

ASU+GSV Summit brings experts together to discuss AI, education equity

**This year's theme for the annual education technology summit:
'The Power of Fusion'**

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
April 15, 2026

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 17th 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 "The Power of Fusion."

Here are some panel highlights from the event.

Tuesday, April 14

'Crossing the Chasm ... The Brave New World of Higher Ed'

In a Tuesday morning keynote event, a panel of university presidents expressed optimism about the future of higher education even as research funding has been reduced and public confidence is declining.

And, they were upbeat about AI.

ASU President Michael Crow said that [a new course taught by musician and tech pioneer will.i.am](#) is creating a truly personalized experience.

"Learning is going to be enhanced. Identity is going to be protected. The true libertarian expression in American democracy — of your ideas controlled by you to advance your interests — is going to

be empowered by all of this,” he said.

“We’re embracing this as a tool to enhance learning outcomes for as many people as we can reach.”

Pradeep Khosla, chancellor of the University of California, San Diego, says that access to AI is key.

“Like the internet age, the haves and have nots of information are going to become wider and wider and wider,” he said.

“That is the challenge — that society is not only divided on an economic basis, but also on who's empowered, who's enabled and who has access to what.”

The presidents also believe that research funding will stabilize when universities restore the public’s trust that they are producing research for the community’s benefit.

“What we need — and this is what we’re getting right now — is a little rejiggering of the model. The model needs to be that we are interested in the success of all Americans. We’re interested in the success of all medical outcomes. We need different systems, different models, new ideas.”

Sian Beilock, president of Dartmouth University, said she’s frequently met with senators and found that they support research funding.

“I think they all understand the power of research, mainly because of the threats from China and other countries. To maintain superiority technologically, we have to invest in research,” she said.

“Having said that, we have to make sure that we don't see research investments by the public as an entitlement. We see it as a necessary thing to empower not just the universities, but to empower the public and to improve our economy.”

‘ASU’s CreateAI Platform: An Enterprise Strategy for Designing AI for Everyone at Scale’

Lev Gonick, ASU Enterprise chief information officer, hosted current and former ASU technology leaders and partners who have been instrumental in ASU's CreateAI journey.

CreateAI is the university's flagship enterprise AI platform and tool kit, with over 21,000 creators and 7,000 AI experiences in the ASU marketplace.

"There is unprecedented demand for trying to share the kinds of things that we're doing at ASU with others across the education market," Gonick said.

“There are new capabilities, new models always emerging. So what we have to do is build technology that plans for the future,” said Kyle Bowen, deputy chief information officer at ASU Enterprise Technology.

[Elizabeth Reilley](#), chief AI officer at the University of North Carolina, was the initial architect of the ASU CreateAI journey.

"Luckily, the way that we architected the platform at Arizona State was such that it's very modularized," Reilley said. "I think that flexibility is going to be key in whatever anybody does or is

thinking about or is moving and doing in an institution-wide or statewide capacity."

Partners such as Axiom Collaborative, the Gates Foundation and Robots and Pencils made that possible.

"To launch CreateAI, we need trusted technology partners who can help us with some of the important workflows, integrations, helping to map the ways in which we can outline our aspirational experiences and then help us do some of the important coding work," Gonik said.

"What's really exciting about CreateAI is that it solves a lot of the issues right away," said Leonard Pagon, CEO of [Robots and Pencils](#). "... Your faculty, your staff and your organization can start to get your hands and build things without understanding anything about the coding."

[Axiom Collaborative](#) CEO Stephanie Khurana said that as partners, ASU has been innovating in a real-live environment.

"The ways that we're going to teach into the future are unfolding right now," Bowen said. "Providing these tool sets, providing the data, providing the access becomes a key part of defining what that future can look like."

MindUP with Goldie Hawn

The Mary Lou Fulton College of Teaching and Learning Innovation is partnering with the Goldie Hawn Foundation to distribute the foundation's [MindUP](#) curriculum to improve mental health in young people. MindUP currently reaches 7 million students in 45 countries.

