BEYOND AI FLUENCY

SUFFOLK'S SAIL FRAMEWORK FOR OWNERSHIP IN THE AGE OF AI

SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY SAWYER BUSINESS SCHOOL | BOSTON

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Our goal at Suffolk University's Sawyer Business School is to develop business leaders who can not only navigate AI with new tools but are also equipped with a clear philosophy, principled frameworks, and critical judgment to apply them. That philosophy is the SAIL Framework. Read on to learn more.

Amy Z. Zeng, PhD
Dean of the Sawyer Business School

SAIL represents four interconnected competencies for AI-ready professionals:

S

Social Intelligence

Communicating about AI to colleagues, clients, and stakeholders—knowing what to share, how to frame it, and what your audience needs to understand.

A

AI Literacy

Understanding what AI can and cannot do. Recognizing its powers as well as limitations, biases, and failure modes in your specific domain.

I

Innovation/Inquiry

Questioning AI outputs, pushing beyond first answers, and treating AI as a thought partner rather than an oracle.

L

Leadership

Taking responsibility for human-AI collaboration outcomes. Deciding when to use AI, when to override it, and owning the results.

HASAN ARSLAN IS CHIEF AI OFFICER and associate professor of information systems and operations management at Suffolk University's Sawyer Business School. An MIT Sloan-trained management scientist, he developed the SAIL Framework—an approach to AI education built not around tool literacy, but around ownership: AI cannot be held accountable, but someone must be.

Q: The SAIL Framework has been central to Suffolk's AI education strategy. But you've recently evolved your thinking. What's changed?

When we first built SAIL, I believed human judgment was the irreplaceable differentiator—something AI could never replicate. Recent developments have made me reconsider.

AI can now match or surpass human judgment in some domains. In software development, it can self-correct and improve its own processes. The human advantage is shrinking—and not in our favor.

The true differentiator isn't judgment—it's ownership. AI can analyze, recommend, and decide, but it cannot own outcomes or be held accountable for them. Only humans can. That's what we must instill in our students.

Q: What do you mean by "ownership" in an AI context?

> **Ownership means taking real responsibility for AI-generated outputs. A doctor using AI for diagnosis still owns the result. A manager using AI to draft a performance review still owns its content. Accountability cannot be offloaded to the model.**

This reframes the entire question of AI literacy. It's not just: Can you use the tools? It's: Do you understand the outputs well enough to be responsible for them? Most people have never been asked that question. That's the problem.

Q: How does SAIL address this challenge in practice?

Take Prompt Alchemy—a competition we run in which students work with real business datasets, such as Boston Airbnb listings and Brazilian e-commerce transactions. They're asked not just to extract insights using AI, but to interrogate those insights, surface their assumptions, consider the ethical implications, and defend their reasoning to judges.

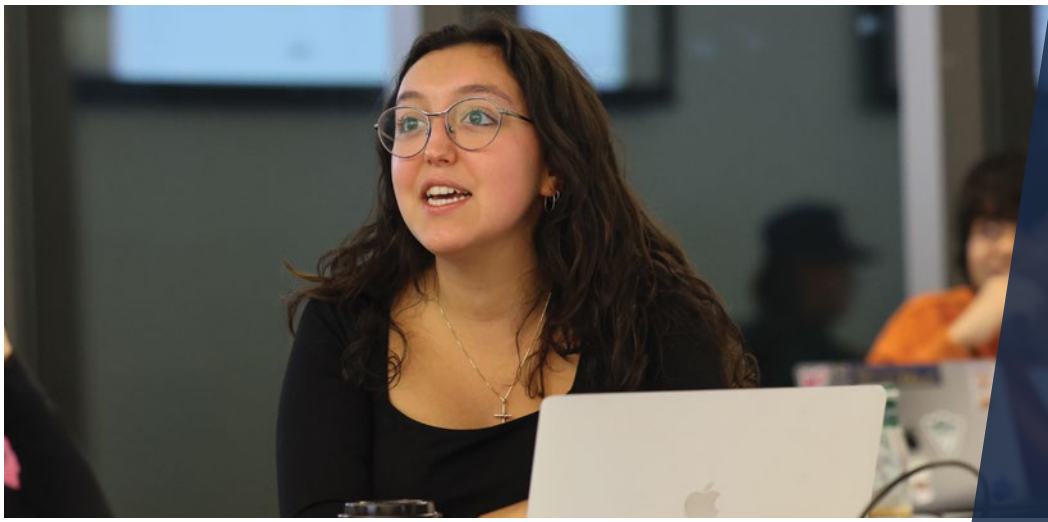
That last step is crucial. Knowing you must defend your work changes how you approach it. The goal isn't just AI literacy, but fostering ownership: the habit of standing behind what AI produces for you.

