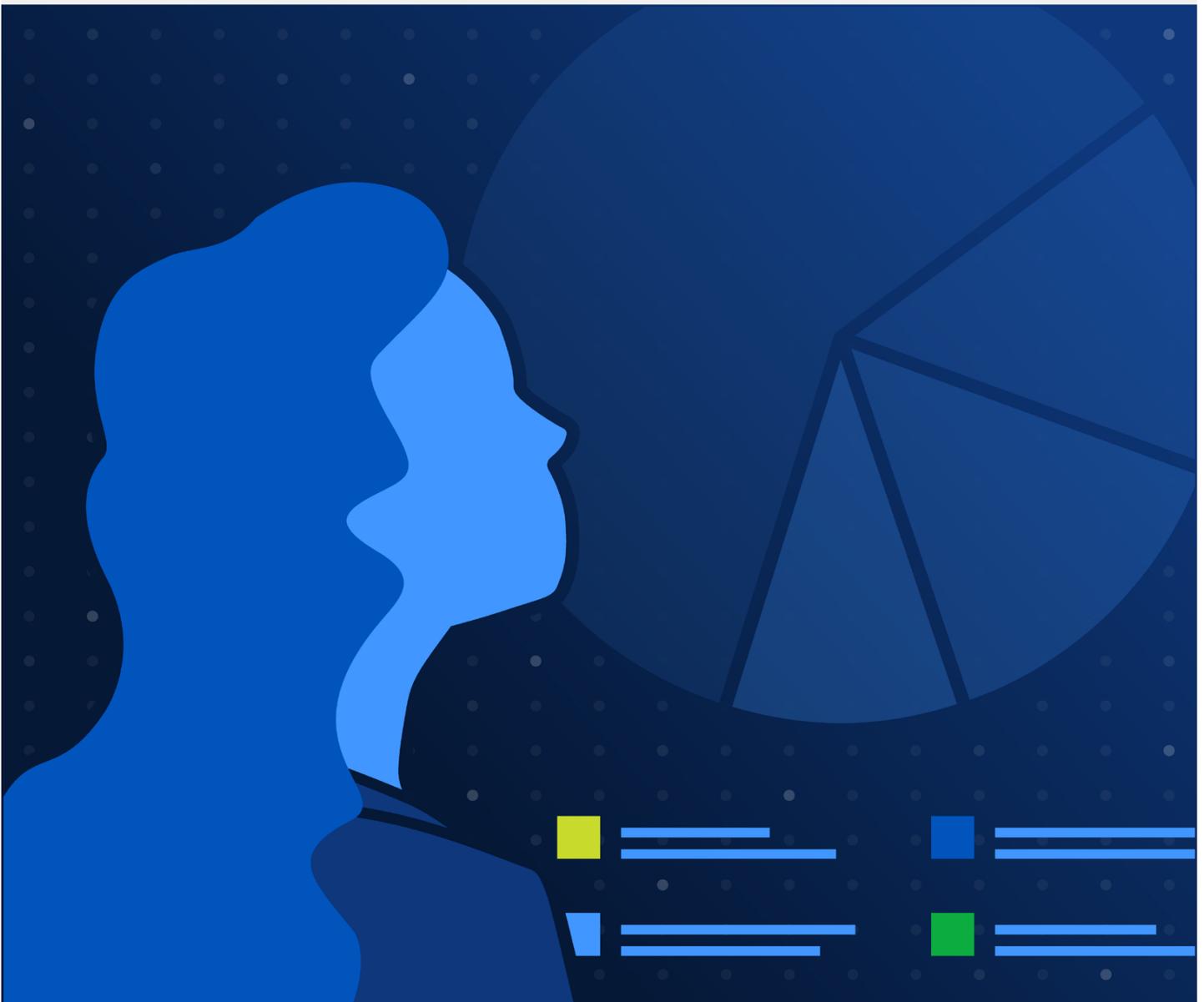# Addressing the Hidden Crisis: The Realities of Faculty Burnout and What Comes Next

Introduction:
The Reality of Faculty Burnout in Higher Education

Evidence that faculty burnout is among higher education's biggest challenges is abundant and comes from all corners of the globe. In the United States, studies have shown that **64% of instructors feel at least somewhat burnt out by the roles**; in the United Kingdom, research spanning 92 major institutions established that half of **higher education staff suffer from chronic emotional exhaustion, worry, stress and poor mental health**, a figure 1.5x higher than other sectors; and data from Thailand shows that **35% of teachers suffer from high emotional exhaustion**, correlating strongly with long working hours. This is a truly global trend, and one that impacts institutions of all types and sizes.