On Tuesday, Hawn chatted with Carole Basile, dean of the Mary Lou Fulton College, to describe how she launched the initiative in 2003.

"I can't bear an unhappy child," said Hawn, who was working on a documentary about happiness at that time.

"I felt in search of joy because it was important to experience this feeling. But then I realized that our children were not experiencing it either."

So she started working with neuroscientists to create a way for children to learn about their brains.

"A child needs to feel strong in themselves, understand their brain, know how to understand their reactivity, be able to self-manage their reactivity and learn empathy, because empathy can be taught. We're building greater human capital — brilliant, smart minds that know how to strategize, understand and be happy," she said.

Basile said the college has broken down its coursework into nano courses for parents, grandparents, tutors and community members.

"The idea is to take the content that we have, what we know about teaching and learning, blend that with what MindUP has around thinking about preventative mental health, thinking about the brain, thinking about things like brain breaks, and bringing these two things together and planting all of that into AI," she said.

"Then together we provide the valid content that people can use.

"If we say there's a struggling reader, not only do we have to address the fact that we've got somebody who needs to learn the skills of reading, we also have to deal with the word 'struggling.'"

'AI Agents Built by and for Institutions'

For many people, their use of AI extends to opening a tab, typing a question and then getting an answer. But what if that wasn't the only model?

That is the question [Casey Evans](#), ASU EdPlus chief operating officer, posed to the audience during a session that showcased several AI agents ASU is actively building and deploying across campus.

"In terms of the problems that our students and our faculty are facing and the ways we're trying to solve them with technology, we're seeing that our technology needs to do more," said [Auryan Ratliff](#), director of technology innovation and research and development at ASU EdPlus. "We need to make a better experience for them working with this technology as well — and agents provide a way to solve that problem."

"... The only way to solve these problems is through partnership," Evans said. "It's our responsibility as an institution to define the ways we can plug in to organizations to empower better change."

That's where a partner company [Superhuman](#) came in. Superhuman, formerly Grammarly, partners with institutions that deeply understand what problems they want to solve and help them achieve outcomes.

"They said, 'Here's our vision, here's what we want to do, and we want to build it with you,'" Ratliff said. "We were able to create things together that we would not have been able to do separately. And that started with a partnership, not just a vendor."

Use cases for the agents include creating a quiz for faculty from source content or converting meeting notes into tasks for staff and transferring them to a project management system.

"This was developed at ASU, leveraging the Superhuman platform," Ratliff said. "So even if that agent does not exist for you and the agents that Superhuman provides, we were able to build this ourselves and we were able to do that in a matter of weeks."

'From Hype to Evidence: The Data on AI and Learning'

The majority of students aren't using AI to cheat; they're using it to learn.

That was one of the takeaways from a panel that looked at the data on AI and learning, where researchers and university leaders sat down to sort fact from fiction on AI in education.

[Annie Hale](#), executive director of the ASU EdPlus Action Lab, moderated the panel alongside [Danielle McNamara](#), executive director of ASU's Learning Engineering Institute, [Elizabeth Reilley](#), chief AI officer for the University of North Carolina, and [Susanna Loeb](#), director of the SCALE Initiative at Stanford University.

Reilley pointed to recent research showing roughly 80% of student AI use is about learning new skills.

"That's not someone copying their assignment text into ChatGPT and then pasting out the response," Reilley said. "Our students who want to learn how to do something in Excel or be able to automate a process ask, 'Can you teach me how to use Google Apps Script?'"

Hale said that according to an ASU survey of 1,000 undergraduates, students are using AI as a 24/7 study buddy, to build flashcards and even design their own bots.

Loeb noted that concerns about using AI to cheat is the wrong thing to be focused on, and that assignments can be tailored to reduce the risk.

"I do think we have to change how we're thinking about it and give assignments where you learn. It's gotten so easy to create badly designed assignments that we have to change that," Loeb said.

