

ASU+GSV Summit brings experts together to discuss innovation in education

This year's theme: 'Learning at the Speed of Light'

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
April 7, 2025

This week, Arizona State University President Michael Crow and other university leadership joined education and learning experts from around the globe at the [ASU+GSV education technology summit](#) in San Diego.

Now in its 16th year, the summit is part of a collaboration between ASU and Global Silicon Valley that explores ways education can create more equitable access to the future for all. This year's theme is "Learning at the Speed of Light."

The event featured conversations with music artist will.i.am, who announced a new partnership with ASU; movie producer Walter Parkes, who talked about how VR can enhance education; and former U.S. assistant surgeon general Susan Blumenthal, who talked about the role AI can play in public health.

Here are some panel highlights from the event.

Wednesday, April 9

'Hollywood Meets High School at ASU Prep'

Amy McGrath, vice president of Educational Outreach and Student Services for ASU and the managing director of ASU Preparatory Academy charter school, moderated a panel on how to engage students. Two of the panelists are collaborating with ASU to improve education outcomes.

"These creatives have shaped how millions of people think and learn through storytelling and through design and through

Related coverage

ASU and GSV Ventures announced the [launch of the Innovation Learning Lab](#), which will feature a professional series on AI fluency.

Read more about Learning Enterprise at the ASU+GSV Summit at learning.asu.edu/newsroom.

data. That's what great educators do," McGrath said.

ASU Prep is launching a hybrid high school this fall on the Tempe campus called [ASU Prep Tempe powered by The Levitt Lab](#). The school is being developed in partnership with economist Steve Levitt, author of "Freakonomics," and his team at the University of Chicago's Radical Innovation for Societal Change to offer a seminar-style curriculum.

At the Wednesday panel, Levitt described his view of education through a story about meeting up with former students five years after they took his class: "None of them could solve the problem that was the centerpiece of class. So I asked, 'Well what do you remember?' And one said, 'I remember the time you forgot to pick up your kid from day care and you said your wife was going to kill you.'

"It was a transformational moment for me because at that time I stopped worrying about anything my students would remember about the actual content and instead I tried to engage them with ideas.

"If you're equipped with a set of skills that allow you to learn what you need to know in the moment, that's all you need."

ASU has been using the [Dreamscape Learn](#) virtual reality experiences in several undergraduate courses as well as in ASU Prep classrooms. The experience is created in collaboration with Dreamscape Immersive, a company co-founded by Walter Parkes, a writer and producer of hits including "WarGames," "Gladiator" and "Twister."

An earlier panel at the summit covered new research that showed how the Dreamscape Learn experiences are improving students' grades and persistence through deep engagement.

Read more: [Large-scale study reveals true impact of ASU VR lab on science education](#)

At the Wednesday panel, Parkes said: "We use VR as a way to really connect our students to a particular story and to solve the issues of that story as a reason to learn. The most concise way and most engaging way to express a complex idea is through a story.

"We also try to focus on transferrable skills. Science is not so much about how to pour something into a test tube. Science is increasingly about data and how to model data and how to understand data. We're trying to move pedagogy toward what is relevant in this century."

ASU, FYI.AI preview AI platform to enhance student success and creativity

Arizona State University and [FYI.AI](#), a messaging platform founded by global musical artist and CEO [will.i.am](#), announced the launch of FYI EDU, a multimodal augmented intelligence tool designed to enhance student engagement and empower professor and teacher productivity.

Projected to launch this fall, the FYI EDU tool will be available to ASU students, faculty and staff, integrating conversational AI companions directly into educational experiences. Leveraging FYI's large language model, text-to-speech technologies and an encrypted messenger, the FYI EDU platform's real-time conversational AI agents can encourage curiosity and promote lifelong learning.

The FYI EDU teacher version will manage the distribution of course materials and include dashboards and analytical tools to efficiently gain insights that monitor student progress.

At an ASU+GSV Summit panel discussion on Wednesday, ASU President Michael Crow said that FYI.AI has created the learner-empowered technology that ASU has been seeking for years.

“What’s been missing from everything that we’ve seen up to this point is the infusion of what I would call spirit, heart, love, character, personality into an AI system. And that’s what Will and his team have found a way to build,” Crow said.

For example, the app can respond in different voices or personas that different users might relate to.

