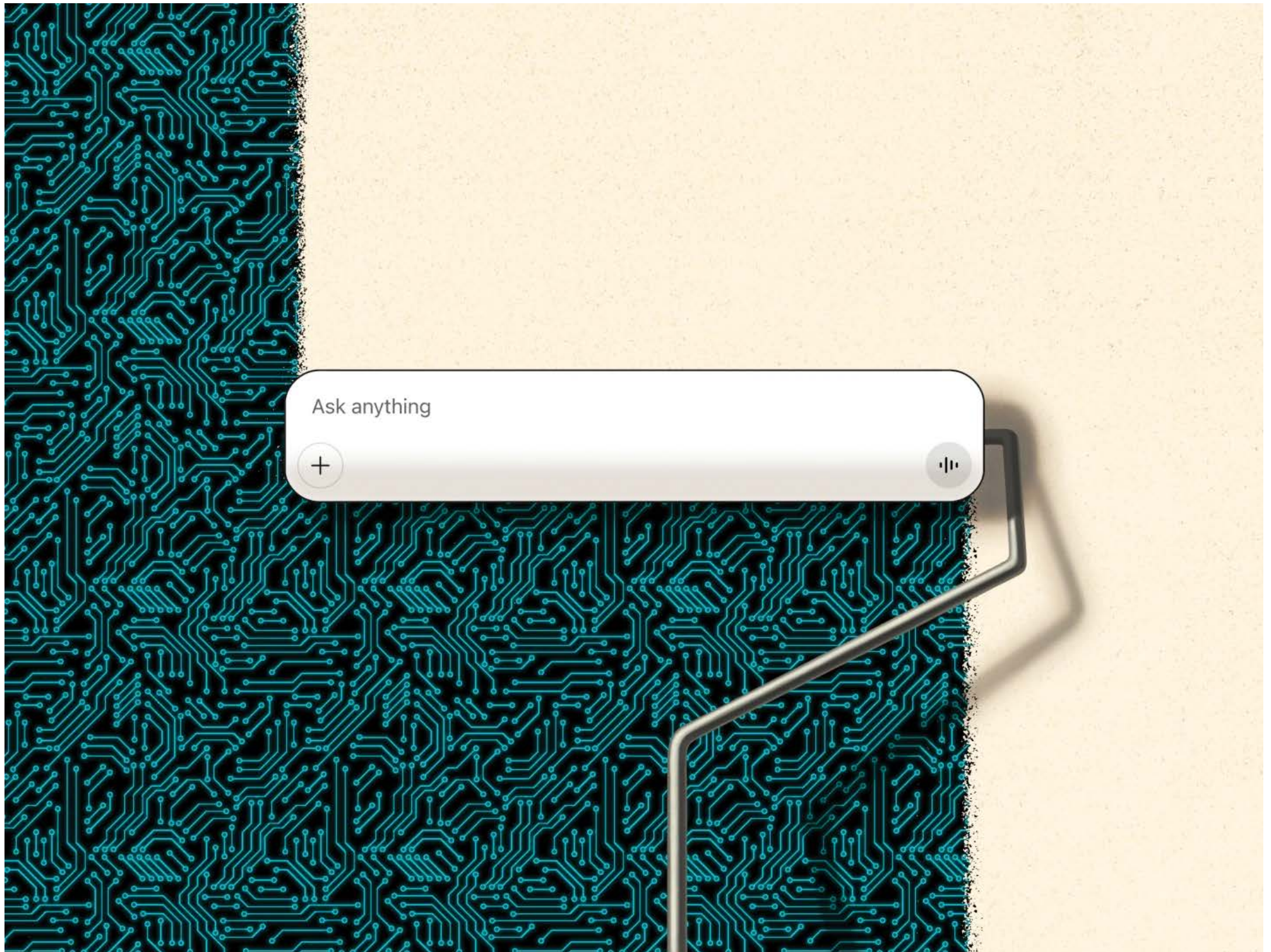
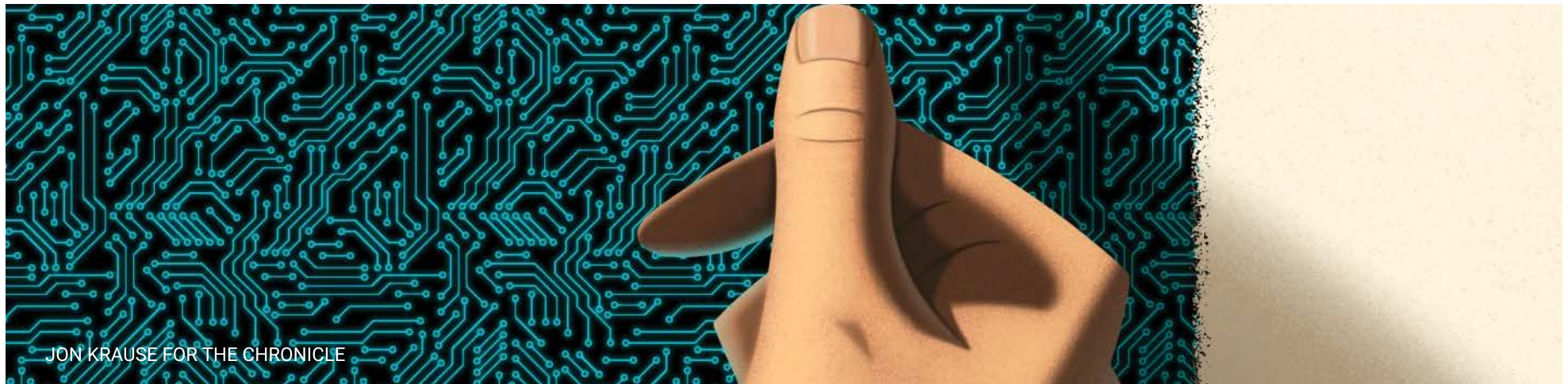




