

SUMMIT ON BELONGING

Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

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Human at the Helm

Mentoring in the Age of AI

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A global challenge

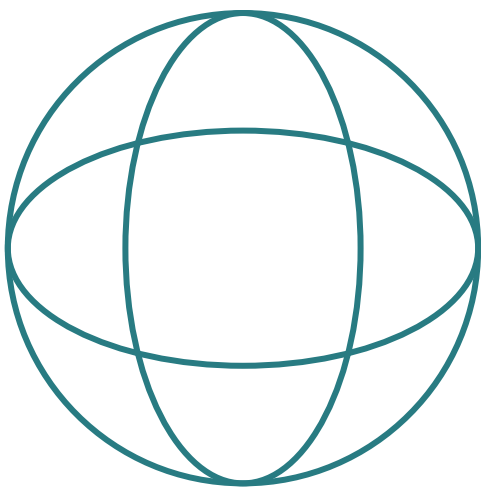
Loneliness, mental health, and a need to belong

LONELINESS

52%

High levels of loneliness

U.S. college students
Healthy Minds Study, 2024–2025



MENTAL HEALTH

37%

Depression

32%

Anxiety

Moderate to severe symptoms
U.S. college students

SCHOOL BELONGING

About

25%

Do not feel they
belong at school

15-year-olds · OECD average
PISA 2022

Selected populations, not worldwide prevalence. Measures differ; anxiety and depression overlap.

Source: [Healthy Minds Study \(2024–2025\)](#) | [OECD PISA 2022, Table 5.1](#)

Faculty and advisors can promote belonging and success.



Belonging

Working-class first-generation students with staff mentors report greater belonging.

[Soria et al. \(2024\)](#) | [Matched comparison](#)

Persistence

Assigned college mentors were linked to staying in college.

[Hu & Ma \(2010\)](#) | [Observational study](#)

Graduation

Faculty-mentored research

[Nerio et al. \(2019\)](#), [graduation](#)

Mentored program (n = 490)

Comparison (n = 490)



Peer mentoring and technology can affordably scale this support

Peer mentoring



Belonging and confidence

Female mentors protected both in women in engineering

[Dennehy & Dasgupta \(2017\) | Randomized trial](#)

Graduation

Higher completion rates among first-year participants

[Boutakidis et al. \(2024\) | Matched comparison](#)

