

From Headlines to Insights: AI Can Expand Student Access

By Don Sutherland

Many students conducting research encounter headlines only to find the underlying stories locked behind paywalls. Yet in most cases, even “exclusive” stories, the information is not truly exclusive. Other outlets often cover the same developments, and much of the underlying material is publicly accessible if one knows where to look.

GPT-5 can now help bridge that gap. It can scour the Internet for relevant information, validate facts, review images, and, with well-designed prompts, go further by supplying analytical depth. For instance, it can draw on legal precedents to outline possible scenarios or highlight historical parallels that move beyond the news report itself. Equally important, AI enables an interactive dynamic. Students can engage in dialogue, asking follow-up questions and probing different perspectives to deepen their understanding.

Does this mean journalists are at risk of obsolescence? No. AI draws upon the factual groundwork laid by journalists. At the same time, it is reshaping how journalists work. Reporters will spend less time on routine drafting and more time on explanation, interpretation, and context. They will increasingly use AI as a partner for background research, for identifying gaps, and for producing initial drafts that can then be refined with human judgment. In short, AI may expand access to information, but it is not a replacement for skilled journalists or the rigor of professional journalism.

To illustrate, I asked GPT-5 to prepare a newswire-style story on a recent Department of Homeland Security proposal to impose a four-year cap on international student visas. I then verified the story’s key facts, including the description of the proposal, the economic impact of international students, and its quoted material, to verify accuracy.

The finished story is below.

U.S. Moves to Impose Four-Year Cap on International Student Visas

The Department of Homeland Security has proposed limiting F-1 and J-1 visas for international students and exchange visitors to a maximum of four years, ending the current “duration of status” system that allows stays tied to enrollment. Officials say the change would tighten oversight and reduce visa misuse, but universities and advocacy groups warn it could disrupt higher education.

Colleges and universities argue the cap would deter applicants and create administrative hurdles, especially for graduate and doctoral programs that extend beyond four years. Schools dependent on international tuition revenue say the change could accelerate financial strain. At Harvard University, where nearly a quarter of students are from abroad, tuition and associated spending contribute hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Administrators warn that any decline in enrollment could not only cut into revenue for research and faculty support, but also reduce funds available for scholarships and grants that assist U.S. students.

International students contribute more than \$43 billion to the U.S. economy each year, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Dr. Fanta Aw, the group's executive director, cautioned that the losses from a policy shift could go far beyond tuition. "International students drive innovation, advance America's global competitiveness, and create research and academic opportunities in our local colleges that will benefit our country for generations," she said.

Harvard, with its large graduate population, is viewed as particularly vulnerable. Doctoral programs in fields like engineering and medicine often last five to seven years, well beyond the proposed limit. Administrators fear the rule would force students to apply for multiple extensions or abandon their studies midway, undermining the university's ability to attract top researchers while shrinking a revenue stream that helps fund domestic student aid.

The proposal remains open to public comment before possible implementation. If enacted, it would mark one of the most sweeping changes in decades to U.S. student visa policy, with far-reaching consequences for colleges, international students, and the wider economy.