

Supporting Higher Education Business Leaders

ENVISIONED

Vol 7 | Issue 3

THE GREAT RE-SKILLING

ENABLING HIGHER
EDUCATION PROCUREMENT



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Canon's commitment

DEFINITION OF KYOSEI

Kyosei is the Japanese concept of living and working together for the **benefit of all**. It emphasizes collaboration, respect, and mutual support across communities and nations.

WHERE KYOSEI LIVES IN CANON



We strive to align our goals with the **planet's wellbeing**.



Our success is tied to the **health of our communities**.



Canon prioritizes **balance** between **business growth** and **environmental sustainability**.



Canon

THE POWER OF EXECUTION

Ideas are everywhere. Dreams, concepts, and strategies flow through higher education with no shortage of creativity. We imagine new ways to teach, bold strategies to build community, and innovative tools to shape the student experience. Yet, without execution, dreams fade.

Execution is what separates the truly great institutions from the rest. It's easy to sit in meetings, circulate reports, and brainstorm endlessly. But activity is not the same as progress. Execution requires action—the steady and determined follow-through that turns vision into reality.

In today's environment, complacency is one of the greatest risks we face. It is comfortable to remain in the way things are, especially when disruption looms all around us.

Technologies like AI, shifts in enrollment patterns, and pressures on cost and staffing can make the landscape feel overwhelming. At times, it is tempting to pull back, to delay, or to take the short-term path of cutting corners. But history tells us that greatness never emerges from hesitation. It comes from decisive movement.

Execution requires buy-in at every level: from administrators to faculty to staff.

Success doesn't come from a single initiative but from the consistent, relentless determination to follow through on a plan, even when it is difficult. And it doesn't mean

acting busy. Endless meetings and reports can give the illusion of momentum, but unless we are connecting with the voices that matter and following up with urgency, little is accomplished.

True execution requires listening. Not a passive hearing, but an active, intentional listening to students, colleagues, and the communities we serve. The answers are in the lived experiences and needs of those around us. When we truly listen and then act with positivity and urgency, we create forward motion.

“When we truly listen and then act with positivity and urgency, we create forward motion.”

The urgency is real. Higher education stands at a critical point, facing pressures unlike any other era. Our students cannot wait for us to be comfortable. Our faculty deserve more than

deferred decisions. Our communities need the strength and leadership of institutions that not only dream, but do.

At Canon, we believe greatness will not come from simply imagining bold futures. It will come from moving now, from taking the first steps and building momentum, from creating a culture where execution is celebrated and accountability is embraced.

Warmest regards,
Peter Kowalczyk
EVP/Client Services Group President
Canon U.S.A., Inc.

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ENABLING HIGHER EDUCATION PROCUREMENT



THE GREAT RE-SKILLING

When Brie Matier describes the day-to-day grind of working in today's higher education procurement landscape, she doesn't reach for buzzwords or analogies. She reaches for lived experience. Matier grew up during those old school unprecedented times — world-changing events like 9/11 and the 2009 recession. Today, there is a whole new set of quagmires to navigate, including artificial intelligence (AI) disruption, tariffs and broader economic uncertainty.

To stay the course in higher education procurement, Matier, Director of Procurement at the University of South Florida, believes you have to come to terms with the totality of it all. "I feel like my generation has grown up with the term 'unprecedented times' our entire lives. We're honestly exhausted by that phrase. What feels different now is the pace of change."

"We manage contracts, but we're also managing people and relationships every day. Being successful takes perseverance, positivity and problem-solving."

— Polly Alles, Contract Specialist, University of Utah

The changes Matier references are not just federal or state policies shifting, but change happening simultaneously at every level. Government. Institutions. Departments. Even down to individual teams. That urgency is reshaping procurement across higher education. Once viewed narrowly as a transactional function—crunching bids, pushing paperwork—procurement has emerged as a strategic lever for colleges and universities. Supply chain disruption, staffing shortages and economic uncertainty have elevated the role.