The consequences of this burnout are equally far-reaching. Faculty experience a steep drop in job satisfaction, and in many cases, burnout impacts personal well-being and **prompts educators to leave the profession entirely**. This not only creates a talent gap that institutions struggle to fill, but also compounds stress on those who remain. Critically, burnout has also been linked to diminished teaching quality and **poorer student outcomes**—posing risks to the core mission of education itself.

While the problem is global, the conditions driving burnout—as well as the policies and institutional responses—are often highly localized. In the US, changing student expectations, rising administrative demands, and new policy pressures are shaping the faculty experience in distinct ways. To better understand these dynamics, we conducted the **2025 Anthology Faculty Survey**—an in-depth reflection from more than 2,500 US-based instructors on the realities of their work today. Their insights shed light on the causes and consequences of burnout, and offer a path forward for institutions looking to better support their educators.

We start by looking at where instructors are spending their time and the factors that are driving an increase in their workloads. While the broader economic and resource context of higher education provides a backdrop, the data outlines a situation far more complex than merely too few people trying to do too much. The rise of online learning and new course modalities means that instructors need to dedicate more time to course creation, assessment development, and other production tasks, while supporting learners with mental health and financial challenges—issues that are now top of mind for faculty more than ever before.

This comes at a significant opportunity cost—put simply, stressed and overworked instructors focus purely on the most immediate needs, meaning that larger strategic initiatives must be deprioritized. Instructors report having little time to embrace emerging best practices, such as accessibility guidelines and experimentation with new technology. They also have limited scope for proactive engagement with students—whether that's offering timely, personalized feedback, reaching out to struggling learners before issues escalate, or creating inclusive learning environments that foster a stronger sense of belonging. Over time, this lack of capacity erodes the student experience and undermines institutional goals around retention, equity, and academic success.

Education technology can play a key role in helping institutions to address these challenges. For example, provided appropriate safeguards are applied, AI represents a great opportunity to simplify and streamline production and administrative tasks. At the same time, data, when surfaced at the right moment, can also help add proactivity and scale to student outreach. These combine to save instructors valuable time, allowing them to focus on parts of their job they find more fulfilling and impactful, and for students to receive more valuable and personalized instruction as a result.

The Administrative Drag:
Where Instructors' Time Goes

The challenge with faculty burnout finds context in the broader challenges of the sector. With many institutions facing financial difficulties, due to enrollment declines, funding uncertainty, and rising costs in inflationary economies, it is sadly the case that all professionals across campus have been stretched to their limits—and instructors are no exception. It is also true that burnout is not simply a reflection of workload: it involves a whole raft of factors related to job satisfaction, remuneration, purpose, and more.

All this notwithstanding, it is also clear that there are pressures specific to the instructor's role that need to be addressed. At Anthology, we believe that instructors are the true stewards of education and that any initiatives that improve their jobs and well-being manifest in improved outcomes for learners as well. Thus, our focus for this paper will be understanding the unique challenges faced by modern faculty and where technology can assist.

Increased demands on instructors' time reflect more than just staffing shortages. Recent years have seen faculty jobs change at unprecedented speed: enrollment challenges have meant many institutions are experimenting with new modalities, which in turn require tailored materials and teaching approaches; a growing market need for upskilling in a rapidly changing economy has meant that these materials need to be updated more regularly than in the past; the COVID pandemic saw a rush to online instruction which many institutions weren't fully resourced to support; and more recently, the rise of generative AI—while holding great potential for education, as we'll get to momentarily—has brought a raft of new considerations for faculty, such as how to maintain **academic integrity in the ChatGPT era**.