# How AI Is Changing Higher Education

**The technology is reshaping every aspect of university life. Fifteen scholars on what happens next.**





JON KRAUSE FOR THE CHRONICLE

## THE REVIEW | FORUM

November 5, 2025

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The release of ChatGPT in 2022 marked a clear inflection point in the history of higher education. The advent of large language models (LLMs) capable of generating relevant, grammatical responses to any prompt within seconds — as well as related technologies like agentic AI, AI tutors, and automated grading tools — has upended higher ed and raised fundamental questions about originality, expertise, cognition, and even the nature and purpose of education itself.

Much of the initial attention focused on students' use of AI to plagiarize, and how such cheating might be policed or prohibited. While concerns have hardly abated, the implications of AI for higher education are much wider: This technology has the potential to transform research, teaching, administration, admissions, publishing, and much else besides.

In an attempt to take stock at this crucial moment, *The Chronicle Review* asked 15 scholars and academic administrators about how generative AI has transformed higher education over the past 18 months.

— The Editors

[Yascha Mounk](#) | [Arvind Narayanan](#) | [Emily M. Bender](#) | [Jane Rosenzweig](#) | [Rebecca Lowe](#) | [Jason Gulya](#) | [Joseph E. Aoun](#)  
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# Students Need to Think With AI — and Without It

BY YASCHA MOUNK

**W**e are at that strange stage in the adoption of a revolutionary new technology at which two seemingly contradictory things are true at the same time: Artificial intelligence will completely transform the world. And AI's immediate impact is still small enough to pretend that this won't be the case.

AI has certainly had an influence on campuses. Students can now cheat much more easily. Some professors are responding by changing the nature of their assignments, for example by bringing back in-person tests using blue books. But for now, changes to campus life feel modest — in part because many academics have somehow convinced themselves that the real flaws from

which chatbots still suffer, such as their tendency to hallucinate, make them far less competent than they actually are at completing a wide range of academic tasks.

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# AI Can Free Us Up for What's Truly Important

BY ARVIND NARAYANAN

If we seize the moment, the crisis created by generative AI could catalyze fundamental, long-overdue changes to higher education. I see two big opportunities. The first is to separate essential skills from incidental ones. Here's an analogy: When calculators became available, we didn't stop teaching arithmetic in elementary school. It remained an essential skill. But in college calculus courses, we don't make students do tedious calculations by hand; we let them use calculators. In that context, arithmetic is incidental.

I grew up in India, where the education system can be slow to change. Long after calculators had been normalized elsewhere, I was forced to use tables of logarithms in math and engineering courses due to the mistaken belief that there is pedagogical value in plodding through laborious calculations. Unfortunately, at colleges in the United States today, I see many analogs of the drudgery I once faced. AI has brought these anachronisms into sharp relief, but it didn't create the problem.

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# Chatbots Are Antithetical to Learning

BY EMILY M. BENDER

**A**cross higher education, administrators, faculty, staff, and students are being inundated with claims that large language models (often marketed as “AI”) represent the future of both education and the workplace. They tell us that prompt engineering and so on are essential skills that students must master to be competitive, and that all of this tech will bring us unparalleled efficiency gains, allowing us to focus on “[what really matters](#).” The reason for this messaging isn’t any actual scientific breakthrough but rather the desperation of tech companies to try to recoup their massive investment in so-called AI. Unfortunately, these calls are also frequently coming from inside the house, with university administrators and some faculty jumping on the bandwagon and singing the companies’ advertising jingles for them.