Today's procurement professionals must not only negotiate contracts and manage risk, they must also interpret data, embrace technology and lead cultural change on their campuses.

"Procurement is never boring. If you want a job where you'll constantly be challenged and surprised, this is it. Every day is different. One week I'm sourcing surgical gloves, the next I'm negotiating for an unmanned drone. The variety is endless."

The stress, Matier admits, is what makes it exciting. Procurement enables her to pull together all of her aforementioned skills into one role. Truth be told, procurement professionals must think like salespeople. "You're constantly 'selling' your ideas, initiatives and value to leadership. If you can't communicate and persuade, you won't get a seat at the table. That's a key part of the job."

The future of higher education, in many ways, depends on how universities and their teams adapt. For Matier, the profession begins and ends with relationships. "Coming out of COVID, when we were all so isolated, being back at events feels like our 'Super Bowl.' You're running through the aisles hugging colleagues, catching up with supplier partners—it reminds you how critical human-to-human connection really is."

That renewed emphasis on interpersonal skills is one of three critical shifts Matier sees defining procurement's future, alongside technology awareness and data analytics. "Too often, higher education relies on suppliers for data rather than taking ownership of analytics ourselves. That's something

I'm very passionate about—helping institutions take the next step in truly understanding and using their data."

If there is one part of the job Matier says outweighs the rest, it is that showing up authentically for your people matters. Some days you'll be stronger than others, and that's okay. Her three-point plan for staying on task and grounded includes finding time to recharge outside of work, leaning on a peer community for perspective, and listening to mentors who remind you that better cycles will come again.

SERVICE AS STRATEGY

At the University of Utah, Contract Specialist Polly Alles views procurement through a similar lens of resilience and redefinition. Working in an environment where no two procurements are alike, Alles says the procurement team is the one that connects to everyone on campus—a connection that requires flexibility and the ability to manage constant change.

For Alles, that flexibility starts with perception. While departments often see procurement as a roadblock, she works deliberately to reposition the team as a partner. "Sometimes that means joining a department's meeting so they're informed in real time, even if the contract isn't ready yet. When people know they can count on you, they stop seeing procurement as a barrier and start seeing you as a partner."

Alles calls her approach “CXL”—customer service on steroids. As she warns, empathy, trust and perseverance are not soft skills in her world. They’re essential to building credibility in a profession where rules, policies and funding realities can quickly frustrate stakeholders. “We manage contracts, but we’re also managing people and relationships every day. Being successful takes perseverance, positivity and problem-solving. This is not a competitive industry—it’s collaborative.

The key to success rests in how procurement specialists connect each and every dot in the process. As connectors, procurement specialists sit at the intersection of policy, funding and campus needs. They are translators between faculty expectations and supplier realities. Protectors of institutional integrity, even when that role is misunderstood.

“You’re constantly ‘selling’ your ideas, initiatives and value to leadership. If you can’t communicate and persuade, you won’t get a seat at the table.”

— **Brie Matier, Director of Procurement, University of South Florida**

“For me, procurement is about relationships and service,” Alles says. “Sometimes that means going the extra mile—like engaging with other department teams ahead of the project and keeping them up to



5 WAYS PROCUREMENT SPECIALISTS CAN THRIVE

1 Lead with relationships

Build trust by showing up authentically and positioning procurement as a partner, not a barrier.

2 Own your data

Don’t rely solely on suppliers; develop internal expertise in analytics to make smarter decisions.

3 Use AI as an assistant, not a replacement

Leverage tools for efficiency, but keep judgment, instinct and empathy at the core.

4 Prioritize self-care

Recognize signs of burnout, set boundaries and find ways to recharge outside of work.

5 Stay collaborative

Focus on perseverance, positivity and lifting others up in a field defined by constant change.

Sources: Polly Alles, Contract Specialist, University of Utah; Brie Matier, Director of Procurement, University of South Florida

speed. When people see you involved at the front end, they look at you more like a collaborator and less like a gatekeeper.”