When combined, these changes have caused a significant rise in administrative and production tasks for teachers—with **6 in 10 reporting their workload has increased in the last five years**. The time required to create and update courses is increasing, and so too is the need for a broader range of assessment tasks, meaning that grading and providing feedback also occupy a larger percentage of an instructor's day. This makes it challenging to find time to prepare classes and develop their students. Our 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey suggests that instructors consider "a lack of time to update courses" as their biggest barrier to delivering effective learning.
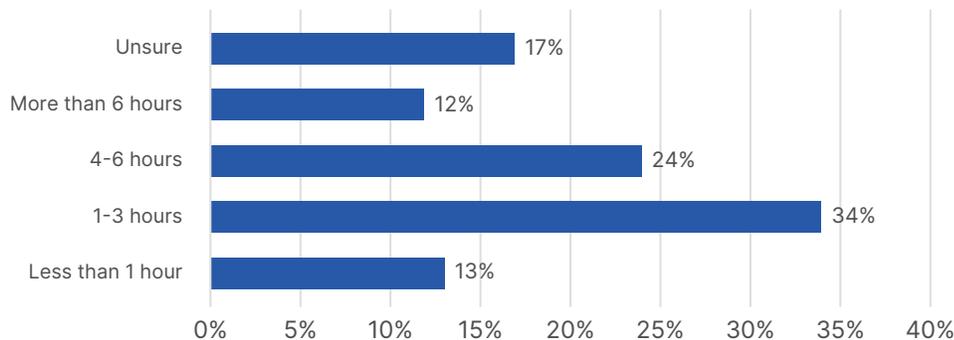
> ## *I'm completely burned out. And it makes me feel bad, because I want to be able to give my students 100 percent. But it's just hard to have that energy.*
>
> —Professor of History, Roosevelt University,
>   as quoted in **The Chronicle of Higher Education**

It is also the case that many instructors are now teaching more courses than in the past, and that the **number of students per course has often increased as well**. This places an increased emphasis on student support, which is time-consuming and often stressful for faculty. Our research shows that instructors now dedicate a lot of time to answering common, everyday inquiries. For more than a third of teachers, this takes up at least four hours—or half a workday— every week.

How much time do you typically spend each week answering repetitive or frequently asked questions from students (e.g., about assignments, deadlines, course materials)?

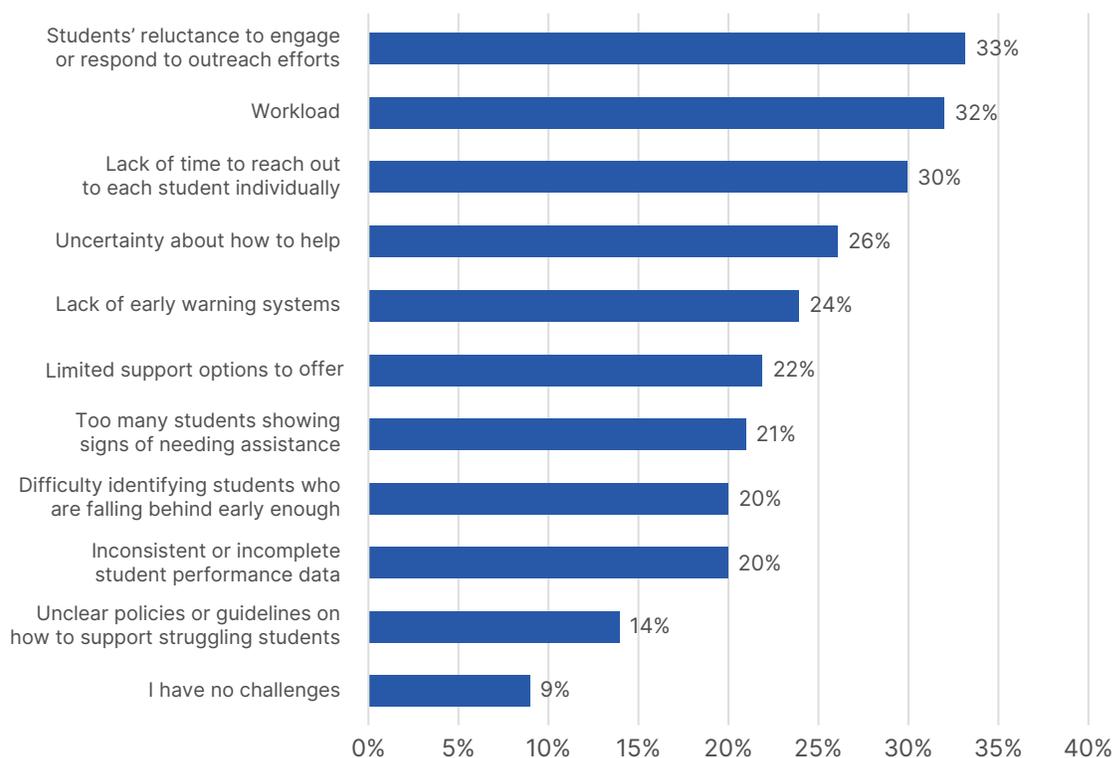| Category	Percentage
Unsure	17%
More than 6 hours	12%
4-6 hours	24%
1-3 hours	34%
Less than 1 hour	13%

Source: 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey

An increasing number of learners also need high-touch, personalized support. Research indicates that **student mental health is worsening**, which places further pressure on instructors to support them—a vicious cycle that ultimately impacts faculty mental health. Understandably, instructors prioritize providing support to the learners most in need, making it difficult for them to find time for proactive engagement with their student body as a whole.

