

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com).

<https://www.wsj.com/lifestyle/careers/want-to-succeed-in-an-ai-world-study-anthropology-cbb2d368>

LIFESTYLE • CAREERS • ON THE CLOCK

# Want to Succeed in an AI World? Study Anthropology

**College students and workers alike are finding a new set of skills is needed for a rapidly changing workplace**



SEAN DONG FOR WSJ



**By Callum Borchers**

**Sept. 10, 2026 8:00 am ET**

A computer-science degree is no longer a golden ticket.

Stanford and MIT graduates are doing just fine, but a stampede of students into this major over the last two decades produced more coders than companies need. Artificial intelligence makes the oversupply even worse.

What's the alternative? Get really good at the stuff machines are lousy at.

For current and prospective college students, and their parents, this might mean avoiding college majors that made sense in a pre-AI world, like computer science, or that were created in response to AI mania. For the rest of us, thinking about what you'd study if you were in college today is a way to identify skills worth developing for the future.

And that doesn't mean focusing on AI itself.

"It's too narrow," says Peter Miscovich, an executive managing director at commercial-real-estate giant JLL who advises some of the firm's biggest tenants on future-of-work strategies.

While it is trendy for companies to create chief AI officer positions, he predicts every C-suite job will ultimately require AI savvy and specialized roles will become outdated. Likewise, an AI-specific degree could seem antiquated in a decade.

"It's sort of like saying you majored in Excel," Miscovich says.

Instead, it might be time to go back to some of the classic areas of study.

"Human skills remain even more important as AI takes on more complex work and reshapes fields in ways we can't fully predict," says Leah Belsky, OpenAI's vice president of education.

So I asked a mix of business executives, investors and academics to recommend programs of study. Here are some of their recommendations, for students and the rest of us.

## **Anthropology**

Alec Litowitz majored in math at MIT and went on to earn a law degree and an MBA. Yet the investor who was an early partner at Citadel continually draws on lessons from his second undergraduate major: anthropology.

"The beauty of anthropology for me is that I can telescope out and try to understand what's happening to society right now," he says. "I don't know all the answers, but I have a frame because one of the key skill sets is metacognition. It's being able to observe a system, and at the same time you are part of the system you're observing."

At its core, anthropology is an effort to grasp what makes us human. It's hard to think of a more relevant pursuit when our career prospects hinge on humanity's value proposition, relative to bots.

Just last week, Ernst & Young said it was creating a \$100 million bonus pool to reward employees who demonstrate value in ways that can't be replaced by AI. If you want a

piece of pies like this one, it would be useful to know as much about human nature as possible.

In “The Adaptability Quotient,” his book coming out this month, Litowitz argues that much of the knowledge people acquire in college has been commoditized by AI, or will be. He says your time and money are best spent on studies that force you to think critically and understand people because those abilities can help you adapt to change.

## **Mathematics**

One of AI’s most powerful effects on the job market is erosion of trust. Recruiters and hiring managers struggle to determine whether candidates are as good as advertised—or merely good at using AI to cheat.

So, IG Labs interviews seemingly promising applicants in person and hands them dry-erase markers.

“We put them on the whiteboard,” says Bert Bean, chief executive of Insight Global, a staffing and consulting firm. IG Labs is the company’s team of AI gurus who help clients with limited-term projects. “We say, ‘OK, now show us what you can do.’ Our guys throw crazy technical problems at them to see how they think through them and how they can solve them.”

That’s some “Good Will Hunting” stuff right there.

Bean says math majors are strong candidates for a couple of reasons. One is that AI modeling involves a lot of math. Another is that math majors typically have experience in the kind of manual problem-solving exercises at the heart of IG Labs’ interview process.

Old-school candidate evaluations are poised for a comeback as AI makes virtual interviews less reliable. People who have wrestled with hard questions and practiced working them out by hand will stand out.

Litowitz, the investor with degrees in both math and anthropology, says he’d pick a third option if he had it to do all over again. His pick? Philosophy.

## **Philosophy**

Look, I'm not going to tell you that becoming the next Socrates is a viable career path. Among recent college graduates, ages 22 to 27, people with philosophy degrees are more than twice as likely to be underemployed as those with computer-science degrees, according to the New York Fed.

Notably, however, these young philosophy majors are less likely to be *unemployed* than their peers with degrees in computer science, computer engineering, information systems or physics.

Some of them might be baristas, but the data suggests people who study philosophy are good at figuring out alternative uses for their talents. That's sure to be valuable in a future job market that AI will change in ways we can't anticipate.

AI companies see value in philosophers, too. Anthropic employs one to teach Claude a sense of morality. There are similar roles at OpenAI and Google.

Jeremy Schifeling, who leads training sessions at college career centers, says a lot of students make the mistake of picking tech majors they are ill-suited for and drop out. While AI-centric majors are in vogue, classic programs can offer lasting value and be better fits for your interests and abilities.

If nothing else, zigging when others zag is often wise.

*Appeared in the September 21, 2026, print edition as 'Need an AI Edge? Study Anthropology'.*

Callum Borchers writes the "On the Clock" column, which chronicles people's careers and work lives. His writing covers major workplace shifts, like hybrid schedules and diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as the quirky side of work. He is a recipient of the National Press Club's Angela Gingras Humor Award. Previously, he was a correspondent at public radi...

Follow



