutions like the internet — campuses were quick to adopt, but it didn't happen nearly as fast. If you look at the adoption curve for AI, it's much steeper. I think the pressures on all these interconnected technologies and the rate at which AI is accelerating them is certainly one thing that keeps them up at night. I think the other big one is cybersecurity. The unique context of a university puts them at high risk of cyber attacks, and they get targeted a lot more frequently because they have so much student and research data,

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as well as sensitive financial and health data. On top of that, you have all these people on the networks across roles of guests, students, faculty, staff. It's a huge concern. The State of Ransomware in Education report for 2024 found that 66% of higher education organizations were hit by ransomware in the last year — that's higher than the global average across sectors, of 59%. They're getting targeted at higher rates and the average cost for higher ed to recover from a ransomware attack was a little over $4 million.

How can teams avoid some of the more common mistakes other institutions have made around training?

The two main ways teams make mistakes are first, when organizations are focused solely on the new technology they're rolling out. It's new, it's shiny and it's exciting to see what the capabilities are, but they don't have focus on the enablement and training piece. Your people drive that innovation and leverage the technology, so organizations really need to make sure that they invest in their training too, and not simply focus on the app or the software itself. The second mistake is to rely on contractors, which are not a permanent solution. Focusing on building skills within existing teams is where we see the most success. Having a culture of learning in an IT organization means being focused on a growth mindset and being a continuous learner. More practically speaking, building that learning time into people's schedules so that everyone is learning should be a top-down practice. Everyone in the organization needs to commit to that. When it comes to benchmarking skills for leaders, it's important to know what skills you have, and where there are opportunities to upskill, and that's important for learners as well. You need to understand how prepared you are for current projects, as well as the time and space you need to set aside to upskill. That's how we've found training to be most effective.

What impacts do cultures of learning and benchmarking IT skills have on campuses?

We see a lot of positive impacts: Leaders are prepared for projects, IT teams have the bandwidth to innovate, and they understand what their skills gaps are. It's great visibility for learners because they see their proficiencies and what skill progress looks like over time. It's valuable to be directed to specific learning and know exactly where to focus your time. And when we think about rolling out this type of program, it needs to start with leaders. They are modeling their own learning and growth, and taking the Skill IQs right along with everyone else. Teams see that they're vulnerable too and they own that they're learning. It just makes everyone else feel more comfortable being in that growth mindset. And when you give people the time and the resources and the space to learn, everyone benefits from the top down. It makes a huge impact.

Listen to the Q&A podcast with Hannah Aldine here.