The Opportunity Cost:
When Faculty Are Stretched Too Thin to Support Strategic Goals

As is often said, there are only a finite number of hours in the day, and the growing demands from administrative tasks reduce the bandwidth that instructors have available for important parts of their role. We've already hinted at arguably the most critical of these: instructors struggle to find the necessary time for preparing classes and proactive student engagement. Our research suggests that 32% of instructors consider "workload" among their biggest barriers for reaching out to students, while 30% cite a "lack of time."

> **32% of instructors consider "workload" among their biggest barriers for reaching out to students, while 30% cite a "lack of time."**

What are your biggest challenges when reaching out to students who are showing signs of failing/falling behind in your courses?

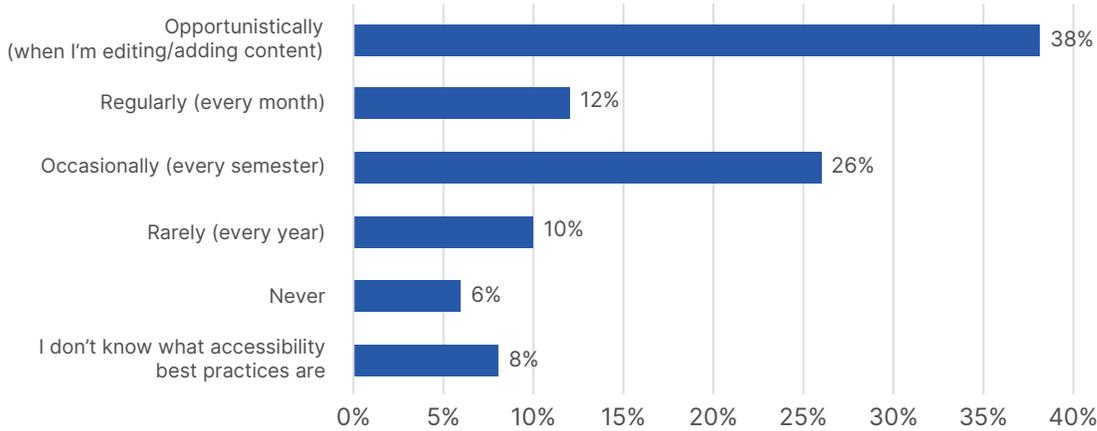| Challenge	Percentage
Students' reluctance to engage or respond to outreach efforts	33%
Workload	32%
Lack of time to reach out to each student individually	30%
Uncertainty about how to help	26%
Lack of early warning systems	24%
Limited support options to offer	22%
Too many students showing signs of needing assistance	21%
Difficulty identifying students who are falling behind early enough	20%
Inconsistent or incomplete student performance data	20%
Unclear policies or guidelines on how to support struggling students	14%
I have no challenges	9%

Source: 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey

The opportunity costs extend well beyond this immediate impact on student outcomes. A lack of available time also restricts faculty's capacity to engage with larger strategic initiatives, which may impede learning outcomes in the mid-to-long term.

This starts with accessibility. As higher education works to support a wider range of students—including those learning online or with disabilities—accessible course content is no longer just good practice. It's essential. And in the US, it's now a legal requirement. In 2024, the Department of Justice finalized updates to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which now requires public colleges and universities to make all digital content—including course material—accessible, using WCAG 2.1 AA standards as the benchmark.