Q: What is your message to other institutions?

Stop teaching students to use AI. Start teaching them to own it.

> **The capabilities AI can replicate are expanding faster than most curricula can keep up with. What it cannot replicate is accountability—the human willingness to put your name on something and stand behind it. If our graduates can't do that with AI-assisted work, we haven't prepared them for the world they're entering.**

At Suffolk, we built SAIL for our students and faculty. Now, we want to share and expand it with institutions asking similar questions. The current challenge isn't technological; it never was. Instead, it's whether individuals—confronted by thinking tools—will keep choosing responsibility. That's what we're building toward.



SEED: DEVELOPING AI-NATIVE GRADUATES WHILE DELIVERING BUSINESS RESULTS

SUFFOLK SEED

SEED, THE UNIVERSITY'S CLINIC-BASED CONSULTING PROGRAM, embeds AI horizontally across all clinics—consulting, marketing, and fundraising—rather than siloing it in a single track. Students learn to encode consulting methodologies directly as AI agents, a capability considered innovative even by industry standards. In a field rapidly moving toward leaner, AI-enabled teams, SEED is preparing students not just to adapt, but to lead.

> "SEED serves two critical needs: preparing students to lead across industries being transformed by AI, while giving businesses access to sophisticated AI-driven insights through our consulting work."
>
> *Chaim Letwin,*
> *Co-founder, SEED; Carol Sawyer Parks Endowed Chair, Associate Chair, Entrepreneurship;*
> *Professor, Management and Entrepreneurship*
> *Suffolk University, Sawyer Business School*