The path forward will require today’s higher education institutions to not only invest in systems, but in people. Training in data analytics, exposure to AI, and opportunities for relationship-

building are all critical. “You need people who will lift others up, not drag them down,” Alles says. “At the end of the day, procurement is vital. Institutions can’t function without it. So my advice is not to take criticism personally, but keep perspective and kill negativity with kindness. The work matters—and so do you.” ■

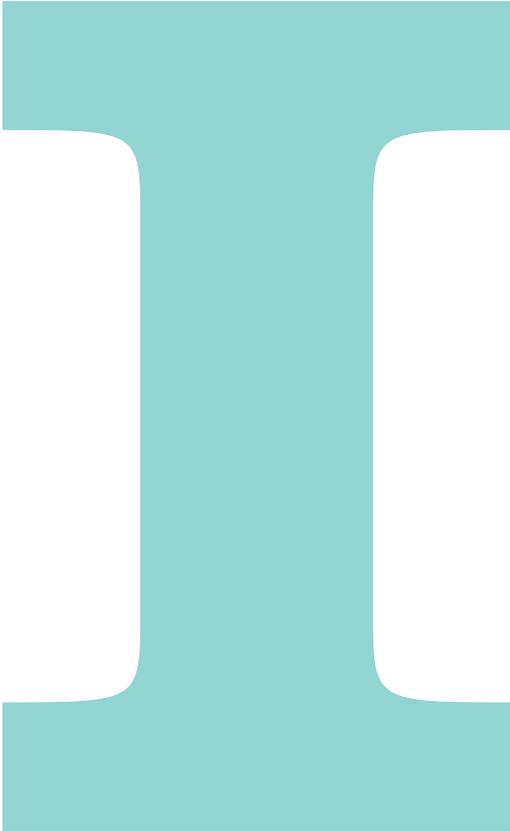
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**STARS
ALIGN**

**SCHOOLS ADAPT
TO MEET NEEDS**





IMAGINE A FALL AFTERNOON IN SOUTH BEND, INDIANA. A GROUP OF NOTRE DAME STUDENTS HUDDLE AROUND A MULTIFUNCTION DEVICE IN THE HESBURGH LIBRARY AT THE HEART OF CAMPUS. REPORTS ARE DUE. PRESENTATIONS NEED POLISHING. PRINTERS ARE HUMMING. WHAT LOOKS LIKE A ROUTINE MOMENT OF CAMPUS LIFE IS ACTUALLY A WINDOW INTO SOMETHING LARGER. FOR GILBERTO A. CARLES, THOSE PRINTERS—AND THE PARTNERSHIP BEHIND THEM—TELL THE STORY OF HOW HIGHER EDUCATION CAN ALIGN ITS RESOURCES WITH THE EVOLVING NEEDS OF STUDENTS, FACULTY AND THE ECOSYSTEM.

Carles, the University of Notre Dame's Executive Director of Procurement Services, says the relationship the school has forged with partners like Canon U.S.A. continues to make a difference in even the simplest of tasks. "They have been a great partner to the University of Notre Dame for many years. Their multifunction devices are efficient, high-quality and reliable. They support faculty and staff every day, but they're also critical for students working on reports and projects. The service is seamless—it keeps our operations running."

That reliability—and the calm it instills—is not an accident. It is the product of years of intentional collaboration, creative problem-

solving and a procurement strategy that is designed to add value to every bidding process. "Our role in procurement is to be an extension of each unit's team," Carles says. "We facilitate the bidding and selection process. We're guided by strategic sourcing methodology to ensure the best results for stakeholders."

More than just back-office logistics, these types of partnerships are helping to ensure today's higher education institutions remain responsive to shifting demands—whether that means enabling research labs to comply with federal regulations or making sure classrooms have the tools they need to function without disruption.

"Our approach is always learning. Every request we receive is an opportunity to research, to expand our knowledge, and to better advise stakeholders."

