

AI Exposure of Academic Programs by State

What each state's portfolio of graduates reveals about exposure to AI, and why it matters for policy. June 2026.

Summary

Every state graduates students across the full range of academic fields, but not in the same proportions. Weighting each field of study by its share of a state's 2023 completions and scoring it on the Opportunity Data AI Exposure Index produces a single state score between 0 and 1. Across all 50 states and the District of Columbia the scores fall in a narrow band, from 0.500 to 0.588, around a national mean of 0.540. The compression is real: the spread between states is about one-sixth of the spread between individual programs. But within that band the ordering is clear, and the share of completions a state awards as short-term credentials accounts for most of it.

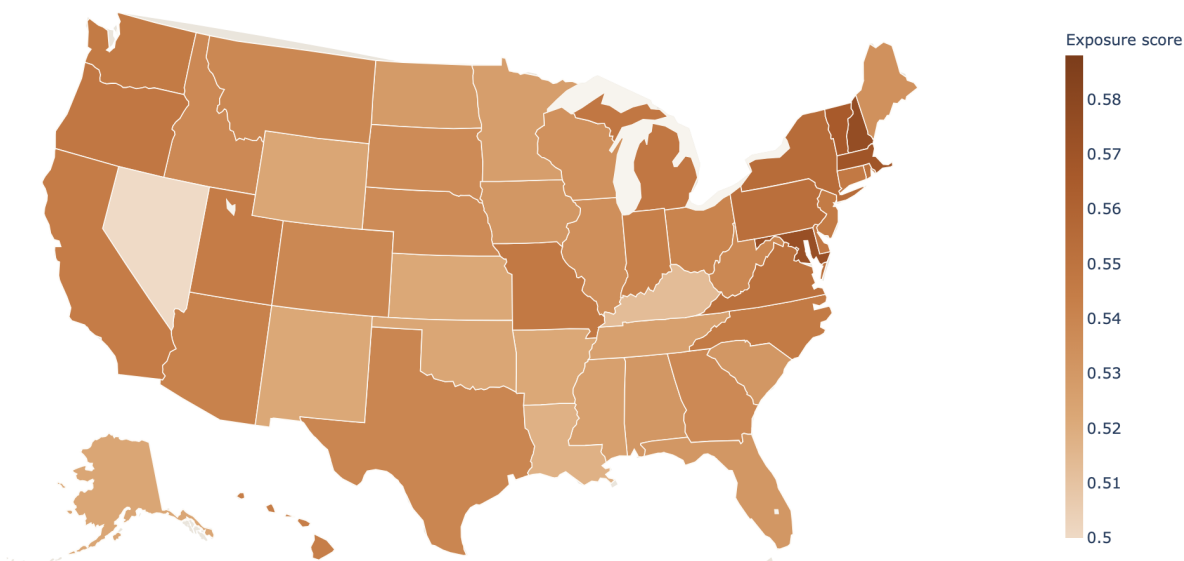


Figure 1. State AI exposure score, 2023 completions. Darker shades are higher scores. The color scale is stretched to the observed range (0.500 to 0.588) so the gradient is visible; absolute differences between adjacent states are small.

A state's reliance on short-term credentials is the strongest correlate of its exposure score

Among the components of a state's credential mix, the sub-baccalaureate share is the strongest single correlate of its score. Across the 51 jurisdictions, the share of completions awarded as certificates or associate degrees correlates -0.78 with the state score, while the graduate-degree share correlates $+0.69$. The association is consistent with the fields beneath each credential: short-term certificates concentrate in the trades, personal services, transportation, and hands-on

health programs that sit at the bottom of the program-level index. The relevance to Workforce Pell is direct, since the program extends federal aid to short-term credentials beginning July 2026. States that award a larger share of such credentials tend to score lower, a descriptive association in the 2023 data rather than a judgment about the value of those programs.

The highest-scoring states graduate disproportionately at the bachelor's and graduate levels

The top of the distribution is graduate- and bachelor's-heavy. District of Columbia leads at 0.588, with a 60% graduate share well above any other jurisdiction. The states behind it, New Hampshire, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Vermont, pair heavy bachelor's and graduate output with small certificate shares (under 7% in each). Two large states, New York (rank 6) and Pennsylvania (rank 7), also appear in the top tier, with substantial research-university and professional-degree output.