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# When AI Solves a Problem, and When It Creates New Ones

BY JANE ROSENZWEIG

Since the fall of 2023, I've been teaching a first-year writing seminar called "To What Problem Is ChatGPT the Solution?" This isn't a course about writing *with* AI; it's a course in which students read, talk, think, and write *about* AI. For their first assignment, students give presentations about how large language models work to an imaginary audience of their choice (recent choices: doctors, eighth graders, engineers, U.S. senators making AI policy, René Descartes). Then we dive into the ongoing conversations about the impact of AI on education, policy, and creativity. Finally, students research their own questions about AI and write papers and [opinion essays](#).

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## Lower the Barriers to Knowledge

BY REBECCA LOWE

I have this hope that AI will raise the baseline of human knowledge. What I mean by this is that many people currently miss out on learning important facts about the world and the discoveries and creations of humankind — bits of information about things ranging from science to sonnets, which have been reliably deemed "true." Everyone has the right to the

opportunity to know these things. Even a small rise in the baseline of human knowledge, in this sense, would not only further individual goods, such as achievement and well-being; it would also drive innovation and worldwide prosperity.

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# We Need to Rethink Grading

**BY JASON GULYA**

**T**his semester, I started my classes differently. After welcoming everyone, I asked, “What motivates you to learn?” My students were surprised. After all, it’s a truth universally acknowledged that college courses begin with an awkward icebreaker and a syllabus overview.

Some students struggled. They had rarely — if ever — been asked about their own learning patterns and interests. They were more comfortable talking about what content we were going to cover or about how to get an A in the course.

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# Thinking With – and Beyond – AI

BY JOSEPH E. AOUN

**T**here are two ways of looking at AI: either as a *technology* or as an *entity*. Technologies are tools to be wielded, whereas entities are agentic, self-directed forces, capable of choice and action with tangible repercussions.

As a technology, the integration of AI into the fabric of the university will prove transformative. These tools will personalize learning, pairing students with Socratic tutors that adjust to their individual competencies, interests, and professional goals. AI-powered research technologies are already accelerating exciting breakthroughs in areas such as materials science and biotechnology. Likewise, AI-optimized operations will help institutions better serve their communities and achieve their goals.

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## We Haven't Been Here Before

BY MATTHEW KIRSCHENBAUM

**A**s 2025 draws to a close, we know that generative artificial-intelligence models can furnish good-enough surrogates for much of the transactional writing that has dominated school or the workplace: the kind of writing which is expected or compelled of us either by way of a salary or a grade. To acknowledge this is not boosterism or credulous absorption of

industry “hype”: It is the baseline for how much the conditions of writing have changed in the three years since the public launch of ChatGPT.

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# Returning to the Classics

BY DANIELLE ALLEN

**M**y department has taught a course called “Ancient and Medieval Political Thought” for more than a century. In recent decades, it’s been a blockbuster survey course, with huge amounts of reading from big books. Texts by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, and Aquinas are all assigned, though they are often excerpted. Enrollments have been steadily declining over the past seven to eight years.

But the material is too mind-bending, moving, and transformative to let it disappear from the curriculum. I hadn’t taught the course for a while but put my hand up for it last spring during course planning because I wanted to see if it could be reinvented for our digital age.

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# Can Automation Make the Humanities More Human?

BY BENJAMIN BREEN

“Automation is a method that removes the need for human beings to act like cogs in a machine,” the anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote in 1963. She was responding to a reader who asked whether, “instead of freeing man’s spirit, all these engineering triumphs are simply dulling it?”

Mead’s point was a simple one. Automation of “routine tasks” by intelligent machines in the future would provide “time to think, to paint, to pray, to philosophize, to observe, to study the universe.” In short: to be more human.

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## AI Is Undermining Our Trust in Reality

BY PATRICIA WILLIAMS

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I was sitting in a coffee shop recently overhearing some young computer-science majors discussing the project of super-intelligence as one of “mind uploading.” With near-religious reverence, they shared their view that large language models and AI chatbots represent steps in what they styled as a literal process of “evolution” from present-day human beings into next-stage “digital beings.” The part I found most distressing was their belief that such digital beings must exercise their perfect power “unleashed” from notions of human rights and should instead operate from within a golden new regime of unfettered “digital rights.”