— **Gilberto A. Carles, Executive Director, Procurement Services, University of Notre Dame**

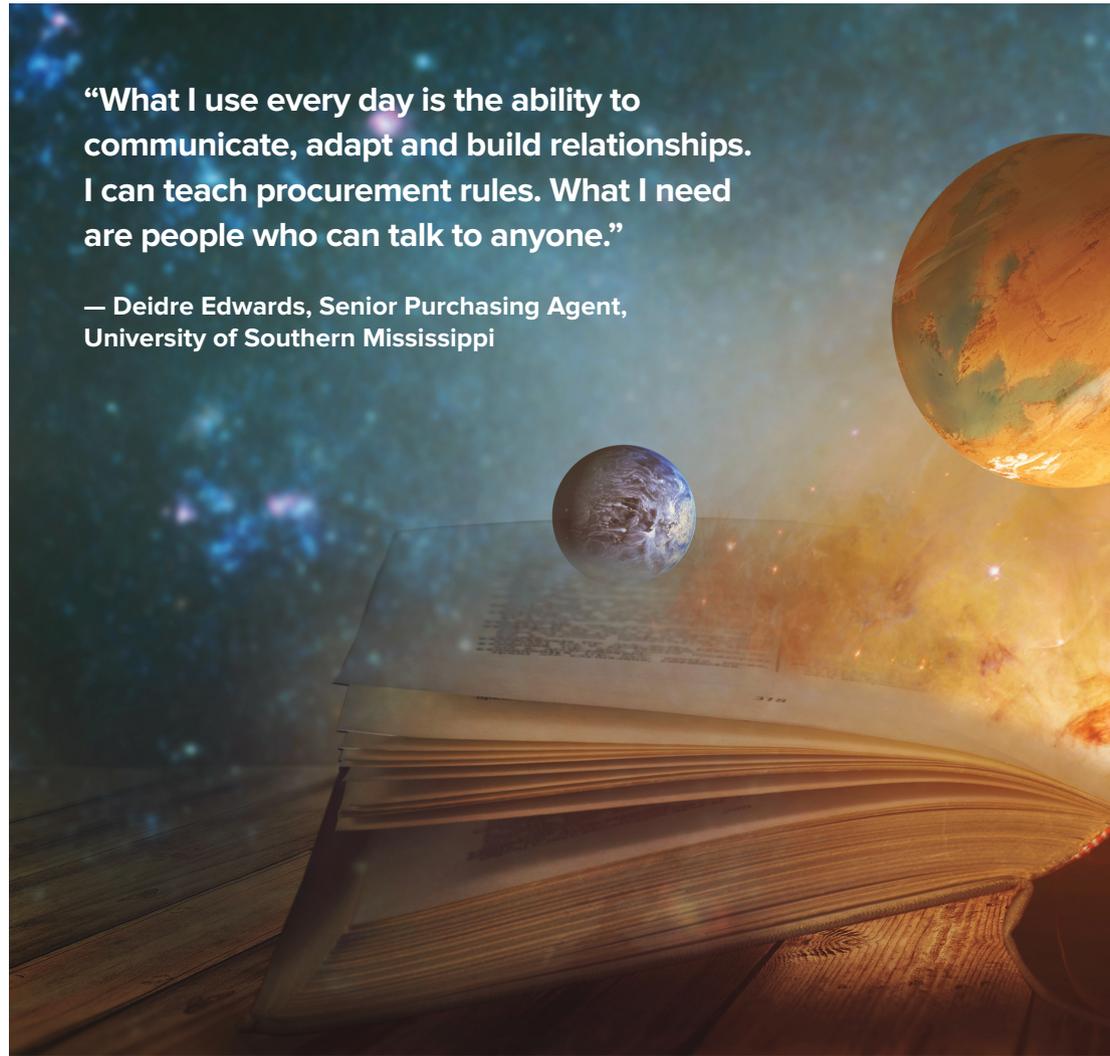
"Our mission is to further the goals of the university by facilitating procurement, mitigating risk, ensuring inclusivity and maximizing value in each transaction," Carles says. "That mission drives us to think about the big picture—how every purchase connects to student success and institutional growth."

