

AI AND THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

Building the AI Research University: The Infrastructure Behind the Next Era of Discovery

As universities move beyond access to AI tools, the next challenge is building the computing, data, talent, and partnerships that can support research and innovation at scale.

THE CENTRAL SHIFT

The future of university AI will not be defined only by which tools people use. It will also depend on the institutional capacity to support responsible, AI-enabled research and discovery.

01 The Next Phase of University AI

Artificial Intelligence is becoming part of the fabric of higher education. Many universities have moved beyond initial experimentation: students and faculty are using generative AI, institutions are developing guidance for responsible use, and academic departments are exploring how AI can support teaching, learning, and research.

But a further shift is now emerging. The question is no longer only how universities can use AI tools. It is whether they can build the underlying infrastructure, expertise, and partnerships needed to make AI a sustained institutional capability—particularly in research and discovery.

02 From Access to Infrastructure

Access to AI tools is an important starting point, but it does not by itself create an AI research ecosystem.

Advanced research may require high-performance computing, specialist software, secure and well-governed data environments, technical support, interdisciplinary teams, and researchers with the skills to work confidently with computational methods.

These elements are interdependent. Computing capacity without relevant expertise can remain underused; data without appropriate governance can create risk; and research capability without pathways to application may struggle to deliver wider value. The strategic task for universities is to connect these components rather than invest in them in isolation.

03 A Case in Point: Morgan State University's AI Research Campus

Morgan State University's collaboration with Google Public Sector offers a practical illustration of this broader transition. Announced in September 2026, the initiative is intended to support a next-generation AI research campus, bringing together high-performance GPU computing resources, cloud infrastructure, research activity, and workforce development.

The proposed research environment is expected to support areas including AI research, cybersecurity, climate science, and health sciences. The university has also identified potential applications beyond the campus, including AI-enabled traffic and urban mobility optimisation in Baltimore. These examples demonstrate how research infrastructure can connect institutional priorities with regional challenges.

Morgan's approach also includes its Obsidian AI platform, which is intended to support research, workforce development, student services, administration, and campus operations. Its emphasis on institutional governance, security, and accountability points to a central consideration for universities: AI capability must be developed

alongside clear oversight of data, systems, and their use.

The collaboration further envisages a Google-focused Center of Excellence supporting cloud computing, AI adoption, workforce development, and technical training. Students may gain industry-recognised credentials, while faculty can access programmes related to commercialisation and entrepreneurship. Morgan has linked this wider strategy to its ambition to advance toward Carnegie R1 classification.

04 The Building Blocks of an AI Research Ecosystem

Although the details will differ across institutions, a sustainable AI research ecosystem is likely to depend on several connected building blocks:

Computing: access to suitable high-performance computing, cloud platforms, and specialist tools.

Data: reliable, responsibly managed data and clear arrangements for privacy, security, access, and governance.

Talent: researchers, technical specialists, librarians, research support teams, and institutional leaders who can work across disciplines.

Skills: practical AI capability embedded in education, professional development, and research training.

Research and translation: mechanisms for turning computational capacity into research outputs, innovation, partnerships, and applications.

Together, these elements create a cycle in which infrastructure supports people and research, and research generates new applications and institutional learning.

05 The Human Capability Behind the Technology

Investment in computing and platforms is only part of the picture. Universities also need to develop the human capability to ask meaningful questions, assess the quality of AI-generated outputs, interpret evidence, recognise limitations, and apply findings responsibly.

This requires more than technical training. Researchers need disciplinary knowledge and critical judgement; students need the ability to use AI without surrendering independent thought; and institutional leaders need to understand the implications of AI for research integrity, intellectual property, data governance, and academic practice.

06 What This Means for University Strategy

For university leaders, the move from AI access to AI infrastructure raises practical strategic questions. Which research priorities would benefit from advanced computing? What data and governance arrangements are required? Which capabilities should be developed internally, and where would partnerships add value? How will faculty, students, and professional staff be supported?

Not every institution needs to build a large-scale AI campus. The appropriate model will depend on its research profile, resources, partnerships, and ambitions. Some universities may develop shared facilities or regional collaborations; others may focus on specialist centres, secure cloud environments, or targeted investments in staff capability. The central issue is alignment between infrastructure and institutional purpose.

07 From AI Adoption to AI-Enabled Discovery

The evolution of university AI strategy can be understood as a progression: first, providing access to AI tools; then, integrating AI into teaching, research, and administration; and finally, developing the infrastructure and ecosystem that enable new forms of discovery.

Morgan State University is one example of how this third phase may take shape. Its initiative illustrates a wider shift that other institutions will approach in different ways: treating AI not simply as a tool available to individuals, but as a capability that may reshape research capacity, institutional partnerships, and the relationship between universities and the communities they serve.

AI infrastructure creates capacity. People create impact.
The universities that connect technology with human expertise, responsible governance, and meaningful research priorities will help shape the next era of discovery.

FURTHER READING

- [Morgan State University and Google Public Sector Collaborate to Build Next-Generation AI Campus](#)
- [Morgan State University – Research](#)
- [Morgan State University – Division of Information Technology](#)

Published by STAR Scholars Network • Concept & Curation: Khalid M