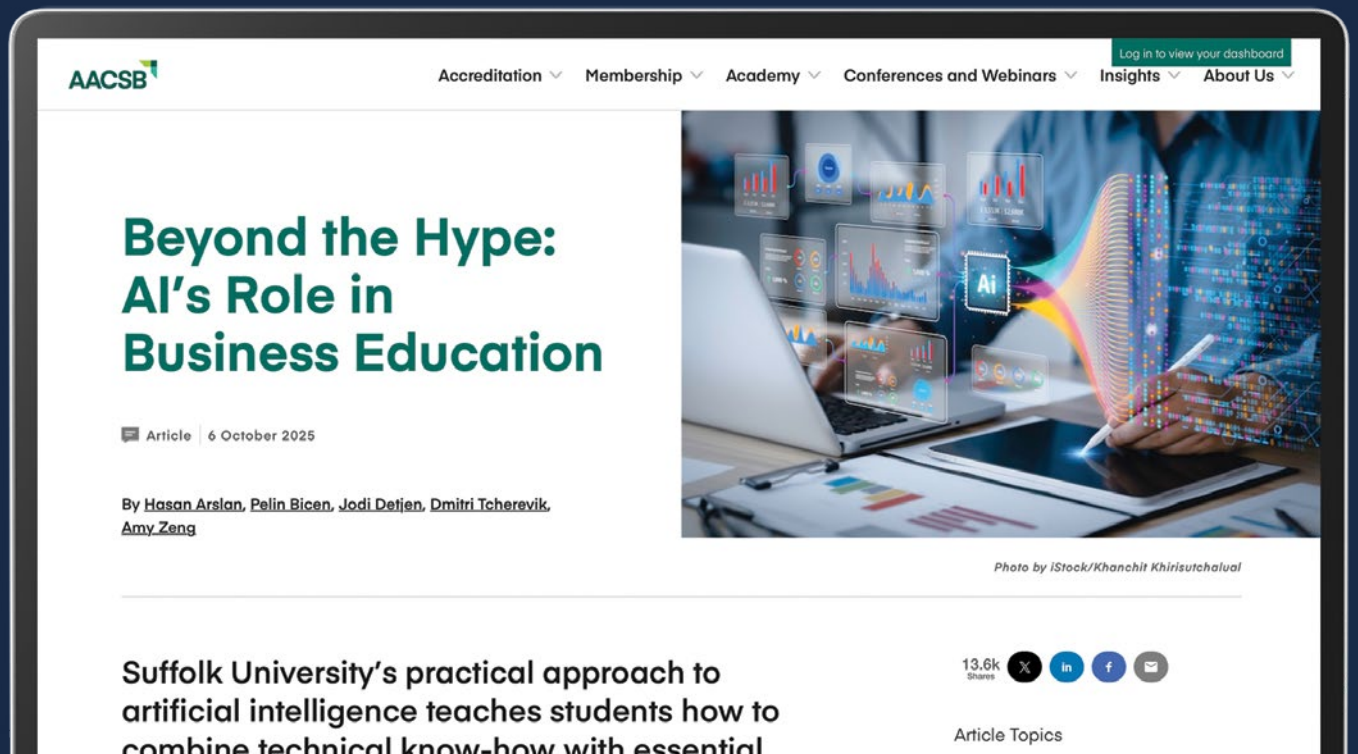
AACSB ACCREDITED

AACSB Insights

Beyond the Hype: AI's Role in Business Education

Suffolk University's Sawyer Business School was featured in AACSB Insights for its practical approach to AI education—teaching students to combine technical proficiency with the human skills that set business leaders apart.

Published October 2025



AI Adoption to AI Leadership

2024 – 2026: From defining its AI approach to embedding it across the student experience and providing leadership in the community.

March 2024

Launched *AI Pulse by Sawyer* newsletter, establishing a platform for AI thought leadership.

August 2024

Established the SAIL Collaborative as the School's Flagship AI Initiative.

Fall 2024

Introduced AI concentration under the Master of Science in Marketing and AI minor & concentration under business analytics & information systems major.

December 2024

Launched the SAIL Collaborative website as a public hub for AI research and programming.

Spring 2025

Hosted the first faculty and staff AI Hackathon and Prompt AIChemy Student Competition.

2024 Foundation

2025 Activation

June 2025

Received Eduventures' Innovation Award for leadership in AI-forward business education.

October 2025

Published AI thought leadership in AACSB Insights, later recognized as one of its "top articles from 2025."

Opened Immersive Education Gallery, celebrating the school's AI leadership.

December 2025

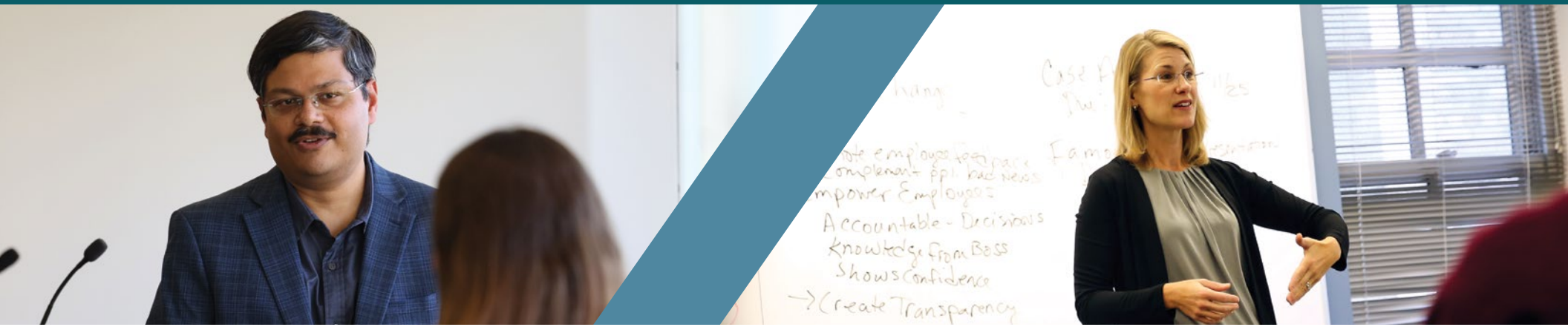
Institutionalized the SAIL framework and expanded faculty engagement through ongoing AI-focused development.