That raises the stakes for faculty. Accessibility isn't just an institutional priority in response to these laws—it's something instructors are now expected to own much more actively. Most are committed to supporting their students, but the reality is, they're stretched thin. Nearly 40% of instructors we surveyed said they review content for accessibility only when time allows, not on a consistent schedule. When asked what would help most in improving accessibility, the top two responses were "more time" and "more training"—highlighting just how strained instructors feel even in areas they care deeply about.
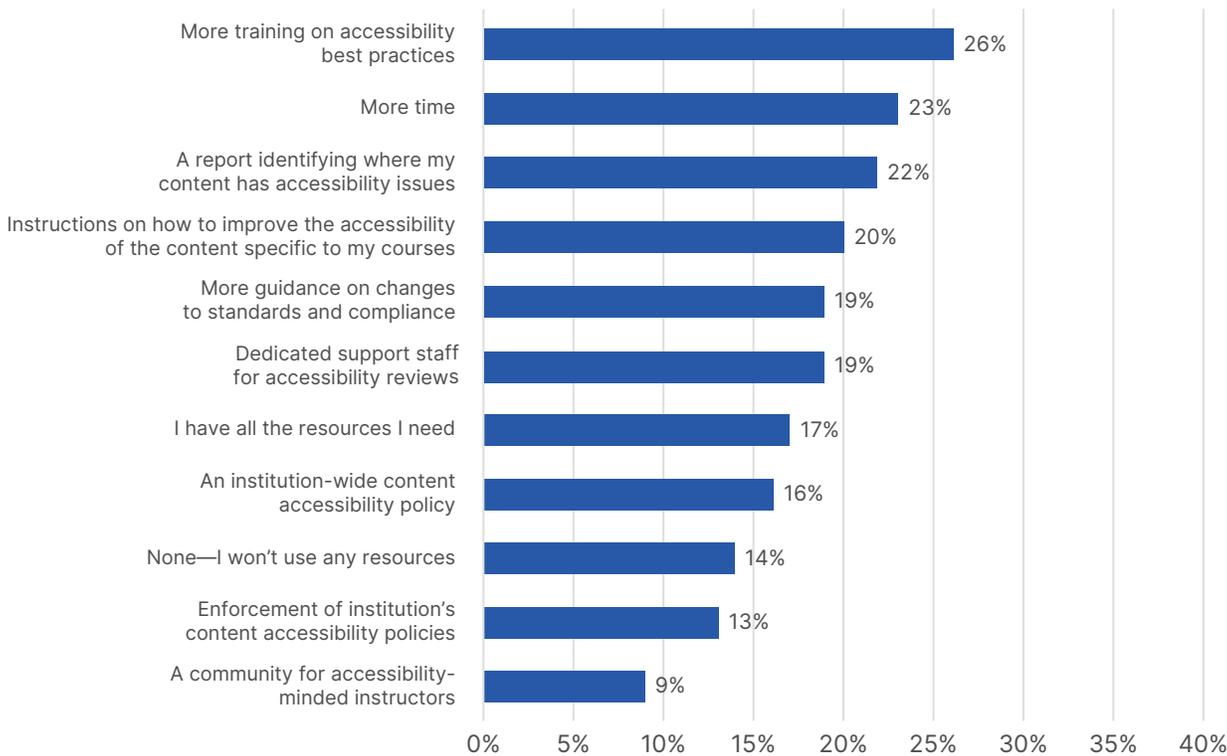
> **When asked what would help most in improving accessibility, the top two responses were "more time" and "more training"**

How often do you review or update your digital course materials to ensure they follow content accessibility best practices?

Category	Value
Opportunistically (when I'm editing/adding content)	38%
Regularly (every month)	12%
Occasionally (every semester)	26%
Rarely (every year)	10%
Never	6%
I don't know what accessibility best practices are	8%

What resources would help you make your digital content more accessible? (Select all that apply)

Category	Value
More training on accessibility best practices	26%
More time	23%
A report identifying where my content has accessibility issues	22%
Instructions on how to improve the accessibility of the content specific to my courses	20%
More guidance on changes to standards and compliance	19%
Dedicated support staff for accessibility reviews	19%
I have all the resources I need	17%
An institution-wide content accessibility policy	16%
None—I won't use any resources	14%
Enforcement of institution's content accessibility policies	13%
A community for accessibility-minded instructors	9%

The data on career and skills development paints a similar picture. When questioned, instructors consider "meeting the demands of a rapidly changing job market" as the second biggest challenge facing higher education, trailing only "rising tuition costs and student debt," and yet only 19% report being "very confident" that their courses align with the latest workforce trends. This is due, at least in part, to a lack of time to engage with new technologies that deliver real-world instruction: only 15% of faculty regularly explore new features in their learning management system (LMS).