McNamara agreed: "If you create assignments that invite cheating because they're not obviously a learning activity, students will use those tools to do it faster and do it better."

Reilley said that faculty are also finding benefits from using AI to create their coursework.

She pointed to a growing wave of instructors using AI to build interactive learning experiences from scratch with no coding background required.

"Our faculty is using AI not necessarily to create AI assignments for students where the students are using AI, but they're using AI to create interactive experiences that help students to learn," she said.

Monday, April 13

Global AI Competition winners

Three startup ventures won funding from the Global AI Competition on Monday, sponsored by the [Spark Center for Innovation in Learning](#) at ASU.

The center, founded by former U.S. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, focuses on finding AI-powered solutions for neurodiverse learners. The center was launched at last year's ASU+GSV Summit with the promise that the inaugural winners would be announced this year.

The winning venture, which received \$75,000, is [Eleplan](#), an AI-powered platform for families who are supporting individuals with autism, dementia, mental health challenges or chronic illnesses.

The second-place winner, [Thingamabob](#), which helps neurodiverse students with assignments, won \$50,000, and [Ama AI](#), which facilitates applied behavior analysis therapy, won \$25,000 for third place.

Also at the competition on Monday was the student team Vertex AI, which won the [AZ AI Challenge](#) with NAVIA, an AI assistant for neurodiverse people that breaks tasks down to micro-actions ("gather ingredients," "prepare ingredients," "cook the meal") and offers a Tinder-style peer-matching network to build community.

Vertex AI includes Mohan Sai Sravan Kummarigunta, a computer science major; Taljinder Singh, data science; Kinjal Chatterjee, computer science; Jacob Kuriakose, data science; and Sankritya

Thakur, computer science.

Kuriakose said: "Winning the Global AI Challenge has been an incredibly exciting and validating moment for our entire team.

"We were honestly thrilled and proud, especially knowing that something we built with real users in mind is being recognized at this level after starting from the [AZ AI Challenge](#)."

He said the team will continue to refine NAVIA through engagement at ASU, where students in the [GATE](#) program have already started using the app.

"It was incredible to see the solutions our winning ventures created, and I am looking forward to ensuring their success through our efforts at the Spark Center," Sinema said. "We are committed to changing the future for neurodiverse learners around the world."

'Building A Future Where Everyone Can Work with AI'

Crow told the crowd that AI must be seen as a tool for individual empowerment for the good of society and not as a threat, and that universities must play a role in that mindset.

"At some point, we have to reverse the logic that the tech bros are talking about with AI as this sort of Death Star image and this unbelievably powerful tool that's going to alter everyone, everything and replace everyone in work.

"In the long run, if we can figure out how to do this, each person's going to be individually and personally empowered — if the tools can be designed in a way where they help the individual to learn, help the individual to make decisions, help the individual to project themselves.

"What I'm arguing for is that some of the universities become deeply embedded at the level of the communities, at the level of working with these companies, working with the workers, working with the transition and developing these kinds of tools."

Gina Raimondo, former U.S. Secretary of Commerce, said that the U.S. is in a tough spot right now.

"We need to lead the global competition in AI but right now, 70-plus percent of Americans are afraid of AI. When they hear AI, they hear, 'I'm going to lose my job.'

"We have to honor the anxiety, not just with empathy, but with a plan and with action, because otherwise politicians are going to overregulate AI and stop it. And that's not competitive."

She said that companies must partner with universities on creating lifelong learning opportunities.

"It has to be continuous learning so that in the grand bargain, in the AI economy, an American has confidence to know as the labor market changes as necessary, skills change, and there's a chance for them in that economy."

[Sethuraman Panchanathan](#), University Professor of Technology and Innovation at ASU and former director of the National Science Foundation, said that companies must be incentivized in new ways.