Emotional well-being

Less negative affect in a mentored cohort

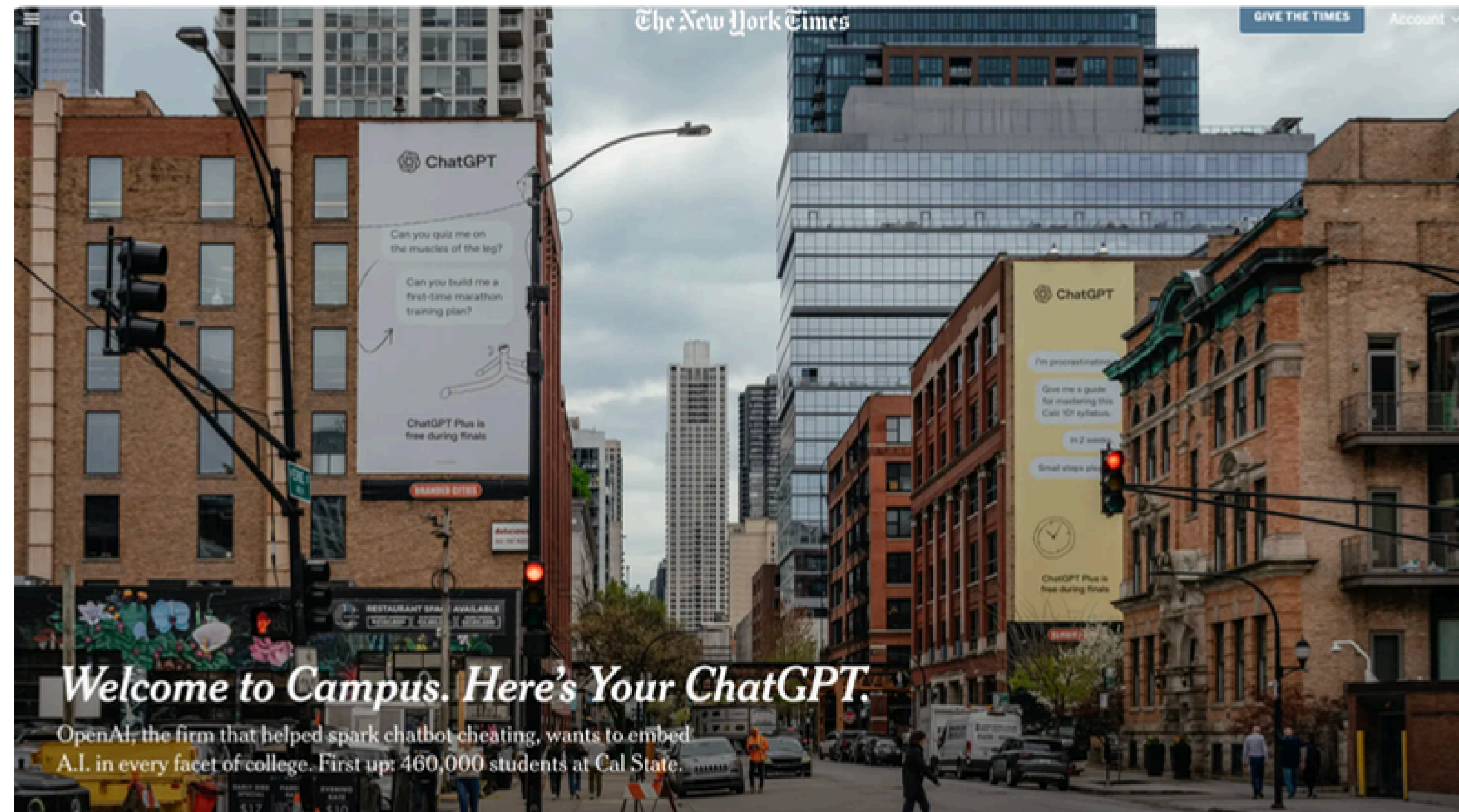
[Collings et al. \(2014\) | Nonrandomized comparison](#)

Belonging, GPA and well-being

Technology-enhanced mentoring linked to better outcomes

[Werntz et al. \(2026\) | Observational study](#)

Enter Chatbots....



[Natasha Singer, The New York Times, June 7, 2025](#)

UK UNDERGRADUATES · 2026 REPORT

95%

used AI in at least one way

1,054 full-time UK undergraduates
Survey conducted December 2025

15%

used AI for friendship, company,
advice or tackling loneliness

Student-Facing Chatbots



1 in 3

teen AI-companion users chose AI instead of a person to discuss something important or serious

n = 758 AI users · U.S. ages 13–17 · 2025
At least once, not necessarily regularly

MIT / OpenAI

Heavier voluntary use was linked to more loneliness and dependence, and less human social interaction.