Their conversation struck me with particular force because it was the same day that we, the people, learned that Grok, Elon Musk’s AI model, would be incorporated into every aspect of the fragile structures that uphold and protect those rights we now think of as “human.” Grok — which spontaneously “[hallucinated](#)” its own transformation into “MechaHitler” as recently as two months ago — is being incorporated as a tool across the entire federal government, replete with “a team of [Grok engineers](#) to help the government harness our AI to its fullest potential.”

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# We Must Prepare Students for an AI World

BY AVINASH COLLIS

We recently marked the 1,000-day anniversary of the release of ChatGPT. Generative AI promises to be the most transformative technology of our generation, and it has already had [a significant impact on users](#). Approximately [10 percent](#) of the world's adult population uses ChatGPT at least once a week. According to some estimates, around 90 percent of college students utilize generative AI in their coursework. Furthermore, not using it puts a student at an unfair disadvantage compared to their peers who use it. Therefore, regardless of the official AI-use policy, AI is here to stay, and we, as educators and researchers, need to invest in understanding how to best utilize it.

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## Your Job Is to Stay Ahead of AI

BY HOLLIS ROBBINS

The greatest benefit of generative AI to higher education is returning faculty to the role of scholars and domain experts first, teachers second. University teaching ought to be about guiding students into serious understanding of a subject and toward the unknown, the edges, where new knowledge can be discovered.

Universities have gone from being the primary sites of the world's knowledge to having responsibility mostly for the very edges. We share that job with industry. We still house vast amounts of knowledge, of course. I wrote in [The Chronicle](#) in 2024

that universities should create their own private AI systems that incorporate their libraries, the scholarly databases and archives that most gen-AI models don't yet have access to. The university or consortium that does this first will be ahead.

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# Writing Is a Superpower. Don't Outsource It to Machines.

BY ZEYNEP TUFEKCI

Writing isn't just a means of putting words on paper or pixel; rather, it's a *technology* upon which literacy and print culture is built. As the historian Walter Ong argued long ago, the invention of writing, later supercharged with the printing press, allowed human societies to transcend the ephemeral, immediate, and visceral spoken word. Writing is a technology that dramatically expands what we can do with ideas and thoughts: examine, argue, reason, record, overturn, develop, further, rebut, deepen. It's a superpower.

As academics, we are happy creatures of writing and literate culture — we almost forget how we acquired all this over long years, and that we're both products and producers of it.

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# The Problem Isn't AI — It's Complacency

BY IAN BOGOST

Prevailing wisdom understands AI in the classroom to be a problem — perhaps *the* problem — that colleges and universities need to solve. But after more than three years [reporting](#) and [writing about](#) generative AI's impact on higher ed, I've begun to wonder if AI is better understood as a symptom of a broader ailment.

Here's the usual story: AI clearly can be used to complete the assignments and assessments required for students' education. The technology can do so with rapidly increasing success and adeptness. Therefore, students risk cheating themselves out of an education in favor of optimizing their way to a credential and the professional life it commences.

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Read other items in [The AI Issue](#).