“The public sector has a job to do here, which is change incentives. Because I think if there are economic incentives for companies to retrain, redeploy, lean into everything that we're talking about instead of just hitting the easy button and laying folks off, I think they'll do it.”

'Future-Ready Nations: Education as Economic Strategy'

Crow led a session highlighting two countries that improved their economies by investing in education: South Korea and Kazakhstan.

[Ju-Ho Lee](#), a professor of practice in the [Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation](#), is the former acting president of the Republic of Korea and was the longest-serving minister of education. He said that starting in the 1970s, Korea began investing in vocational high schools and science and engineering universities.

“We achieved both industrialization and democratization, and this path toward being an advanced country is based on our strategic investment in education.

“But sometimes we reach too far. There is very high competition to enter the best universities, and the cost of private tutoring and the stress and the burden of parents and students to enter into the best university is really strong.”

He said ASU is a model for the way it maintains excellence while increasing access.

“When I was in the ministry, we started a big project called Local University Project. We selected 30 universities and provided \$750 billion to transform themselves to be more like ASU to reduce the burden on the parents and students because of the selectivity.”

Sayasat Nurbek, minister of science and higher education in Kazakhstan, said his country has become an economic powerhouse.

“We've just amended our constitution a few weeks ago and we've put four key values as our national priorities: education, research, human capital and innovation,” he said.

Several international universities have established campuses in Kazakhstan.

“So we brought all these great institutions to Kazakhstan and created what we call an academic and research hub, which already is giving us some really tangible results, with over 35,000 international students,” he said.

“We've located all these different campuses around our country, and local governors are now enjoying this new wave of investments and human capital.”

Doug Becker is founder and chairman of [Cintana Education](#), ASU's partner in pioneering an educational model that helps universities around the world build and scale high-quality programs tailored to their country's needs. He said that while affluent countries like Korea can build their own universities, middle-income and developing countries cannot.

“What they want is affordability, access and innovation. And so we go into countries and develop that, and over time, people begin to recognize and seek that.

“Now when I go around the world, people want what ASU can do, which is this first-tier positioning in innovation. I loved hearing that Kazakhstan is adopting innovation as one of its pillars in the same way that ASU has, and realizing that in the end, that is probably the scarcest natural resource if we don't develop it.”

'The AI Roadmap Ahead: Harnessing AI to be Pro Human in Education, Work and Society'

Crow also moderated a panel that featured musician, tech founder and philanthropist will.i.am. The CEO and founder of [FYI.AI](#), will.i.am is also a professor of practice at ASU, where he is teaching a course called "[The Agentic Self](#)."

An early investor in AI, will.i.am said that current technology, such as smartphones and social media, does not belong to the individual.

“You're actually the product. You use ChatGPT, which is a great product, but it's not yours. Meanwhile, all your personal information is in every company's data center. These companies know you more than you know yourself,” he said.

“But agentic self is a system that is yours.”

An agentic self is an AI persona that can reason, adapt and accomplish complicated tasks on behalf of its creator, while reflecting that person's values, voice and goals.

He called agentic self “liberation.”

“This era is giving every single person a torch to illuminate their path through this digital-verse. It's so deep. It's too vast. You don't got the time to figure it out.

“As this technology gets more and more advanced, everyone needs an agentic cellphone because we no longer just live in the real world. We live most of our awakened moments in a screen, and that screen's not for our brains. We need to spend more time human to human.”

Sonya Christian, chancellor of the California Community Colleges, described the challenge of scaling AI to all of the 2.3 million students in the system.

“For the California Community Colleges, it's almost a moral obligation. If we don't show up and if we don't find the tools to build that human agency using the agentic self, then what we are doing is part of the problem of widening power gaps, of widening wealth gaps, of widening health gaps,” she said.

The community college system must create and evaluate demonstration projects before asking for state funding.

“To do that, our faculty need to be co-developers and co-creators. The idea is when we are co-developing with faculty, that ownership automatically builds the trust and brings it into the classroom.”

