



Bethany College AI Initiative: A Timeline for Future-Proofing Students

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Artificial intelligence marks a new era of technological, intellectual, and ethical change. At Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas, we approach this moment not as a race to adopt tools, but as a responsibility to prepare students for *what is now* and *what comes next*. Bethany's AI initiative reflects our conviction that liberal arts education is how we *future-proof* students. As a Lutheran liberal arts college grounded in the theological, intellectual, and technological innovation of the Reformation, we recognize this moment. Then, as now, new tools reshaped how knowledge was created, shared, and contested. Our response is grounded in the same commitments: curiosity, ethical responsibility, community, and courage.

For small colleges especially, AI adoption is not about scale or speed. It is about alignment: using what we already do well, trusting our people, and leaning into community when resources are limited. In that sense, this work is not new for Bethany. It is simply the next chapter in a long tradition of thoughtful innovation in service to the common good. As a very small, rural, private college, Bethany relies on collaboration, creativity, and the determination to grow capacity from within. Resource constraint has become one of our strengths in shaping an AI initiative that is pragmatic, values-driven, and deeply integrated into who we already are.

Timeline of Bethany's AI Initiative

Fall 2024: Laying the Ethical and Educational Groundwork

- Campus-wide conversations begin, framing AI as a human and ethical challenge, not merely a technical one
- AI positioned as a liberal arts question: How do we reason well, communicate clearly, evaluate evidence, and act responsibly in a world shaped by intelligent systems?
- Initial employee trainings launch, signaling that AI literacy is a shared responsibility

December 2024–Spring 2025: Building Internal Capacity

- Fourteen AI training and information sessions delivered for faculty and staff
- Faculty professional development begins with tiered learning ("AI for Beginners" and "Beyond the Basic Prompt")
- Five employees complete CIC's *AI Ready* program, with additional staff enrolled the following year
- Campus panel discussion models transparent dialogue about promise, risk, and integrity

Fall 2025: Integrating AI into the Student Experience

- 100% of first-year students engage AI ethics through the Quest I curriculum
- AI ethics embedded across ID101, with pilot sections testing deeper integration
- Twenty-seven employees gain hands-on experience through BoodleBox

2025–26: Scaling Access and Equity

- Technology fee implemented to ensure universal student access to AI tools
- AI literacy no longer dependent on major, background, or personal resources



- Admissions and external outreach incorporate AI conversations with counselors and school districts, extending Bethany's role as an educational partner in rural communities

Spring 2026: Deepening Curriculum and Practice

- Comprehensive curriculum review launches to embed AI across disciplines
- Interdisciplinary course, *Research in the AI Era*, debuts
- Faculty-led peer training emphasizes discipline-specific uses
- Staff training initiative focuses on operational resilience, efficiency, and student support
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Summer 2026 and Beyond: Extending the Mission

- K-12 educator AI institute planned, reinforcing Bethany's regional leadership role
- Community panels continue open dialogue about learning, integrity, and change
- AI framed as a catalyst for renewed attention to human creativity and vocation

Lessons Learned for Small Colleges

1. Start with values, not tools.

AI adoption moves faster and with less resistance when it is framed as an extension of mission, ethics, and educational purpose.

2. Build capacity from within.

Investing in faculty and staff learning, peer leadership, and shared experimentation creates durable expertise and institutional confidence.

3. Equity must be embedded.

Universal access to AI tools matters. Without it, AI literacy quickly becomes uneven and divided.

4. Integrate early and often.

Embedding AI in first-year and general education normalizes responsible use and shifts the focus from policing to learning.

5. Leverage small scale as an advantage.

Seminars, mentoring, and close community allow for integrated project-based AI learning.

6. Treat AI as a shared responsibility.

Faculty, staff, and administrators need AI fluency. Operational uses and classroom use reinforce one another.

7. Transparency builds trust.

Open conversations about academic integrity, ethical risk, and uncertainty create buy-in and reduce fear.

8. Progress beats perfection.

In fast-moving technological landscapes, steady, values-aligned steps matter more than flawless plans.