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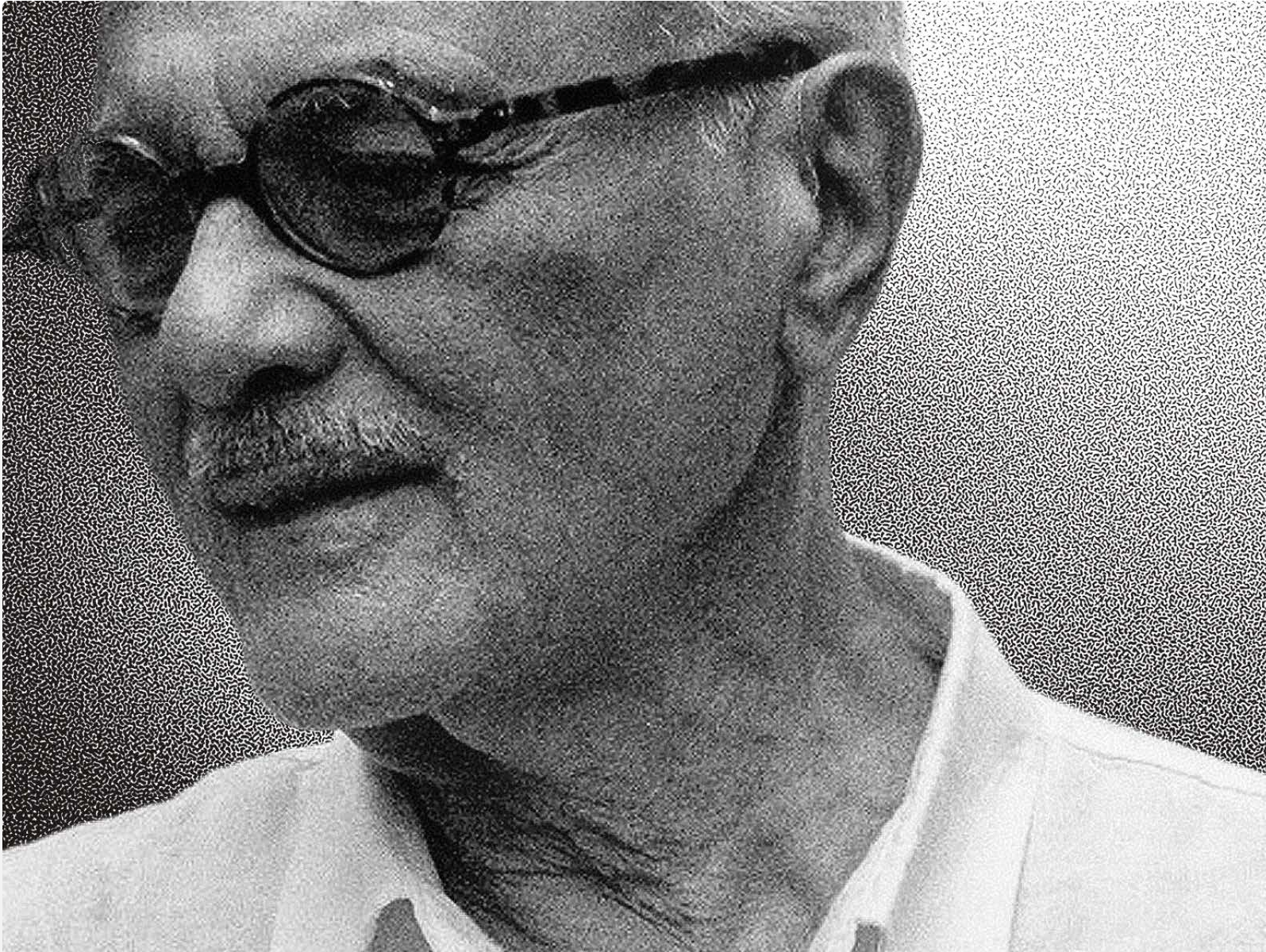