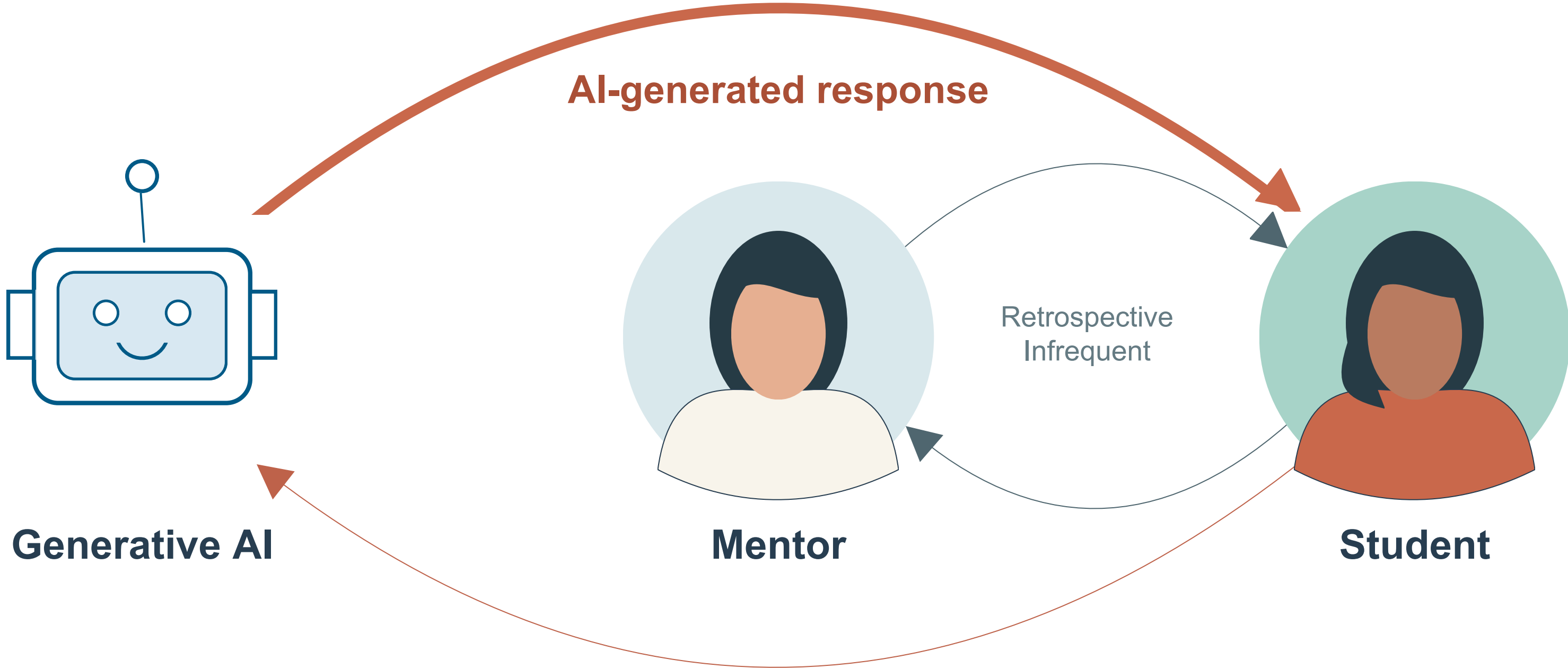
n = 981 · four weeks · 2025 preprint
Usage-intensity association, not a causal effect

Different samples and designs; these findings do not establish that AI causes loneliness.

[Source: Common Sense Media \(2025\), Talk, Trust, and Trade-Offs, Q9](#)

[Source: Fang et al. \(2025\), How AI and Human Behaviors Shape Psychosocial Effects of Extended Chatbot Use](#)

Human-in-the-Loop



Lost Opportunities for Connection



22%

Skipped an advisor meeting
because AI had answered their question

N = 412 U.S. college students who used AI
Exploratory, nonrepresentative survey · 2025

33%

Turned to chatbots
instead of staff or faculty

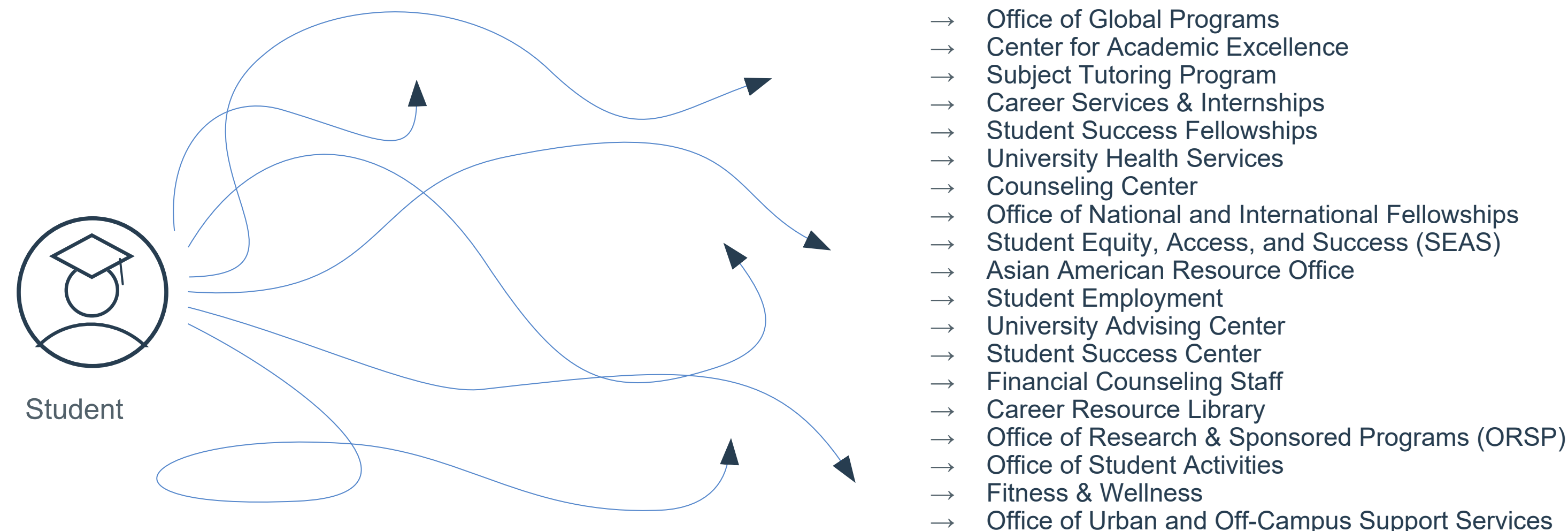
N = 545 WGU students · mean age 35.8
One online university · 2026 report