Emerging Solutions:
How Technology Can Help to Reduce Faculty Burnout

Before we touch on the possibilities of learning technology to improve instructors' roles, which we believe to be both numerous and significant in their scope, it's important to start by acknowledging that technology isn't a silver bullet for these complex problems. In fact, when used incorrectly, technology can worsen the issue; 79% of instructors now feel that they are **"always on the job" because of technology**, while well-intentioned initiatives to measure how faculty spend their day—such as increased use of timesheets and other reporting measures—have often simply added a further drag on their time. Faculty burnout is at its core a human problem, and any solution that doesn't focus on the fundamentals of human well-being is bound to fail—irrespective of the technology employed.

However, the data reveals clear opportunities to save instructors' time and reduce burnout when thoughtfully executed. We consider four particularly important: reducing the administrative burden, streamlining student support, embracing engaging learning activities, and creating a culture of accessibility. In each of these cases, Anthology is actively investing to provide genuine solutions for our global learning community.

Reducing the administrative burden

The rise of generative AI represents a huge opportunity to make time-consuming production tasks such as course creation, assessment, and rubric creation more efficient. It is crucial, however, that this is done in an ethical fashion, which requires placing instructors in control. Instructors must always have the opportunity to review and edit all AI suggestions, ensuring that they maintain responsibility for all outputs and that the resulting lessons are not only more efficient but also more effective.

With the goal of reducing the administrative burden with ethical AI capabilities for instructors, Anthology® Blackboard released the **AI Design Assistant** in September of 2023—marking the first initiative from a major LMS provider to leverage AI. Built in accordance with our **Trustworthy AI Approach**, the AI Design Assistant allows instructors to access AI suggestions when building course structure, creating assessments, adding images, or employing grading rubrics, all within clear workflows that outline where AI is used and ensure the instructor reviews thoroughly before any content is presented to learners. To date, this functionality has been used to power more than 1.8 million education tasks, with 96% of surveyed instructors agreeing that it saves them time and 90% saying that it provides inspiration.

There remains significant potential for further innovation in this area. Recently, Blackboard introduced a new capability to offer AI suggestions to instructors on potential layouts for their course documents, and soon will be releasing capabilities that leverage AI to help give thorough and polished feedback to learners in a fraction of the time. In both cases, the instructor remains in control of all output—just as they currently do with the AI Design Assistant.

> *Blackboard AI Design Assistant has taken a task which might have taken me a full day down to a few minutes. This has given me more time in the classroom with my students and allows me to give them the experience that I would like them to have.*
>
> —**Dr. Steven Montagu-Cairns**, Associate Professor in Law, University of Leeds
> **Read the full case study.**

Streamlining student support

As we've seen, supporting learners is a multi-dimensional challenge. It requires fast responses to common inquiries, proactive outreach to learners, and high-touch support for students with complex challenges such as mental health. Let's touch briefly on how technology can assist instructors in each of these cases.
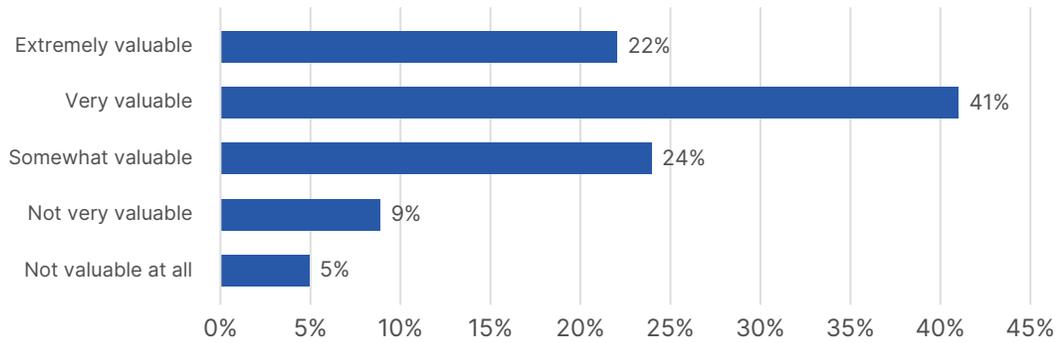
Many faculty say they're overwhelmed by repeat questions from students—things like "When is this due?" or "Where can I find the assignment?" While each question is easy to answer, responding to them over and over takes up valuable time and delays the help students need.