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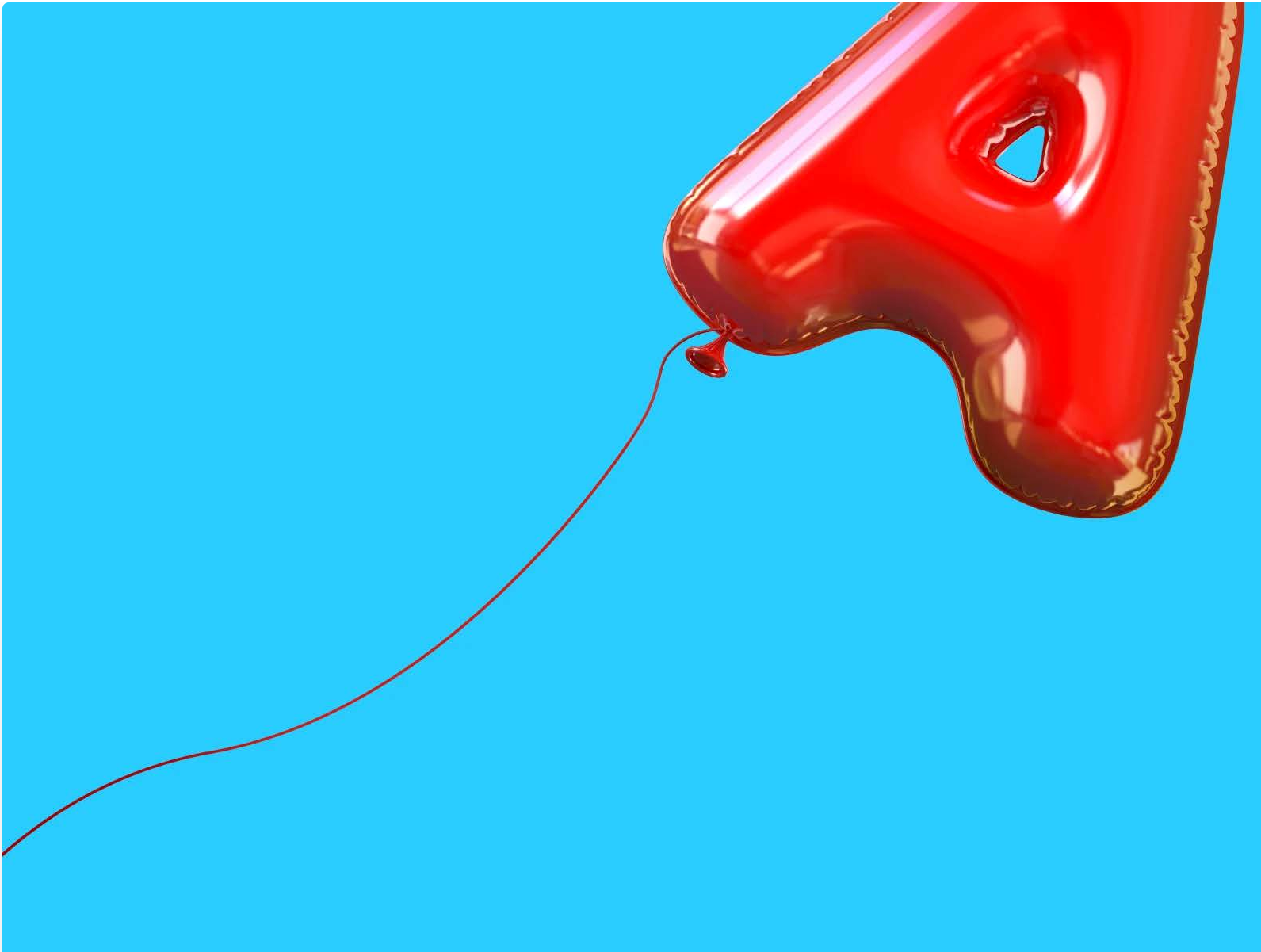
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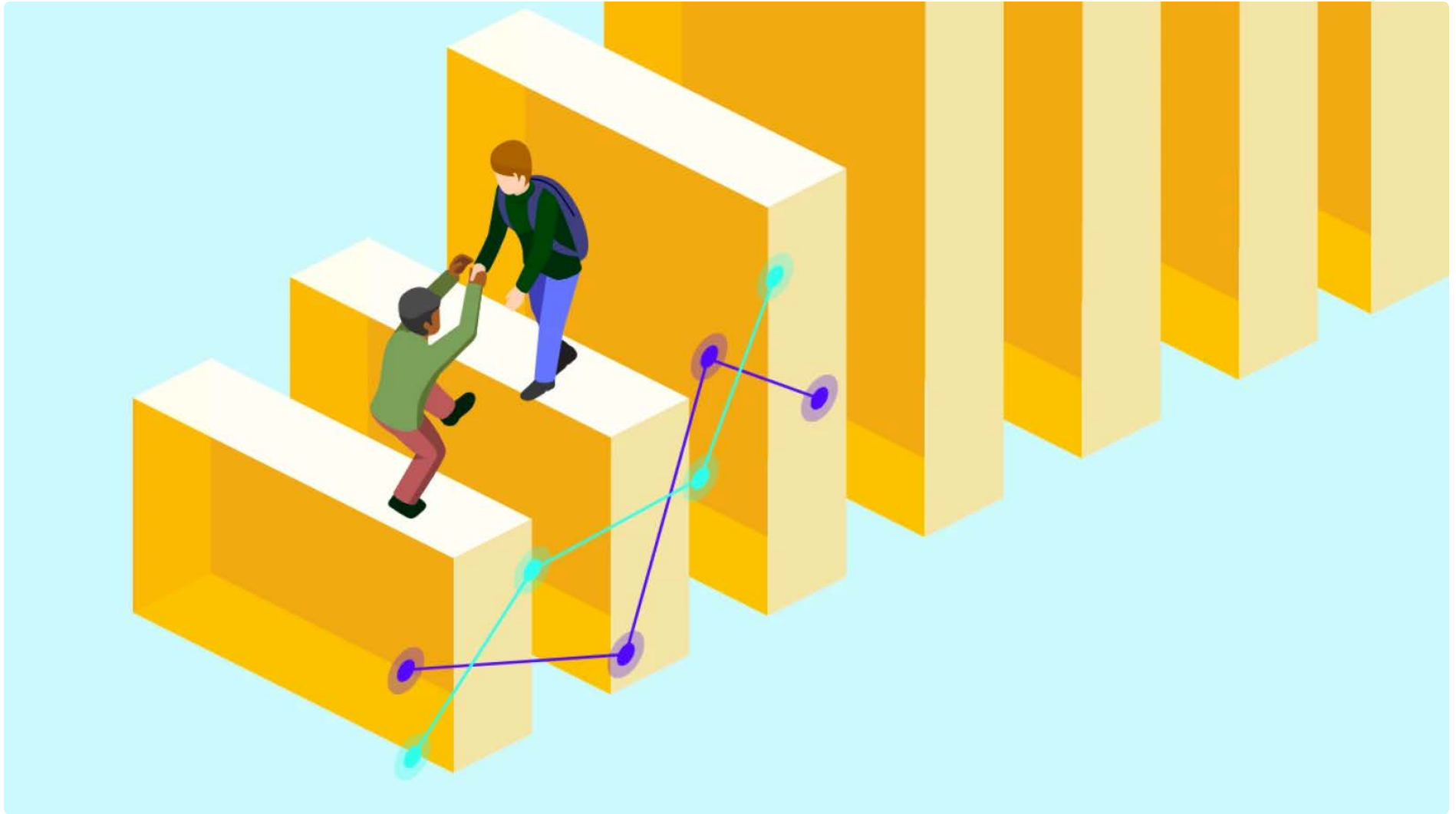
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