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# How Catholic Higher Education Shapes Graduate Engagement with Artificial Intelligence

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Holistic Impact Report (HIR) | Research Note | HIR 2.0*

***The distinctive education of Catholic colleges and universities prepares graduates to navigate the age of Artificial Intelligence.***

## KEY FINDINGS

- Graduates of Catholic colleges use AI at work at substantially higher rates than their secular peers, with **9.3 percentage points more** reporting frequent or very frequent use ( $p < .001$ ).
- Graduates of Catholic colleges are **more than twice as likely** to feel extremely prepared for AI integration (5.8% vs. 2.4%), a preparation that qualitative comments attribute not to AI-specific coursework but to the broader education they received.
- Graduates of Catholic colleges are **3.9 percentage points more likely** to strongly support AI in the workplace (14.1% vs. 10.2%), reflecting an openness to engagement with new and complex challenges.
- Graduates of Catholic colleges are **more likely to view AI's societal impact positively** (31.0% vs. 26.4%), approaching a contested technology with measured optimism rather than resistance.

## OVERVIEW

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Artificial intelligence is reshaping how we work, create, learn, govern, and think. It promises enormous benefits and poses serious risks, to jobs, to the environment, to human agency itself. The central challenge is navigating that transformation well, capturing what AI makes possible while guarding against what it threatens. The 2025 Holistic Impact Report (HIR) suggests that the distinctive education of Catholic colleges and universities prepares graduates to do exactly that.

The HIR surveyed 2,000 college graduates, 1,000 from Catholic institutions and 1,000 from secular institutions, on four dimensions of AI engagement: current use at work, sense of preparation, support for AI in the workplace, and views on AI's societal impact. Graduates

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were also invited to describe in their own words how their education shaped their engagement with AI. Across all four measures, graduates of Catholic colleges and universities report more confident, more supportive, and more active engagement with AI than their secular peers. This research note examines what that education contributes to those outcomes.

## CURRENT AI USE AT WORK

Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities use AI at work at significantly higher rates than their secular peers.

Current AI Use at Work	Catholic Grads	Secular Grads	Difference
Never*	32.1%	42.8%	-10.7 pp
Very rarely**	13.4%	17.5%	-4.1 pp
Rarely	9.3%	8.6%	+0.7 pp
Occasionally**	21.7%	16.9%	+4.8 pp
Frequently*	15.8%	10.2%	+5.6 pp
Very frequently*	7.8%	4.1%	+3.7 pp

\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01

Graduates of Catholic colleges are 9.3 percentage points more likely to use AI frequently or very frequently (23.6% vs. 14.3%), and 10.7 percentage points less likely to report never using AI at all (32.1% vs. 42.8%). This is the largest gap across all four AI measures.

The HIR consistently finds that graduates of Catholic colleges and universities report more meaningful lives, stronger community engagement, and stronger ethical commitments. Their education orients them toward the world with purpose and ethical seriousness, a disposition that enables confident but critical engagement with something as consequential as AI.

## PREPARED FOR AI INTEGRATION

Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are significantly more likely to feel prepared for AI integration than their secular peers, with Catholic graduates more than twice as likely to feel extremely prepared (5.8% vs. 2.4%).

Prepared for AI Integration	Catholic Grads	Secular Grads	Difference
Not at all prepared	20.9%	22.0%	-1.1 pp
Slightly prepared	9.2%	8.3%	+0.9 pp
Somewhat prepared	9.6%	7.8%	+1.8 pp
Moderately prepared**	9.6%	6.8%	+2.8 pp
Extremely prepared*	5.8%	2.4%	+3.4 pp
AI not in existence during my time*	44.8%	52.7%	-7.9 pp

\* p < .001; \*\* p < .05

The preparedness gap is notable because most respondents graduated before AI became a widespread presence in professional life, with 44.8% of Catholic graduates and 52.7% of secular graduates reporting that AI did not exist during their time at university. They are assessing whether their education as a whole equipped them to engage a technology that emerged after they left school. The qualitative comments from graduates of Catholic colleges and universities confirm this interpretation and identify what makes the difference. Respondents do not point to AI-specific instruction. They point to the ethics, philosophy, liberal arts, and critical thinking at the core of their education as what gave them the resources to engage AI with confidence and judgment.

