ESG Education Strategy Group

CASE STUDY:
BUILDING AI RESILIENCE FOR STUDENTS

Nashville State Community College

THE CHALLENGE: MOVING BEYOND THE "WAIT AND SEE" APPROACH

Like many higher education institutions, Nashville State Community College (NSCC) initially viewed Artificial Intelligence through a narrow lens. The college's first AI focus was centered on whether to create specialized IT or computer science degrees to meet technical demands. However, local labor market signals indicated a much broader shift.

Dr. Johannah Williams, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and her team began to recognize that AI skills were no longer a niche requirement but a **baseline workforce expectation** across all sectors, including healthcare, business, and marketing. The risk of inaction was clear: waiting for the technology to "mature" would result in preparing students for a workforce that had already passed them by.

"We saw a moment when we might either lead right now or spend years and years trying to catch up."

— Dr. Johannah Williams

THE STRATEGY: A COLLEGE-WIDE RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

Partnering with **Education Strategy Group** (ESG), Nashville State underwent an **AI Resilience Review** to align its programs with the rapid evolution of the Nashville labor market. The review shifted the college's strategy from creating "AI-builder" programs to fostering "AI-enabled" professionals across the board.

Key Strategic Shifts:

- **Cross-Disciplinary Integration:** Moving AI literacy out of the computer science silo and embedding it into disciplines like Healthcare, Business, and Marketing.
- **Focus on Adaptability:** Prioritizing the ability of students to work alongside AI and adapt to new tools, which Nashville employers identified as a top priority.
- **Comprehensive Approach:** Ensuring all students, regardless of major, graduate with AI fluency to prevent a new "digital divide" in career mobility.

THE IMPLEMENTATION: EMPOWERING FACULTY AND STAFF

To turn strategy into action, Nashville State established a robust internal infrastructure designed to support a long-term transition.

- **AI Task Force:** A college-wide group tasked with developing a comprehensive training framework for both faculty and staff.
- **Modular Professional Development:** Creating training through the college's teaching center that is tailored to different departments—recognizing that a business professor needs different AI tools than an IT instructor.
- **Curriculum Evolution:** Updating existing modules to include AI literacy and opening specialized AI courses to students across all four of the college's schools.

THE OUTCOME: DURABLE SKILLS FOR A DIGITAL FUTURE

The partnership with ESG provided Nashville State with a clear roadmap to close the gap between academic requirements and industry needs. By integrating AI literacy with "durable human skills"—such as ethics, critical thinking, and communication—Nashville State is ensuring its graduates are not just tech-savvy, but career-resilient.

Lessons for Leadership:

- **Start with the Labor Market:** Understanding where the local labor market is headed with respect to AI is a critical first step.
- **Don't Isolate AI:** AI is a workforce transformation, not a departmental one.
- **Act Amidst Ambiguity:** Start moving forward even before the landscape is fully defined.
- **Balance Technical & Human:** AI handles the technical tasks, making human-centric "durable skills" more valuable than ever.

Learn more about how ESG can help your college adapt to serve students in the AI era.
Reach out to Austin Estes at aestes@edstrategy.org.