The Canon relationship is one example of how procurement connects directly to workforce readiness. Creating standards—like default double-sided printing or black-and-white settings—helps reduce costs and build sustainable practices. “It’s about efficiency, but it’s also about modeling responsible business processes that students see and carry into their careers,” Carles says.

Carles says today’s procurement professionals must be more than negotiators. They must understand market conditions, conduct detailed analysis and navigate federal research regulations. That means supplier relationship management is critical. “Preferred suppliers are part of our daily operations. Regular communication and feedback both ways help us grow together. Continuous improvement is the goal.”

That emphasis on growth extends to his team as well. Training at Notre Dame blends technical skills—contracts, strategic sourcing, federal regulations—with soft skills like communication, teamwork, and emotional intelligence. “Our approach is always learning,” Carles says. “Every request we receive is an opportunity to research, to expand our knowledge, and to better advise stakeholders.”

His advice to other procurement professionals is straightforward. “Be prepared to keep learning about the market. Our world changes every



“What I use every day is the ability to communicate, adapt and build relationships. I can teach procurement rules. What I need are people who can talk to anyone.”

— Deidre Edwards, Senior Purchasing Agent,
University of Southern Mississippi

day. Continuous education, embracing new technologies, even integrating AI into operations—these are the tools that will carry us into the future.”

PROCUREMENT WITH PURPOSE

At the University of Southern Mississippi, Deidre Edwards likes to tell prospective hires—and the next generation of students—that procurement is anything but static. The truth is that it is a jack-of-all-trades role. As a Senior Purchasing

Agent, Edwards says that one day you may be working with athletics, the next with music and the next with facilities. “You’re not just sitting at a desk pushing paper. You’re at the table where things happen.”

Edwards lives these types of scenarios every day. At Southern Miss, she has been part of projects ranging from modular athletic locker rooms to the construction of a new theater. “I was there from beginning to end. Walking into that theater for the first student screening, I thought,



research purchases, I had to coach my team to weigh quotes differently and think creatively. When grant funding is cut after commitments are made, we can't just throw up our hands. We have to help researchers find a path forward."

And then there's artificial intelligence (AI). Edwards first experimented with ChatGPT by writing cheers for her daughter's softball team. Not long after, she realized its professional potential in drafting RFPs and proposals. She remains realistic about both its strengths and its limits. "AI can draft an RFP, but it doesn't know state laws or compliance codes. It can't navigate the nuances. That's where we bring value. Procurement professionals ensure things are done correctly."

If today's procurement professionals are to succeed, Edwards believes they must be flexible, relationship-builders, solution-driven and relentlessly positive. "Challenges will keep coming—COVID, tariffs, budget cuts. Procurement isn't about focusing on problems. It's about creating solutions and moving institutions forward. That's what makes this career rewarding."

By forging partnerships, embracing innovation and staying solution-driven, today's higher education procurement specialists are proving that when the stars align, education becomes both a catalyst for careers and a driver of economic growth. ■

'I did this. I had a hand in it.' That's the impact this career allows."

If you want to take the 20,000-foot approach, you will find that the procurement skills needed in today's environment go well beyond technical expertise. "Flexibility is No. 1," Edwards says. "My background is in educational psychology and sport management, not business. What I use every day is the ability to communicate, adapt and build relationships. I can teach procurement rules. What I need are

people who can talk to anyone—from the president to a secretary—without being intimidated or intimidating."

In her view, procurement today must be solution-driven. "We sometimes have to say no, but it shouldn't stop there. It should be, 'No, but let's look at another road to get there.' That mindset is critical when dealing with tariffs, budget cuts, or new technologies."