RANK	STATE	SCORE	GRADUATE	CERTIFICATE	COMPLETIONS
1	District of Columbia	0.588	60%	3%	30,339
2	New Hampshire	0.576	29%	4%	50,080
3	Maryland	0.574	33%	9%	88,462
4	Massachusetts	0.570	45%	6%	137,570
5	Vermont	0.566	26%	7%	10,109
6	New York	0.555	35%	7%	309,197
7	Pennsylvania	0.553	32%	13%	184,436
8	Rhode Island	0.552	23%	10%	20,908
9	Virginia	0.552	29%	14%	139,944
10	Delaware	0.548	28%	8%	13,477

The lowest-scoring states award a larger share of short-term certificates

The bottom of the distribution is certificate-heavy. Nevada ranks last at 0.500, with 13% graduate completions and 34% certificates. Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Arkansas show the same pattern: a third or more of their completions are short-term certificates, concentrated in fields the index scores low. This describes the composition of output, not the quality of these systems, which are weighted toward applied, hands-on training that scores lower on exposure by construction.

RANK	STATE	SCORE	GRADUATE	CERTIFICATE	COMPLETIONS
42	Tennessee	0.526	23%	19%	87,381
43	Alaska	0.523	14%	36%	5,014
44	Oklahoma	0.523	18%	30%	59,337
45	Wyoming	0.523	12%	26%	7,507
46	Arkansas	0.522	18%	32%	52,384
47	Kansas	0.522	21%	26%	52,571
48	New Mexico	0.522	14%	41%	32,329
49	Louisiana	0.518	21%	35%	67,606

50	Kentucky	0.513	23%	37%	90,804
51	Nevada	0.500	13%	34%	30,111

The largest states by completions fall near the middle of the distribution

The biggest producers of credentials sit near the center, not the top. California, the largest with 721,107 completions, ranks 19 of 51; Texas ranks 24 and Florida ranks 36. State size shows little relationship to the exposure of its graduates; the mix does the work. New York and Pennsylvania are the two large states that also rank high, reflecting a mix weighted toward advanced and analytic fields.

The ranking holds within credential levels, not only across them

Because the index scores fields of study rather than credential levels, it is worth asking whether the state ranking simply reflects how many graduate degrees a state awards. It does not. Mean exposure does rise with level nationally, from 0.467 for certificates and 0.516 for associate degrees to 0.569 for bachelor's and 0.569 for graduate degrees, because higher levels concentrate in more analytic fields. But the ranking persists when credential level is held constant: comparing only bachelor's graduates, state scores still range from 0.539 to 0.594 and correlate +0.77 with the overall ranking, with District of Columbia and Maryland highest and Nevada and Minnesota lowest. What a state's students study, not only how far they go, moves the number.

The state-level exceptions illustrate the point. California scores higher than its 16% graduate share alone would predict, its bachelor's output weighted toward computing, engineering, and business; Minnesota runs the other way, pairing a 35% graduate share with a below-median 0.527, its advanced degrees concentrated in health and education.

One limit follows from the same design. Because exposure is attached to the field and not the credential, the index assigns a field one score across levels: a nursing associate and a nursing master's receive the same program score. All of the credential-level signal here is therefore compositional, a matter of which fields sit at which levels, not of any exposure difference the index measures between a field's shorter and longer credentials.

The score describes the composition of educational output, not economic strength or quality

State AI exposure is not a measure of economic strength, educational quality, or the prospects of any individual graduate. A higher score is not better and a lower score is not worse; it marks where graduates feed into work more reachable by software, which is where the question of how a credential holds its value over time is most live. The score is a baseline for that question, a way for a state to see the shape of its educational output and ask whether its portfolio is positioned for a labor market that AI is reshaping. It is most useful read alongside earnings and local labor-market data, not in place of them.

Data and methods

Each state's score is the completion-weighted average AI exposure of the academic programs its graduates complete, from IPEDS 2023 completions (first majors, 5.3 million awards) mapped to states through the IPEDS directory and scored on the Opportunity Data AI Exposure Index. Programs

the index does not yet score (about one completion in eight) are held at the national average exposure (0.542) so they stay neutral. Full construction, the credential-tier definitions, and limits are in the [methodology note](#). Sources: the AI Exposure Index is built from [O*NET](#) work characteristics weighted by [BLS OEWS](#) employment; completions and the institutional directory are from [NCES IPEDS](#).

Opportunity Data. (2026). *AI Exposure of Academic Programs by State*. opportunitydata.org/ai-exposure-states.html.

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