That's where AI can step in. We've recently introduced the Anthology Virtual Assistant (AVA), a new suite of tools in Blackboard designed to help instructors with many day-to-day tasks, including responding to common student questions more efficiently. For students, AVA is an AI-powered assistant that reads their message, searches the course content for the answer, and responds within seconds—giving them the support they need right away so they can stay focused on the task at hand. Each reply is clearly marked as AI-generated and includes a link to the original source, so students can double-check the information or reach out to their instructor if needed. Instructors also have full visibility into these conversations, so they stay informed and in control.

Besides day-to-day inquiries, instructors are also struggling to keep up with meaningful student communications. When asked how proactive they are in reaching out to learners who are showing signs of falling behind, the most common response from faculty was "I reach out—but only when a pattern emerges," representing 43% of respondents. Instructors would love to engage all their learners sooner, but workload, as we've mentioned, is a significant barrier to doing so. At least half of instructors believe that automating performance-based nudges would save them time and allow them to engage learners more proactively. The Anthology Virtual Assistant will further strengthen these capabilities in Blackboard, building on existing notifications and progress tracking features— which instructors at great institutions like **Grand Valley State University** have successfully applied to advance student success.

When it comes to more serious student challenges, such as those related to finances and mental health, instructors can't be expected to manage these situations alone. According to 90% of instructors, **student mental health is significantly worse today than when they started their careers**, and many are looking for more support from their institution to help manage the situation. Additionally, 63% agree that it would be either "very" or "extremely valuable" if advisors were directly notified when LMS data indicates that a student is having difficulties.

How valuable would it be if advisors were automatically notified if students were showing signs of failing/disengaging from a course?

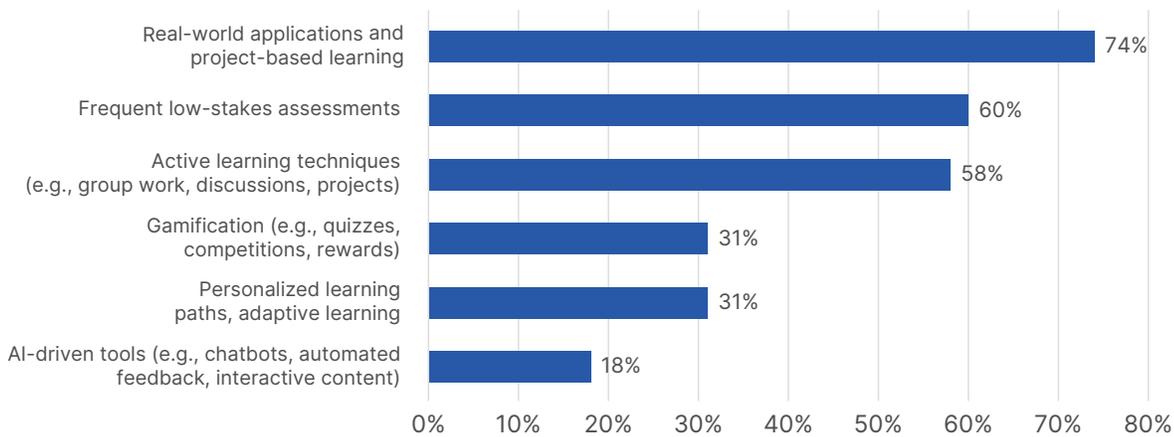| Response	Value
Extremely valuable	22%
Very valuable	41%
Somewhat valuable	24%
Not very valuable	9%
Not valuable at all	5%

Source: 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey

The new integration between Blackboard and the Anthology® Reach CRM makes this possible for institutions. This surfaces insights on student performance from LMS data within the CRM environment, allowing advisors to immediately contact them. In addition to improving the quality of support provided to learners, this also ensures that instructors aren't forced to tackle these complex situations alone, reducing stress and freeing up time.

Embracing engaging learning activities

When asked the most effective strategy to improve student engagement, the response from the 2,500 instructors in the 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey was emphatic: "real-world applications and project-based learning." This can also be seen as a crucial step in addressing the challenge of ensuring that course design reflects the skills needed to succeed in the industry.

Which of the following strategies have been most effective in keeping your students engaged?

Strategy	Value
Real-world applications and project-based learning	74%
Frequent low-stakes assessments	60%
Active learning techniques (e.g., group work, discussions, projects)	58%
Gamification (e.g., quizzes, competitions, rewards)	31%
Personalized learning paths, adaptive learning	31%
AI-driven tools (e.g., chatbots, automated feedback, interactive content)	18%

Source: 2025 Anthology Faculty Survey

Learning technology has a large role to play in helping instructors deliver real-world activities. This is particularly the case for learners studying in online or hybrid formats, as it helps to close the gap between digital and in-person learning.