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*My college regularly required me to engage in critical thinking and independent research to fact-check and develop independent ideas. This greatly prepared me for AI, as these skills are necessary to know how to properly utilize and integrate AI in a productive and positive way.*

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*I do not remember learning anything specific about AI since I graduated over 10 years ago, but I learned about thinking critically and being curious, which I think are important elements when determining how to use AI.*

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*I do not recall any classes on AI specifically, but I did learn about ethics in philosophy and religion courses that I think correspond to thinking about AI in the workplace.*

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*Courses on machine learning algorithms helped me understand how AI models are trained, and philosophy — specifically epistemology — helped me understand the limitations of human understanding and the nature of knowledge.*

Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities do not attribute their preparation to AI instruction. They attribute it to an education grounded in ethics, critical thinking, and the liberal arts, the distinctive elements of Catholic higher education that the HIR consistently links to more meaningful lives, community engagement, and ethical commitments. One graduate put it clearly: “My university emphasized being able to reason clearly and empathize with other points of view but also sticking to one’s guns if justified, which is still a valuable skill in today’s workplace because AI reasoning is too eager to please and will never disagree with its users.”

## ATTITUDES TOWARD AI

Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are more likely to support AI in the workplace and to view its societal impact positively than their secular peers.

Attitude Toward AI	Catholic Grads	Secular Grads	Difference
<b>Support for AI in the Workplace</b>			
Strongly support*	14.1%	10.2%	<b>+3.9 pp</b>
Somewhat support	29.9%	27.6%	<b>+2.3 pp</b>
Neither support nor oppose**	24.9%	28.9%	<b>−4.0 pp</b>
Somewhat oppose	17.5%	17.3%	<b>+0.2 pp</b>
Strongly oppose	13.6%	16.2%	<b>−2.6 pp</b>
<b>AI’s Potential Societal Impact</b>			
Mostly positive**	12.9%	9.7%	<b>+3.2 pp</b>
Somewhat positive	18.2%	16.7%	<b>+1.5 pp</b>
Both positive and negative	42.2%	43.2%	<b>−1.0 pp</b>
Somewhat negative**	11.2%	11.4%	<b>−0.2 pp</b>
Mostly negative	15.6%	18.9%	<b>−3.3 pp</b>

\* p< .01; \*\* p<.05

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On workplace support, graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are 3.9 percentage points more likely to support AI's growing use (14.1% vs. 10.2%) and less likely to strongly oppose it (13.6% vs. 16.2%).

On societal impact, graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are more likely to view AI's potential effects as mostly or somewhat positive (31.0% vs. 26.4%) and less likely to view them as mostly negative (15.6% vs. 18.9%). The largest response category for both groups is "both positive and negative," 42.2% of graduates of Catholic colleges and universities and 43.2% of secular graduates. Neither group responds to AI with uncritical enthusiasm. The difference is in overall orientation. Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities are more supportive, less opposed, and more constructive in their assessment of AI's societal impact.

The HIR consistently finds that graduates of Catholic colleges and universities report more meaningful lives, community engagement, and ethical commitments. Those frameworks presuppose constraints on how a contested and consequential technology like AI should be used, and within those constraints, its positive contributions become visible. The attitudinal data reflect that orientation.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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Across all four measures, graduates of Catholic colleges and universities engage AI more actively, feel better prepared for it, and view its potential more constructively than their secular peers. The data point consistently in the same direction.

The broader HIR findings suggest why. Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities report more meaningful lives, community engagement, and ethical commitments. These outcomes reflect an education that presupposes the kind of constraints and commitments that make a technology like AI navigable rather than threatening.

The qualitative comments make this concrete. Graduates of Catholic colleges and universities do not credit AI-specific coursework for their preparation. They credit the ethics, philosophy, liberal arts, and critical thinking at the core of their education. That is the distinctive contribution of Catholic higher education to graduate engagement with AI, and it is what the data consistently show.

## STUDY INFORMATION

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This research note draws on data from the 2025 Holistic Impact Report (HIR), conducted by the Center for Catholic Studies at St. Mary's University in partnership with YouGov. The study surveyed 2,000 college graduates, 1,000 alumni of Catholic colleges and universities and 1,000 alumni of secular institutions, on four dimensions of AI engagement. The sample was weighted to reflect the national demographics of U.S. college graduates using propensity score matching and post-stratification on gender, age, race, education, religion,

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and presidential vote choice. Statistical significance was assessed at conventional thresholds ( $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Qualitative responses were drawn from an open-ended follow-up question asked of all respondents. This note draws on responses from graduates of Catholic colleges and universities.

To cite this research note: King, Jason. 2026. "How Catholic Higher Education Shapes Graduate Engagement with Artificial Intelligence." Holistic Impact Report Research Note, HIR 2.0. Center for Catholic Studies, St. Mary's University. <https://www.stmarytx.edu/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/HIR2-Research-Note-AI.pdf>.