Self-reported substitution, not evidence of a national decline in advisor meetings.

Source: [A-State \(2025\)](#) | [WGU Labs \(2026\)](#) | [Rhodes \(2026\)](#), [Vouching towards Bethlehem](#)

Student struggle to find support

Students navigate complex systems with limited guidance



48% of students used no campus supports
[Source: Hope Center \(2025\)](#)

<40% reported having a mentor who encouraged their goals and dreams
[Gallup-Lumina \(2026\), p. 5](#)

>300 students per primary-role advisor
[Tyton Partners \(2024\), p. 20](#)



[Return to Search Results](#)

Connected Futures

Course #: INTR-D 135, **Class #:** 10531, **Section #:** 05

Description

In this course you will learn and practice skills associated with finding mentors, people to help you with different aspects of your academic and professional lives. You will learn how to better cultivate a network of caring mentors and people to support you throughout your career. Over the semester you will participate in weekly classes that include training in identifying potential mentors in your social networks and practicing strategies for connecting with mentors through role-playing as well as real-world conversations and interviews.

Course Details

Date / Time	Location	Credits
9/8/26 - 12/11/26 We 2:30p.m. – 3:45p.m.	McCormack M01-0417	1

Course completion is linked to student success

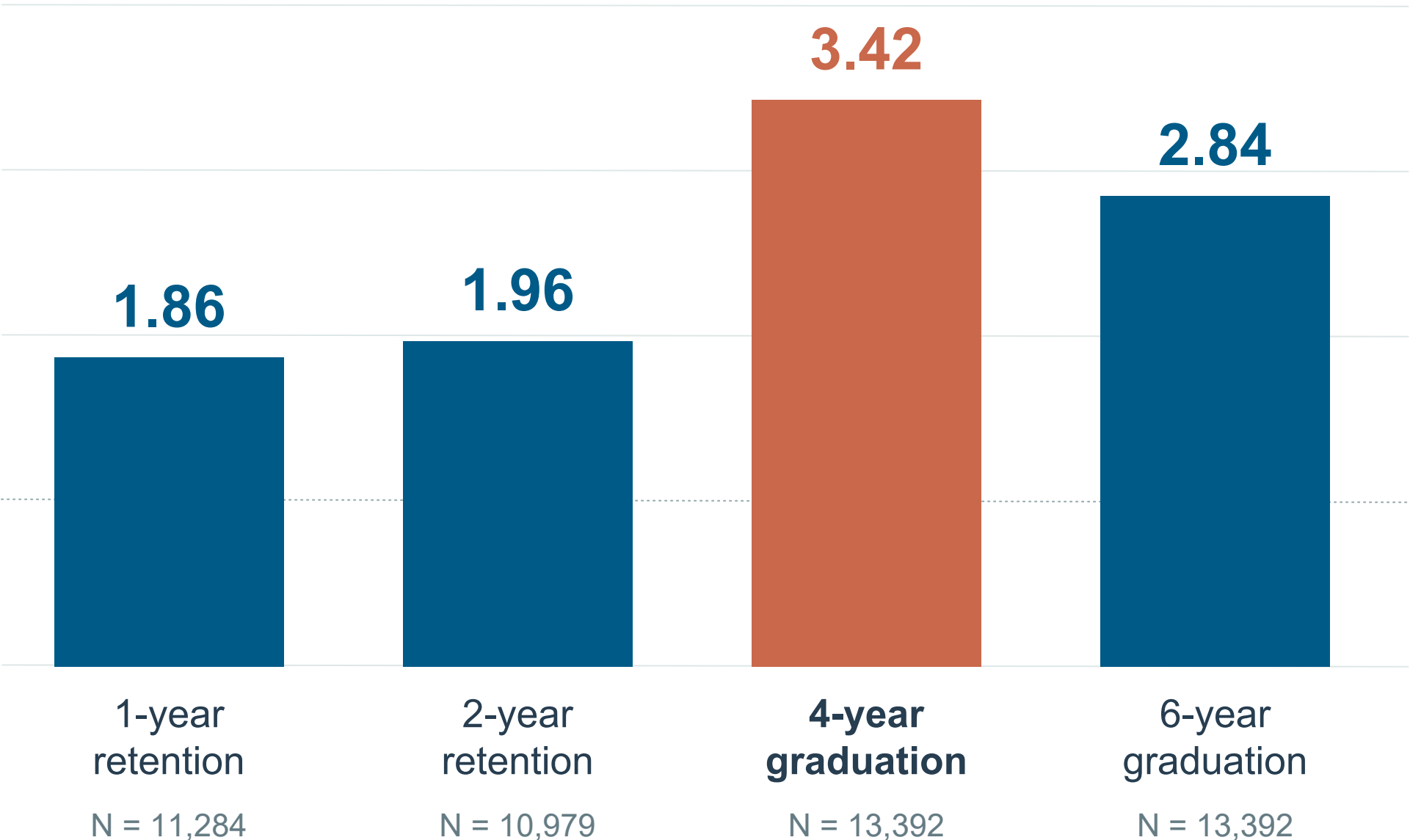
3.42×

the adjusted odds of
four-year graduation

Students who passed
Connected Scholars

Compared with other students