Integrated biweekly SAIL Friday virtual gatherings to spark collaboration.

Spring 2026

Piloted SBS Pulse, an application to streamline faculty activity reporting and strengthen academic community infrastructure, with over 100 faculty users.

2026 Scale



AT THE SAWYER BUSINESS SCHOOL, we believe the most important questions about artificial intelligence are not technological—they are human. How do employees learn to trust AI? How do teams function alongside it? How do organizations embed it responsibly?

These are the types of questions driving our faculty's research across management, organizational behavior, finance, accounting, marketing, and public policy. Rather than treating AI as a tool to be deployed, we examine it as a force that reshapes work, identity, governance, and opportunity—and we do so with the rigor of scholars and the urgency of practitioners.

Research by Professors Arka Sarkar and Sheila Webber—along with their respective collaborators—illustrates the Business School's research approach.

From Fear to Fluency

Prof. Sarkar's research traces a path from workplace psychology to organizational strategy to systemic equity—moving from the fears that block AI adoption, to the firm-level frameworks that overcome them, to the systemic mechanisms through which AI can either reinforce or repair inequity. Published across *Organizational Dynamics* (2025, 2026) and *AI and Ethics* (2025), each paper answers a question raised by the last—a hallmark of serious, cumulative scholarship.

Trust, Teams, and the Classroom

Prof. Sheila Webber and colleagues have built an equally coherent body of work centered on AI and human teams—from a prescient early assessment of AI's potential to improve team diagnostics, to the productive tension of embedded tools that simultaneously reduce mundane work and erode trust, to classroom applications that give students the analytical skills an AI-enabled workplace demands. Published across *Business Horizons, Organizational Dynamics*, and *Management Teaching Review*, this research connects faculty scholarship directly to how teams and students experience AI.

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DEAN ZENG AND PELIN BICEN, ASSOCIATE DEAN OF UNDERGRADUATE AND QUANT PROGRAMS, the Sawyer Business School has fully embraced AI integration for first-year students. Professors Sarah Mellen and Idil Senerdi Barry have been at the forefront of this transformation, using innovative approaches to shift student perceptions and build essential AI competencies.

From 'Forbidden Fruit' to Essential Tool

When Professor Barry surveyed her students at the start of the semester, 45% viewed AI as cheating. Coming from high schools where AI was treated as plagiarism, an entire generation considered it a "forbidden fruit." By semester's end, the majority saw AI as a valuable learning partner.

"The transformation was quite remarkable," says Barry. "We transferred their perception from, 'No, no, don't go there,' to, 'Hey, it must be an important skill.'"

The Mega Prompt Innovation

A key breakthrough came through "mega prompts" created by Associate Dean Bicen. These carefully designed prompts teach students to use AI as an upbeat tutor rather than just an answer machine. The prompts specify the AI's role, interaction style, and pedagogical approach—asking probing questions rather than providing direct answers.

> "Students worked individually through the mega prompt on case studies," explains Professor Mellen. "We reviewed all their chats to see the critical thinking happening. Then they'd share their prompts with group members and compare approaches. One student told me: 'I loved seeing how my group members asked different questions to get to the same answer. It really opened my eyes to different ways of thinking.'"