FYI EDU will be developed with collaboration from educators, academic support staff, students and creatives from ASU and elsewhere. The platform aims to provide tailored, real-time guidance for academic advising, career support and personal well-being.

According to will.i.am, after a mutual friend and ASU graduate introduced him and President Crow, Crow’s imagination “went to the moon and back to bring about this partnership where we’re going to be using FYI.AI to transform education as we know it, for workforce development and forever learning.”

He said his innovation came from his pride in his background.

“Now we finally have a tool where we can solve our problems ourselves. And while we’re doing that, industries will come from us. And this is a prime example of that.”

Watch the full session:

(Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ls5ZvJFU5Yk>)

Tuesday, April 8

'Revelation or Revolution? ... An Inflection Point for Higher Education'

Several higher education leaders discussed how institutions can deal with the current political climate and maintain their commitment to students.

Ann Kirschner, a professor of practice and a senior advisor to the Office of the President at ASU, moderated the panel. She asked, “With everything going on, is this a moment for boldness or for a protective crouch? What does boldness look like?”

“We have to recognize that somewhere along the way we lost the trust of the people,” said Daniel Greenstein, former chancellor of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and current managing director of Baker Tilly. “There’s a reason for that. How are organizations that are here to lift up people and provide opportunity for all are instead imposing debt and seeing stop-out rates at 40-plus percent?”

“We have to use this as an opportunity to address the structural and performance challenges we know we have.”

Marjorie Hass, president of the Council of Independent Colleges, said: “We’ve treated education as a private good — it’s all about you and your success. We’ve lost the notion that education is a collective good.”

Melva Wallace, president and CEO of Huston-Tillotson University, noted that promoting statistics could be one way forward: “The stats help. Our institution has been named the No. 1 HBCU in the country that puts students in the highest-wage jobs immediately upon graduation.”

'The AI University: Rethinking Learning, Teaching and Operation'

ASU Chief Information Officer Lev Gonick, OpenAI VP and General Manager Leah Belsky and Chief Information Officer in the CSU Office the Chancellor Ed Clark discussed how universities are rethinking teaching, learning and operations with the arrival of AI.

Former Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema was in attendance to offer an announcement at the end of the session about her new ASU collaboration: the [Spark Center for Innovation in Learning](#), to be housed within the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions.

Sinema, who has served as an ASU professor for more than 20 years, intends for the center to assist the estimated one in five children who are neurodiverse — including those with ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other learning differences. The center will launch a Global AI Competition to invite tech companies, students, researchers, faculty and others to help design AI-powered solutions that support neurodiverse learners at all stages of life. Ideas for the competition can be submitted starting in May.

'On the Horizon: Higher Ed's Burning Trends with The Chronicle of Higher Ed'

ASU Provost Nancy Gonzales had a conversation with Goldie Blumenstyk, who covered higher education for many years with The Chronicle of Higher Education and remains a contributing writer. They discussed how universities can move forward amid the current tumult.

Blumenstyk recalled a visit to ASU several years ago in which she saw a group of Native American high school students touring the campus.

“The kids were so excited to be there and wearing their ASU swag, and I remember thinking, ‘This is so cool. This is one of the quiet things ASU is doing right now to make sure it’s serving its population.’

Blumenstyk, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, was a first-generation college goer when she went to Colgate University. Recently, she returned to write about the naming of a building by a donor, who decided to use his original family name of Bernstein.

“Going back 45 years later and seeing Bernstein Hall on my campus meant so much to me,” she said.

“There’s a danger in identity politics, but there’s a value in identity and having people see their identity on campus,” she said, noting that she has written many stories about how a sense of belonging is tied to persistence among students.

Gonzales agreed that as a first-generation college goer, it mattered to her to see university leaders who looked like her.

"I urge all of us to not give up on that," she said.

"... As we think about what's happening, I have faith that we'll continue to be a powerhouse in science and figure out ways to make sure we're continuing to work in the national interest."

Monday, April 7

'AI and Technology: Innovative Tools to Transform Public Health'

Crow noted that despite advances in medical technology, huge segments of the U.S. population is not benefiting.

"The U.S. economy is hampered by spending 20% of the economy on health, while other countries are spending 10%," he said.

"If you ask people the leading causes of death, they'll say cancer and heart disease, when really, if you take the list of the top five or 10 things, half are behavior."

He said that the new [School of Technology for Public Health](#) at ASU will focus on using technology to improve health outcomes for everyone.