Edwards has seen this firsthand. "When tariffs added costs to

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THE IMPACT OF AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION



A striking
92%
of university students are using AI tools as of 2025— up from **66%** in 2024.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/3nhc92ys>

One global survey shows
86%
of students use AI in their studies, **54% weekly**, with nearly **25% daily** usage.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/bdhrjtjhs>

65%
of higher ed students feel they know more about AI than their instructors. **45%** wish their professors incorporated AI skills into courses.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/bdhrjtjhs>

65%
of institutions now use AI to support curriculum design; **52%** automate administrative workflows.
Source: Reuters

84%
of higher education professionals use AI either professionally or personally, representing a **32 percentage point** increase over the previous year.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/2rbykhu5>

69%
of student success professionals have used AI in their work over 2024.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/p6werbxc>

65%
of faculty staff want time to experiment with AI tools in research and **52%** of faculty staff want institutional working groups that explore AI together.
Source: <https://tinyurl.com/p6werbxc>



VOICES

Canon U.S.A. champions students in 20th Annual Japan Center Essay Competition

At Stony Brook University on May 4, the spotlight wasn't on technology or innovation, but on the written word. More than 200 students from high schools and colleges across the country submitted essays for the 20th Annual Japan Center Essay Competition, which Canon U.S.A., Inc. has proudly supported since its inception in 2005.

The competition, organized by the Japan Center at Stony Brook, challenges students to explore Japanese culture through personal reflection. Essays span themes from art and philosophy to tradition, business, and technology—always with the goal of connecting cultural insights to students' own experiences and aspirations.

Dr. Iwao Ojima, president of the Japan Center, praised the entrants for their creativity and depth. "We are proud to partner with Canon U.S.A. on the essay competition, providing students with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of diverse cultural perspectives," Ojima said. "We congratulate the winners and every participant for their great work."

A panel of judges selected winners across high school and college divisions, with top honorees receiving Canon products in recognition of their efforts. Isao "Sammy" Kobayashi, president and CEO of Canon U.S.A., served as an honorary judge, while Kiyoshi Oka, executive vice president and general manager of Canon's Marketing Strategy Unit, attended the awards ceremony.

"It is a privilege to continue to partner with this great



program and help support the Japan Center and all the work they do in fostering understanding of Japanese culture," Oka said. "The students did a commendable job writing so eloquently about their experiences, and we congratulate the winners on their tremendous accomplishments."

Among this year's winners was Kazushi Kousaka of Choate Rosemary Hall, who earned first place and the Consul General of Japan Special Award for his essay "Daijoubu: Powerful Call for Unity." Other standout essays included "Echoes from Hibakusha" by Erika Kawakami of Jericho High School, and "Amaterasu's Mirror of Ecstasy" by Stony Brook student Naomi Kirkup, winner of the college division.

The competition also honored several special award recipients, including essays on themes as diverse as origami, perseverance, and cultural traditions. Each winner read their work aloud at the ceremony, underscoring the event's celebration of storytelling as a bridge between cultures.

What began two decades ago through the vision of the late Canon U.S.A. president Kinya Uchida has now become a tradition that continues to inspire. With Canon's support, the Japan Center Essay Competition remains a powerful stage for young voices to connect cultures and imagine a more globally aware future. ■



Getting EPIC

Higher ed IT executive shares human-centered insights

Joe Sabado serves as Deputy CIO at UC Santa Barbara. An immigrant and first-generation college graduate with almost 30 years of experience in higher education, he is also a writer, speaker, and mentor whose work focuses on advancing conversations about ethical AI, human-centered systems, and purpose-driven leadership while building communities of belonging and developing the next generation of leaders. We spoke with him about his vision for responsible AI, the role of governance, and how higher education can prepare for a future shaped by both technology and community.

What are the most pressing challenges for colleges and universities today?

Colleges face enrollment declines, rising costs, technology disruption, and shifting demographics. These issues are real, but the deeper challenge is whether institutions can stay true to their purpose while adapting, not reacting, to forces they cannot control. At times, institutions may focus on revenue, make short-term financial choices, or adopt technologies without fully considering whether these decisions strengthen dignity, belonging, and growth. Leaders must also adapt to competing stakeholder interests, which is a constant test. These pressures make it easy for institutions to lose focus, but clarity of mission and values is what sustains them.

The real measure of success is whether students, faculty, and staff are treated as whole people with stories, aspirations, and agency.