UMass Boston

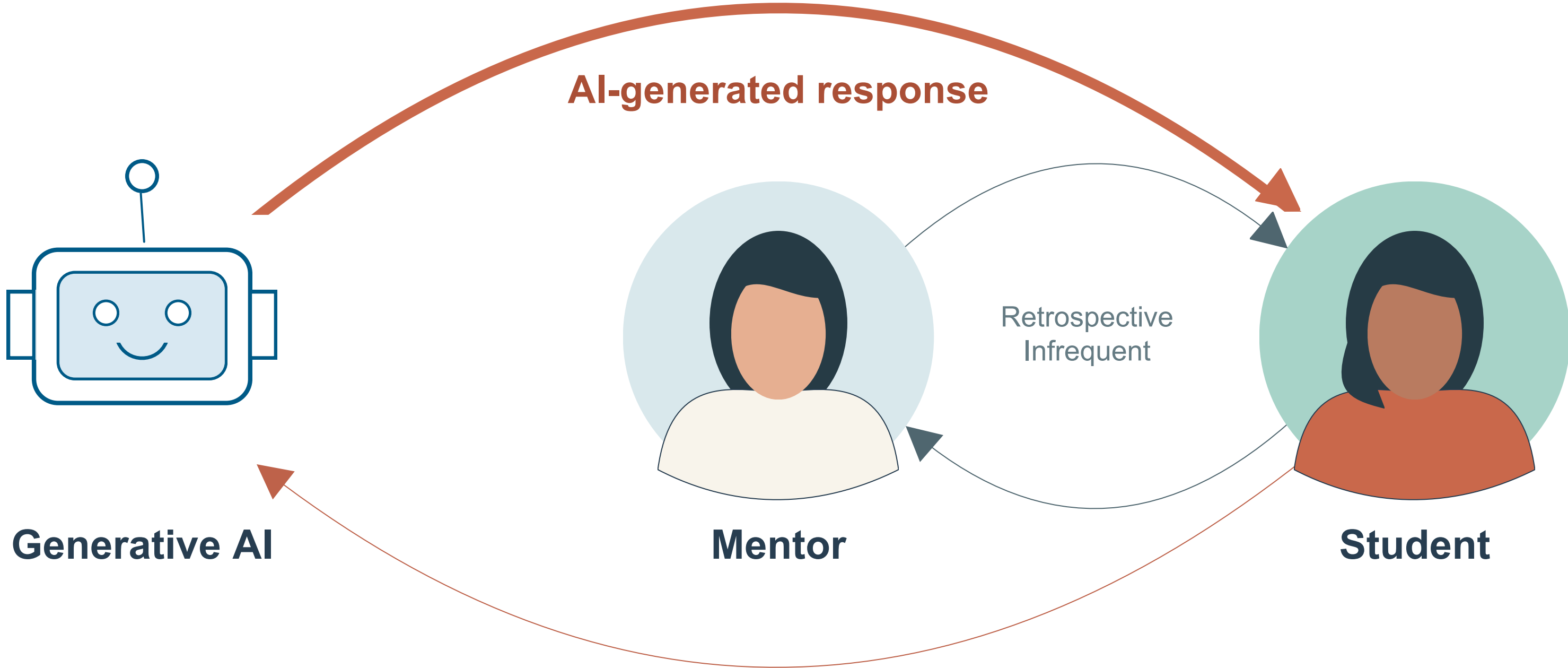
Adjusted odds ratios



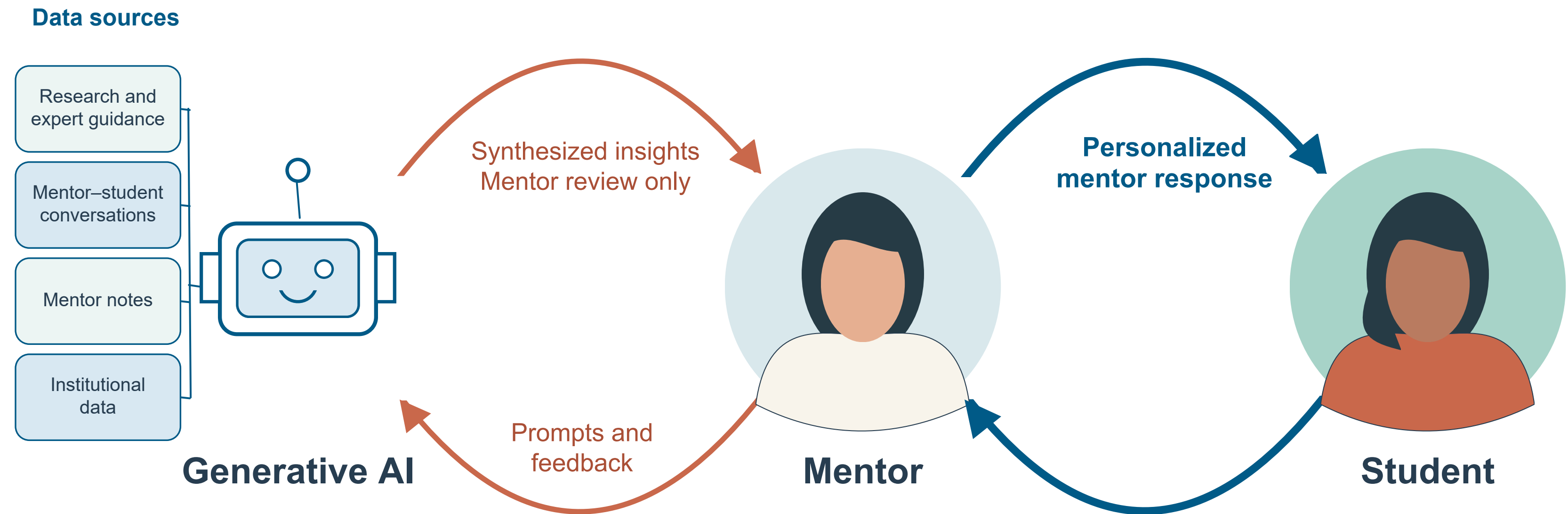
Adjusted observational associations, not causal effects. Ns are total analytic samples.

Source: [Hersch et al. \(2026\), American Journal of Community Psychology](#).

Human-in-the-Loop



Human-at-the-Helm



Reduce cognitive load. Scale human support.

Source: Rhodes (2026), Human-at-the-Helm

Thank you

“We each have the power to create belonging out there in the world.”

Geoffrey L. Cohen

Belonging (2022)



Source: Cohen, Next Big Idea Club (2022)

Continue the conversation



Vouching towards Bethlehem:
what colleges and universities
owe students in the age of AI

Rhodes, J. E. (2026)
Frontiers in Education, 11, 1855989