



Case Study: Central New Mexico Community College and Advisor AI Share a 5 Step Model for Implementing Trusted, People-Centered AI in Higher Education

Albuquerque, NM — March 2, 2026 — Amid rapid changes in the labor market and education landscape, higher education institutions are facing increasing expectations to personalize guidance, support earlier student decision-making, and strengthen workforce alignment—without compromising ethical standards, data responsibility, or the human relationships central to student success.

For Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), the question was not whether artificial intelligence could support these goals, but how it could be introduced responsibly. Early, career-connected exploration and integrated pathways were intentionally positioned not as recruitment mechanisms, but as foundational elements of long-term student success—helping learners make informed choices that improve persistence, completion, and alignment with future workforce opportunities.

In 2025, CNM and the Advisor AI team began a deliberate, phased collaboration—progressing from exploration to pilot implementation, evaluation, and ultimately program expansion. Throughout this process, the focus remained on designing more personalized educational experiences while integrating AI in ways that maintained the core values of trust, transparency, and human connection.

Now, Advisor AI and CNM are sharing insights from that work to provide a practical case study for colleges and universities seeking to adopt people-centered AI across recruitment, academic advising, and career services.

How Should Higher Education Adopt AI Systems?

Rather than starting with a technology solution, CNM followed a structured, multi-stage process designed to ensure any AI adopted would:

- Support students with clarity, agency, and trust
- Strengthen human advising rather than replace it
- Align with institutional governance, risk, and ethical frameworks
- Expand access while reducing—not adding—complexity

A Five-Stage Process for Implementing Human-Centered, Ethical AI Systems

The collaboration followed a five-stage process—Exploration, Governance, Pilot, Evaluation, and Iteration—designed to balance innovation with institutional trust and accountability.

1. Exploration: Defining Specific & Actionable Student Success Use Cases

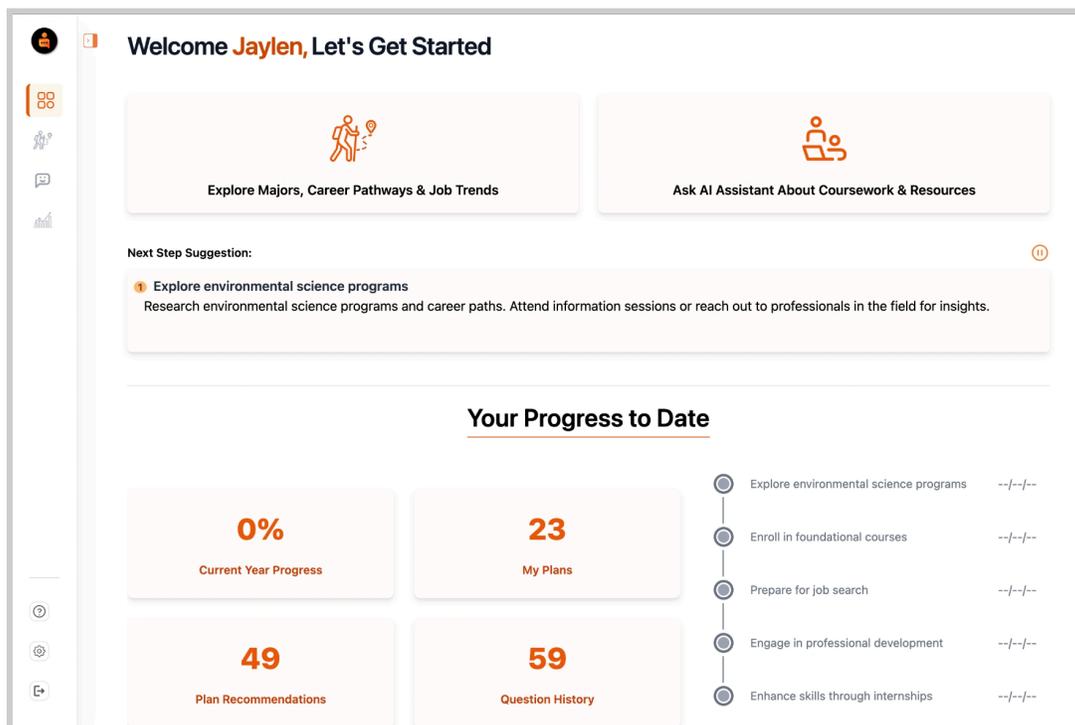
In the early months of the collaboration, CNM identified where prospective students—particularly high school learners—faced the greatest barriers to enrollment. Common areas included understanding program requirements, aligning interests with career outcomes, and navigating course prerequisites for high-demand pathways such as healthcare.

Exploration focused on questions including:

- Where do students need clarity earlier in their journey?
- Which questions repeatedly surface for advisors and enrollment teams?
- How can guidance be delivered consistently without overwhelming students and staff?

By grounding the initiative in real recruitment and advising workflows, CNM ensured the work addressed actual student and team needs, rather than abstract technology goals.

“Looking ahead, our goal is to continue illuminating best-fit pathways for thousands of prospective students each year, helping them see how CNM’s programs align with their strengths, interests, and ambitions,” said, Jessica Candelaria, Program Director, Respiratory Therapy at CNM.



2. Governance Review: Addressing Security, AI Ethics, and Accountability Upfront

Before any program deployment, CNM team conducted a cross-functional governance and risk review involving leadership from Information Technology, Student Affairs, and Enrollment. This phase ensured that AI adoption would meet the highest ethical, security, and human judgment standards. Key questions and criteria evaluated included:

Q: How does the AI system protect institutional and student data?