Blackboard has recently released a raft of innovations in this area. The new **Video Studio** platform offers 360°, immersive video activities, allowing for a realistic replication of important scenarios; the AI Conversation tool includes a role play functionality to allow students to prepare for crucial situations they will face in practical assessments and later in the workforce; and the addition of native badging and the mastery gradebook make it easier for instructors to embrace skills-based learning, and reward students as they attain employable skills.

> *It really helps our students who have gone through COVID and who live in a social media universe. They're not always confident to participate in practical tasks live with their peers in the classroom, so having this safe space like the AI Conversation to practice beforehand makes a huge difference.*
>
> —**Dr. Celena Kusch**, Executive Director, Center for Academic Innovation and Faculty Support, USC Upstate
> **Read the full case study.**

Creating a culture of accessibility

As already noted, instructors believe there are two crucial ingredients for improving accessibility: more training and more time. Their response reflects that what's needed is to create a genuine culture of accessibility, where instructors are informed about best practices and have the time, tools, and resources to apply them universally. Here again, technology is just a part of the solution, not the whole answer.

At Anthology, we're focused on supporting institutions as they work to build a sustainable culture of accessibility—and not just in response to changing regulations.

Anthology® Ally is designed to help instructors make their content more accessible without adding significantly to instructor workloads. Instead of requiring instructors to learn a new system or complete accessibility checks after the fact, Ally surfaces accessibility issues directly within their existing workflows—for example, flagging inaccessible PDFs during upload or editing, and allowing instructors to correct the issues without leaving the LMS. This makes it easier for faculty to address issues as they go, rather than all at once—driving ongoing behavioral change that accumulates over time to make content more accessible for everyone.

Ally also includes AI-driven tools, like the Alt Text Assistant, which can suggest alt text image descriptions for instructors to review and edit. These suggestions save time while still encouraging thoughtful engagement with accessibility best practices. By combining automation with instructor oversight, the tool helps lower the barrier to getting started while reinforcing long-term behavior change. Ultimately, the goal is not just to fix individual issues, but to build habits that lead to more inclusive course design over time—and all without increasing the workload on instructors.

> *Our partnership with Anthology has been crucial to developing an inclusive learning environment for students from all backgrounds. It feels like a true partnership; our views and suggestions are listened to and implemented. The result is an accessible, valued VLE [LMS] that is utilised to its fullest, helping learners maximise their potential from pre-arrival right through to graduation.*
>
> —**Scott Farrow**, Head of Digital Learning, Edge Hill University, Ormskirk, England
> **Read the full case study.**

Conclusion:
An Important Piece of a Puzzle That Needs to Be Solved

Faculty burnout is a direct threat to institutional success. Across the world, instructors are reporting increased workloads and stress, with an alarming number leaving the sector as a result. Research clearly shows that when faculty are burnt out the quality of teaching that learners receive suffers, leading to poor learning outcomes and increased student stop out.

The causes of faculty burnout are numerous, and technology should not be considered an answer to all these factors. Nonetheless, the data gleaned from the *2025 Anthology Faculty Survey*, when coupled with other related research, clearly shows that an increased administrative load and growing support demands from students have contributed significantly to the problem in recent years.

Learning technology can make a big difference in these areas. This paper has presented four key opportunities: reducing the time required for production tasks, simplifying the processes of proactive student engagement, embracing new digital activities that simulate real-world scenarios and improve learner motivation, and generating a culture of accessibility. In each of these spaces, Anthology combines responsible AI, actionable data, and cross-platform integration to provide market-leading solutions that make a meaningful difference for faculty.

This is far from an exhaustive list. We are committed to improving instructors' roles through sensible and ethical technology, and our product development is directly informed by the Anthology Idea Exchange, where instructors from our global learning community advise us on the pain points they face and how technology can help.

About Anthology

Anthology delivers education and technology solutions so that students can reach their full potential and learning institutions thrive. Millions of students around the world are supported throughout their education journey via Anthology's ecosystem of flagship SaaS solutions and supporting services, including the award-winning Blackboard® (LMS), Anthology® Student (SIS/ERP), and Anthology® Reach (CRM). Through the Power of Together™, we are uniquely inspiring educators and institutions with innovation that is meaningful, simple, and intelligent to help customers redefine what's possible and create life-changing opportunities for people everywhere. **anthology.com**