'Strength in Partnership — Building a National Education Ecosystem'

[Chris Howard](#), executive vice president and chief operating officer at Arizona State University, led a conversation about how partnerships between organizations and higher education institutions

can create a more egalitarian higher education system.

"If you want to be innovative, if you want to solve issues and problems, find other giants in the industry who are willing to partner with you and help you make that happen," said [Chris Vitelli](#), president of Merced Community College.

"If you want to go further, go together," Howard said. "These folks here have gone further, and we're going together."

[Wendy Walsh](#), chief learning officer at Air Education and Training Command, and [Shay Scott](#), professor of practice, vice dean and chief operating officer of digital learning at the University of Tennessee Knoxville, joined Howard and Vitelli.

The discussion centered on how partnering with ASU has enabled their institutions to provide accessible education to their learners.

"We are almost three years into (our ASU) partnership," Scott said. "We've already doubled the number of online students that we serve. We have increased the number of undergraduate programs from five to 28 that we're offering fully online, and we're really just getting started."

At Air Education and Training Command, working with ASU on online learning changed the mindset of learners and what it means to earn a degree.

"There's a culture within the military that if you go to a program in person, that you are better, and if you do the program remotely, you are not as big," Walsh said. "That has been changing over the past four years."

Institutions should be in partnership to serve society, Vitelli said, by taking the best from each other to advance student success.

"The best part of working with ASU is that it's transformative, not transactional," Shay said.

This story was written with contributions from Meenah Rincon/ASU EdPlus.

Read more

[ASU leaders explore AI, access and the future of learning at the 2026 ASU+GSV Summit](#)

[New AI-enabled platform to help learners navigate career transitions in a rapidly changing world](#)

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

Main image



From left: Arizona State University President Michael Crow, California Community Colleges Chancellor Sonya Christian and will.i.am, CEO and founder of FYI.AI and a professor of practice at Arizona State University discuss how artificial intelligence is reshaping work and learning during a panel at the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego on April 13. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus

Text image(s)



From left: Wall Street Journal reporter Doug Belkin moderated a panel with Sian Beilock, president of Dartmouth, Pradeep Khosla, chancellor of UC San Diego, and ASU President Michael Crow about the future state of higher ed at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 14. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



Lev Gonick, CIO of ASU Enterprise, hosted a panel about ASU's CreateAI journey at the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego on April 14. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



Actress Goldie Hawn (center) joins Carole Basile (right), dean of the Mary Lou Fulton College at ASU, discuss the Goldie Hawn Foundation's MindUP initiative, which works to improve mental health in young people. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



Aryan Ratliff, director of technology innovation and research and development at ASU EdPlus, talks about ASU's work on AI agents at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 14. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



From left: Annie Hale, executive director of the ASU EdPlus Action Lab, Danielle McNamara, executive director of ASU's Learning Engineering Institute, and Elizabeth Reilley, chief AI officer for the University of North Carolina, talk about what research says about AI and learning at the ASU+GSV Summit on April 14. Photo by ASU EdPlus



Amanda Lukof (left), co-founder and CEO of Eleplan, winner of the Spark Center for Innovation in Learning competition poses with center founder Kyrsten Sinema at the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego on April 13. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



Former NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan (right), University Professor of Technology and Innovation at Arizona State University, speaks on a panel about the future of AI and work during the ASU+GSV Summit on April 13. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



From left: ASU President Michael Crow, ASU Professor of Practice Ju-Ho Lee, the former acting president of the Republic of Korea, and Doug Becker, founder and chairman of Cintana Education, talk about education as an economic investment. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



will.i.am., CEO and founder of FYI.AI, and professor of practice at ASU, talks about the future of agentic AI at the ASU+GSV Summit in San Diego on April 13. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus



Chris Howard (far left), ASU executive vice president and COO, moderated a panel on the importance of partnerships in building a more equitable national education ecosystem during the ASU+GSV Summit on April 13. Photo courtesy of ASU EdPlus