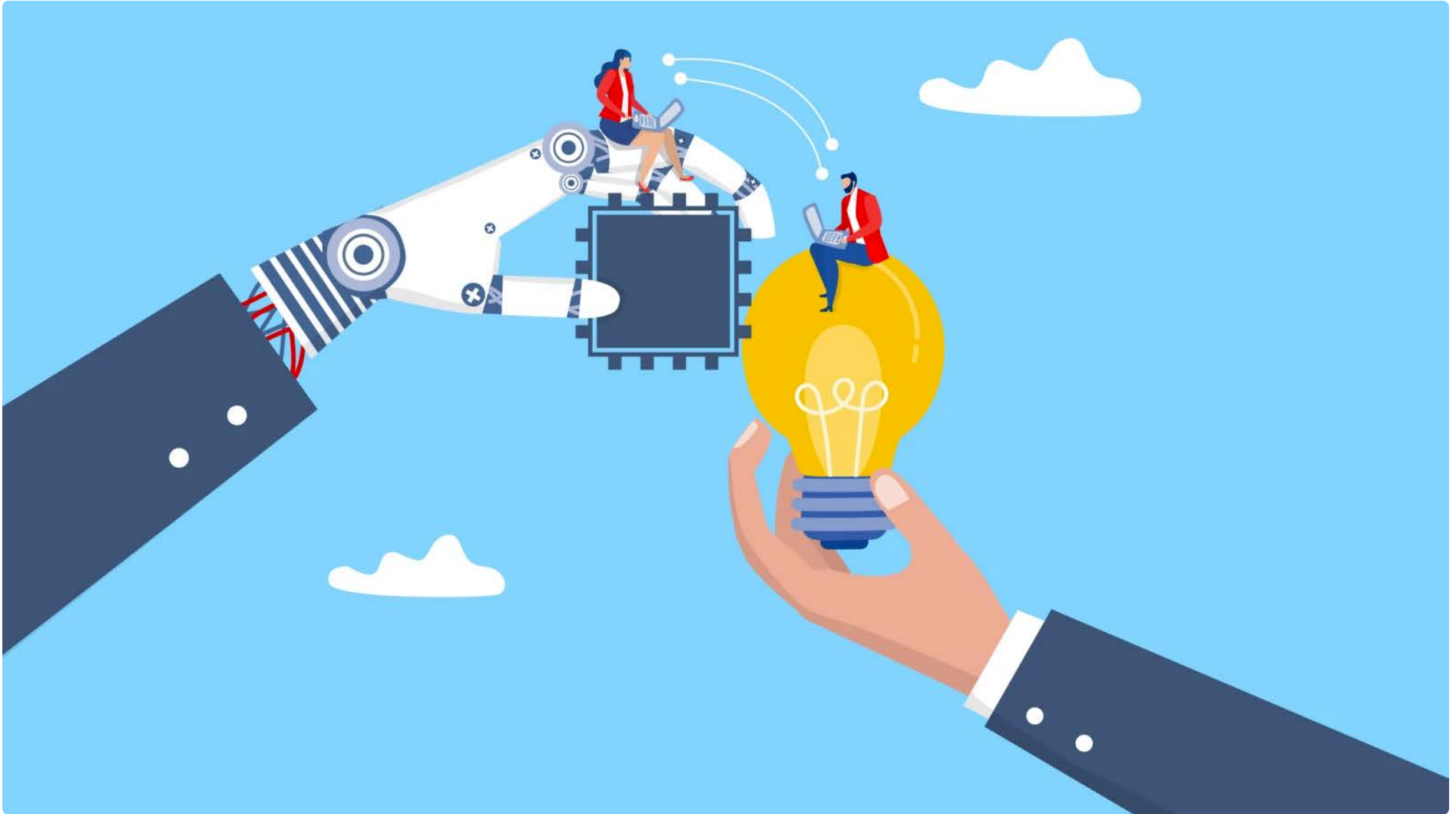
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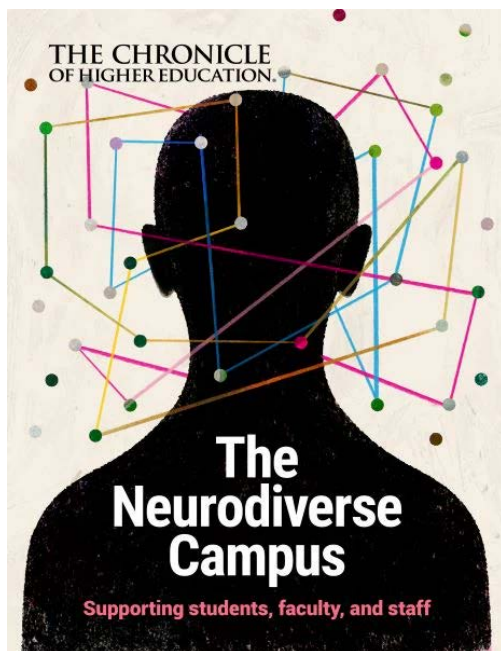
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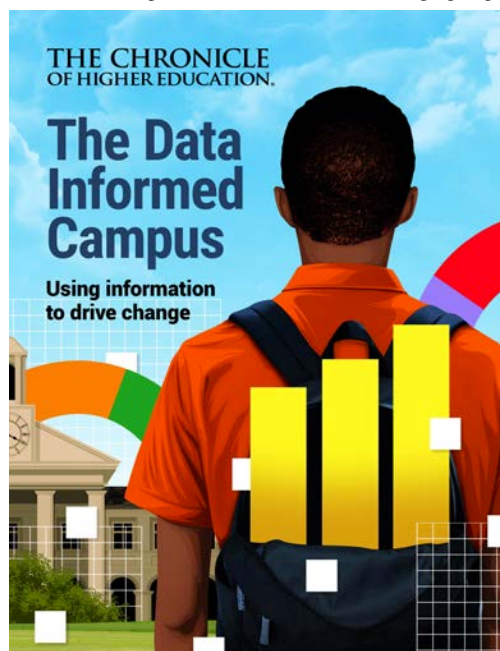