Five Essential Competencies

Through this hands-on approach, students develop five critical professional competencies: prompt engineering (speaking the language of AI), critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and advanced research skills. These competencies will remain essential regardless of how AI technology evolves.

Integrating Generative AI into the Marketing Classroom

By Arka Sarkar, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Sawyer Business School, Suffolk University

> "I entered this course expecting AI was just for writing captions and saving time. Now I see GenAI as a marketing teammate for research, strategy, creative, and testing."

The Vision: Why This Course Exists

Marketing with Generative AI is a 3-credit upper-division elective designed from the ground up and first offered in fall 2025 at the Sawyer Business School. The course was born from a straightforward conviction: the marketing profession is being reshaped by generative AI, and students deserve to graduate not merely aware of the transformation but actively prepared to lead it.

The course operates on a clear pedagogical philosophy: you learn AI by using AI—a lot. The course is structured around active, experiential learning. Each week blends direct instruction, hands-on lab time, peer presentations, and collaborative problem-solving. Rather than a traditional textbook, students work with curated, dynamic materials drawn from both academic and industry sources, ensuring relevance in a field that evolves week by week.

What Students Actually Do: The Course Design

The course unfolds across three modules, each building on the last.

Module 1: Generative AI Tools and Foundations

Students begin by learning the fundamentals of large language models, prompting techniques, and the ethical considerations that accompany AI use in marketing. Through a Perplexity Business Fellowship, every student receives free access to Perplexity Enterprise Pro for the entire semester, alongside guided access to Gemini Advanced and ChatGPT.

Module 2: Marketing and Generative AI

The second module applies foundational skills to core marketing functions: segmentation, brand storytelling, campaign ideation, personalization, and data-driven decision-making. Students do not simply read about these applications—they build them. Guest lectures from marketing professionals who actively use generative AI provide students direct exposure to how the industry is evolving in real time.

Module 3: Real-World Client Project

The capstone is a team-based consulting engagement with a real business client. In Spring 2026, students partnered with Swallowtail Farm and Creamery, a Maine company exploring the launch of an upcycled functional beverage. Teams developed full marketing strategies leveraging AI to accelerate research, competitive analysis, and creative execution, that culminated in a live client presentation.

Student Impact: In Their Own Words

The most compelling evidence of this course's impact comes directly from students. Across two semesters, several themes emerge with remarkable consistency.

> "I will be entering the job market not as someone who knows all the tools, but as someone who understands how to learn, evaluate, and collaborate with AI to create better marketing outcomes."

From Skeptics to Strategic Thinkers

Many students enter with narrow or skeptical views of AI. By the semester's end, their perspectives have fundamentally shifted. A student who identified as a photographer entered fearing AI would threaten creativity, only to conclude that AI works best as a creative partner—helping generate ideas. At the same time, humans refine and guide the final message.

Career Confidence and Professional Readiness

Students repeatedly describe feeling more prepared for the professional world.

Several students referenced using AI skills from the course to strengthen internship applications, curate cover letters, and prepare for interviews. One student summarized a broader truth: "AI skills will be baseline in marketing; competitive advantage comes from knowing when and how to apply it responsibly."

> "GenAI helps me draft faster, but I am responsible for the final message."

Responsible and Ethical AI Use

A theme across nearly every student reflection is the importance of responsible AI use. Students are not just learning to use AI tools—they are learning to question output, check for bias, verify accuracy, and maintain authenticity.

The course consistently reinforces that human judgment, creativity, and ethical awareness remain essential. As one student put it: "AI is an assistant, not my boss. Knowing what ideas to pick and when to drop them is imperative."

Transforming Students into AI-Fluent Marketers

Marketing with Generative AI is not simply a course about AI tools. It is a course about what happens when you give marketing students the confidence, access, and structured environment to experiment fearlessly with a technology that's reshaping their profession. The students who emerge do not just know how to prompt a chatbot. They know how to think critically about AI-generated output, integrate multiple tools into a coherent marketing workflow, present strategic recommendations to a real client, and position themselves professionally in an AI-powered job market.