Without this, higher education risks becoming financially viable but spiritually hollow, especially as its value is questioned due to cost and AI pressures. Success should not be judged only by numbers but by whether people leave more whole, confident, and connected. Higher education must also commit to systemic well-being, creating environments where people feel safe, supported, and able to flourish emotionally, relationally, and professionally.

You've created influential AI frameworks. How do you see these tools shaping how leaders integrate ethical and trustworthy AI into their campus ecosystems?

The frameworks I created like *Campus AI Framework*, are emergent blueprints, adaptable, scalable, and designed to include diverse voices in shaping outcomes. They are not prescriptive but hopeful guides for ethical AI adoption. They provide

structure in a time when many leaders feel overwhelmed by rapid changes and ethical concerns.

AI adoption in higher education is not just technical, it is moral. Ethical leadership protects dignity and fairness. Effective leadership builds systems and cultures that turn principles into practice. Leaders should always ask: Does this system treat people as more than data points? Who benefits, who is left out, and how will this affect future well-being? Grounded in purpose, AI can be a tool for flourishing rather than harm.

How do you think higher ed can balance digital transformation with preserving meaningful, human-centered relationships?

Education is relational. Students thrive because of faculty, mentors, peers, and staff who care. Faculty and staff also need to feel valued. Technology should serve these

relationships, not replace them. When technology takes the lead instead of people, trust and connection suffer.

The balance comes from asking: does this tool humanize or dehumanize? If AI saves time, reinvest it in teaching, advising, and mentorship. If it scales access, ensure it does not erase presence. The test of digital transformation is whether it sustains connection, belonging, and dignity. Institutions that succeed will be those that integrate AI while keeping people at the center of design and implementation.

You recently introduced your EPIC philosophy (Exemplar of a Purpose-Driven, Inspired, and Compassionate Being). What inspired you to create this, and how has it shaped the way you lead?

EPIC came from my story as an immigrant and first-generation student often told I was not enough. I learned leadership is not about titles but about living with purpose, inspiring through authenticity, and leading with compassion. I share openly how being bullied for my accent created fear of speaking, and how reclaiming my history and identity helped me overcome it. My goal is to be a “possibility model,” not a savior, showing that others can rise above hardship too.

EPIC reminds me to lead with purpose, inspire with authenticity, and act with compassion. It keeps

me grounded in honoring the humanity of others while staying true to my values.

“The real measure of success is whether students, faculty, and staff are treated as whole people with stories, aspirations, and agency.”

How can the EPIC concept serve as a guide for both students and faculty in navigating not only academic and professional pressures, but also the ethical and relational challenges of a tech-driven world?

Students, faculty, and staff face heavy pressures: costs, workloads, uncertainty, and digital overload. EPIC offers a compass: live with purpose, provide inspiration, and act with compassion. Success is not just outputs but alignment with deeper values and relationships.

For students, EPIC is a call to see themselves as more than GPA or résumé. For faculty, it means modeling integrity and care in teaching and scholarship. For staff, it validates growth, agency, and belonging. In a tech-driven world, EPIC reminds us that humanity, not efficiency, must lead. It reflects empathy, moral judgment, creativity, and relationships that AI cannot

replicate. These qualities give education its true value, shaping not just careers but whole lives.

What advice would you give higher ed leaders who want to model both technological vision and the kind of purpose-driven, compassionate leadership that EPIC represents?

Start with clarity of mission for both your institution and your own life. Commit to inclusive processes where diverse voices shape decisions. Connect every technology choice back to education’s purpose: human development, dignity, and service. Practice foresight, considering long-term impacts. Lead with compassion, because trust is built on care, humility, and consistency. Leadership in this era requires courage to pause, listen, and put people first.

Ethical leadership protects fairness, dignity, and rights. Effective leadership builds systems that make principles real. Leaders themselves are always becoming. Think globally, act locally, and lead from within. The best leadership is lived, grounded in purpose, guided by compassion, and measured by whether it leaves people and institutions more whole. ■

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