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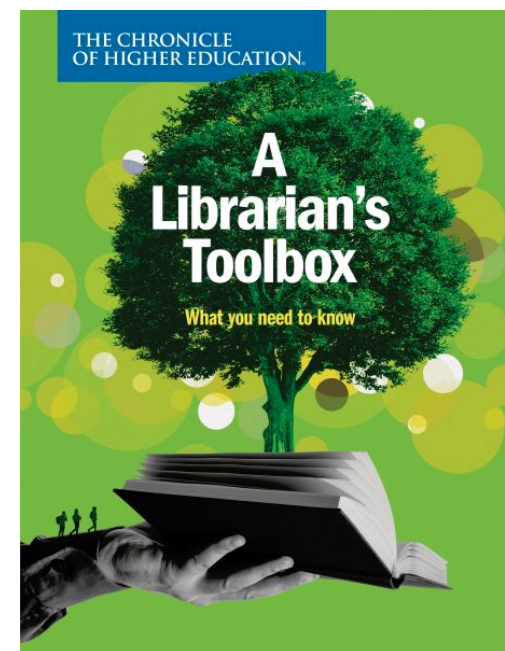
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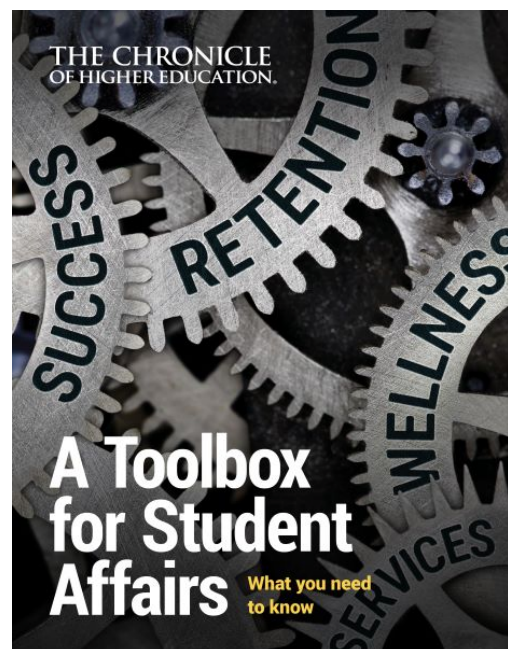
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