> "This course transformed my understanding of GenAI from a simple tool into a meaningful strategic partner."

Eduventures Innovation Award

The Sawyer Business School received a national Eduventures Innovation Award—given to institutions advancing innovation and improving outcomes in higher education—for its AI-human educational framework and the measurable gains in student confidence and capability it produced.

June 2025

THE SCHOOL'S COMMITMENT TO AI extends beyond the classroom. Through competitions, faculty development, industry engagement, and a growing ecosystem of collaborative programs, the Business School is building the infrastructure for responsible AI literacy—equipping students with skills employers need, supporting faculty as they redesign how they teach, and bringing business leaders into the conversation.

Preparing AI-Ready Graduates

- **Prompt AIChemy Competition:** A signature student challenge in which teams apply the SAIL Framework to extract insights from real-world business datasets, with judges evaluating both the quality of AI prompting and the rigor of ethical reasoning.
- **AI Startup Pitch Competition:** Suffolk x Top Contenders: A cross-campus entrepreneurship event connecting student innovators with venture capital networks, mentorship, and prize funding.

Building a Supportive Ecosystem for Faculty

- **SAIL Fridays:** A faculty development series launched to help instructors translate the SAIL Framework into practical, AI-informed learning design—ensuring that AI literacy is built into the curriculum across disciplines, not added as an afterthought.
- **The Pulse:** A purpose-built platform designed to help the Sawyer community discover colleagues' expertise, surface collaboration opportunities, and strengthen the connective tissue of a research and teaching community that is increasingly working across boundaries. The school also launched the *AI Pulse by Sawyer* newsletter keeping faculty apprised of the latest developments in AI.

Supporting Business AI Acceleration

- **Leading Teams in the Age of AI:** A practitioner-focused program delivering actionable strategies for business leaders navigating AI's impact on team dynamics, decision-making, and organizational performance.
- **SEED Program:** Through the School's consulting clinics, AI capabilities are embedded directly into student engagements—giving students hands-on applied experience while providing business clients with analytically sophisticated support they might not otherwise access.

EXECUTIVE IN RESIDENCE DMITRI TCHEREVIK, founder and CEO of AnyQuest, bridges the theoretical grounding of an academic with the hands-on experience of a practitioner. He works exclusively on the Business School's AI strategies.

Teaching AI. Using AI to Teach.

Sawyer's AI strategy is two-pronged: teaching students to become AI experts, and using AI to transform business education itself. Both dimensions are reflected in the School's approach—from the SEED consulting program where students deploy AI as practitioners, to the personalized learning systems that use AI to reimagine how education is delivered.

The Workforce Imperative

Tcherevik is direct: the debate about whether AI is real is over. Companies have moved on to the harder question of what to do about it—from the C-suite to the front line.

> "Companies are seriously thinking about upskilling their workforce. And it starts from the top: 'So, what is our AI strategy?' And then all the way to: 'How do we make our line workers more productive with AI?'"

The Sawyer Business School is meeting that demand and has delivered executive AI workshops for major Boston-area employers, including Massport and Manulife, with more in the pipeline. Tcherevik sees this as core to the School's mission.

Personalized Learning at Scale

A critical component of Tcherevik's vision for transforming education is a sophisticated AI system that provides every student with a genuinely personalized path through their degree. The system will eventually integrate labor market intelligence, curriculum analytics, a course and program warehouse, and AI agents that synthesize all of this into tailored academic recommendations.

> "AI is in a great position to develop super personalized learning paths for students, given their background, their objectives, given what we offer, and then what is demanded by the industry that they would like to join."

The initial interface will be a chatbot capable of holding a dynamic dialogue with students—asking about their goals, background, and target career, then mapping that to available courses and market demand.

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