Susan Blumenthal, senior health advisor to Crow and a former U.S. assistant surgeon general, said that public health is invisible to most people until there's a crisis.

"We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen public health with technology and create professionals who are bilingual in public health and technology," she said.

She said that AI can be harnessed to create "digital twins" of people and communities for predictive modeling, creation of interventions and training.

Jyotishman Pathak, currently professor and vice chair for entrepreneurship in population health sciences at Cornell University, will lead the new School of Technology for Public Health at ASU. He told the GSV crowd that a lot of health care technology is intended for medical care, such as imaging and pharmaceuticals, not public health.

"As part of this new school we want to see technology, artificial intelligence, machine learning and digital health to better understand the existing and emerging public-health threats," he said.

Malcolm Grant, former chairman of the National Health Services in England and a senior advisor to Crow, said, "One thing we should be welcoming is the retirement of Dr. Google. Dr. Google will be overtaken by AI.

"We'll see the ability of people to use agents like FYI.AI to say, 'Help me develop a diabetes-management plan. Here are my problems and here is my data.'"

'Changing Futures: Transforming Global Education and Advancing Technology for Good'

Gretchen Buhlig, CEO of the ASU Foundation for a New American University, and Crow discussed ASU's new [Changing Futures](#) campaign that was announced on Monday. Changing Futures is a global campaign to attract philanthropy and new partnerships to increase ASU's impact and to solve the complex challenges facing society.

"One way the world advances is education. You need 300 million more people to go to college," he said.

"We need new models and new ways of doing things. How do we accelerate the evolution of our planet and the people living here to be more ecologically viable, and less conflict-oriented?"

"We need the ability to reach more learners. We think we can do that."

Philanthropy is essential to the emergence of new ideas because it allows the innovators to not be constrained by bureaucracy or politics, Crow said.

Buhlig told Crow: "As long as I've known you, you've never been focused on a numbers game, especially in the world of philanthropy. You've always been focused on impact and outcomes."

The 'Invisible Hand' of University Research

Paul Cherukuri, vice president for innovation and chief innovation officer at Rice University, had a conversation with Crow about the importance of research at universities. The session was based on a [video](#) of an earlier conversation that went viral, in which Crow described the enormous and yet unknown contributions of university researchers in smartphone technology.

At Monday's session, he elaborated on the smartphone metaphor.

"It's tens of thousands of academic articles. It's at least 4,000 academic research groups over decades that laid the foundations so that this technology could emerge," he said.

But because it involved so many groups over so much time in incremental steps, it's an "invisible hand," he said.

Cherukuri said: "We wouldn't have gotten out of COVID without university research. It's because mRNA was studied for decades. It was an infusion of capital and an accordion-like contraction of processes that could get us out of COVID."

Crow gave two examples of recent monumental research discoveries that are barely known by the public — the creation of fusion energy at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and the creation of a new element at Berkeley.

"It's unbelievable science, but in academia there's a total lack of ability to communicate about it," he said.

Crow said that universities need to explain these research discoveries in a way that regular people understand.

"We have to make them understand that this leads to better outcomes for everybody, not just better outcomes for rich people," he said.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Photo courtesy of EdPlus at ASU

Text image(s)



ASU President Michael Crow (center) and music artist will.i.am. (right) announce the launch of a new augmented intelligence tool during a panel moderated by [Christine Devine](#), ASU alumna and anchor at Fox 11 in Los Angeles, on April 9 at the ASU+GSV Summit. Photo courtesy of EdPlus at ASU



Former Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema introduces a new collaboration with ASU — the Spark Center for Innovation in Learning — during a panel at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 8. Photo courtesy of EdPlus at ASU



ASU Provost Nancy Gonzales (left) and journalist Goldie Blumenstyk (center) talk about being first-generation college goers during a panel at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 8. Photo courtesy of EdPlus at ASU



Gretchen Buhlig, CEO of the ASU Foundation for a New American University, and ASU President Michael Crow talk about ASU's new Changing Futures campaign at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 7. Photo by EdPlus at ASU



Attendees watch a Dreamscape Learn presentation at the AI Show at the ASU+GSV Summit. ASU's Dreamscape Learn biology courses include 15-minute virtual reality scenarios every week that have students traveling through space to an intergalactic wildlife sanctuary. Photo by EdPlus at ASU