Advisor.AI uses a system architecture that separates data and model environments for model training and testing. This approach is designed to restrict institutional data from being exposed to external models or unauthorized access by incorporating extensive guardrails.

What this really means: Student information and data stay locked in a safe, within a vault, within a separate building for each institution, and not floating around the internet.

Q: Does your AI system make autonomous academic and/or career decisions?

No. Advisor.AI neither approves nor takes action independently. All decisions remain under human control and aligned with institutional policies and governance.

What this really means: It's like having a really smart GPS that helps you plan your route and explore options - but you're still the one driving the car.

Q: How does your AI system address and mitigate bias and fairness issues?

The platform incorporates built-in bias and fairness guardrails. Models are trained on anonymized, representative datasets and continuously monitored to identify and mitigate risks.

What this really means: It's designed to treat every student or administrative user fairly, not just the loudest, fastest, or most confident ones.

Q: How does the platform avoid over-reliance on AI technology?

Advisor.AI avoids engagement-driven or addictive design patterns. Guidance is delivered in short, purposeful steps, and students are encouraged to consult advisors for high-stakes decisions—supporting informed use rather than dependence.

What this really means: It gives helpful nudges, not constant notifications or pressure to stay glued to the screen, which can often lead to negative consequences (feelings of isolation, greater anxiety, a lack of human connection, etc., as often seen with social media apps).

Q: What risk management practices support long-term adoption?

Advisor AI conducts regular risk assessments, including security reviews, client-specific model performance evaluations, and continuous bias & fairness audits. These processes support transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

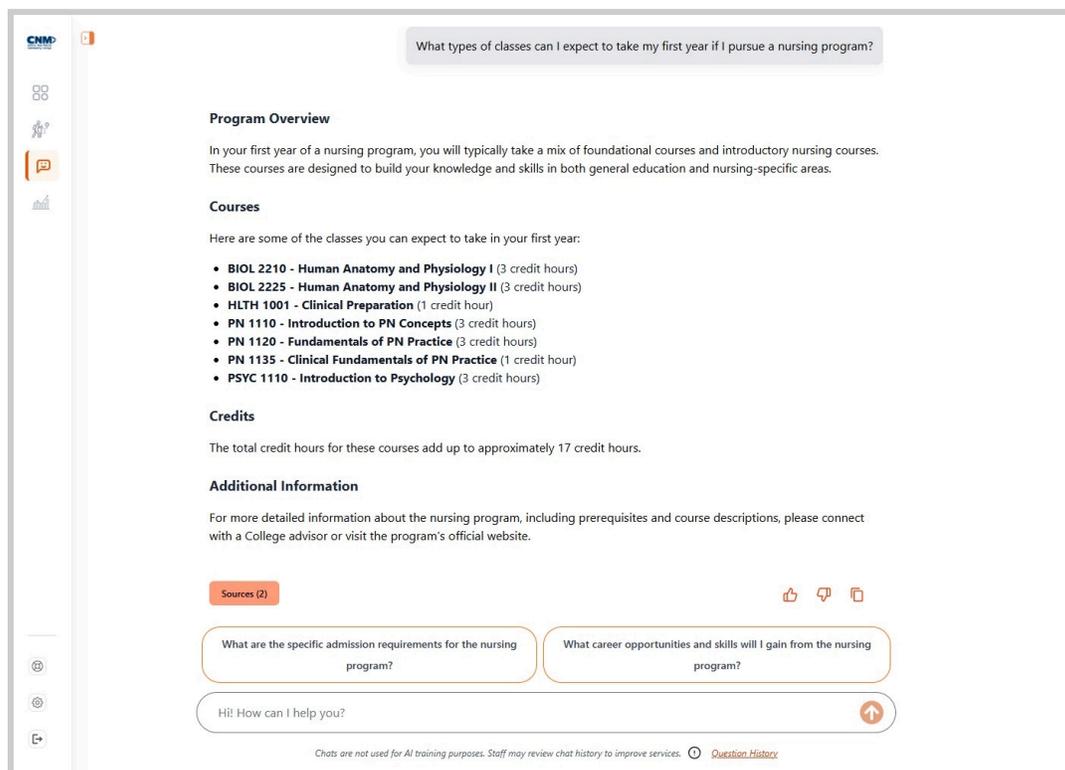
What this really means: The system gets regular check-ups, like a car going in for maintenance so it

doesn't break down later - when you are taking a road trip.

Q: Why are Advisor AI's system recommendations explainable and trustworthy?

The recommendation includes a clear rationale grounded in academic catalogs, career pathways, and/ or institutional data. This transparency supports trust, adoption, and responsible decision-making. Feedback loops help support continuous improvement over time.

What this really means: It shows its work—so you know *why* it's suggesting something, not just *what* it's suggesting.



“As institutions explore AI, the question isn’t whether to adopt technology—it’s how to do so responsibly, transparently, and in service of students. In Advisor.AI, we saw a powerful tool that prioritizes human judgment, ethical design, and institutional trust at every step.” — Brian Sailer, Executive Director of Student Persistence & Completion at CNM.

3. Pilot: Launching with Multi-Stakeholder Feedback & Expert Insights

Following governance approval, CNM and Advisor AI moved quickly into a focused pilot phase—launching in under four weeks. The pilot brought together eight key leaders and subject-matter experts from advising, enrollment, and student success to ensure the system reflected real-world workflows and student needs from the outset.

Pathways were intentionally scoped to support prospective students exploring healthcare programs, navigating admissions resources, and understanding early academic milestones. This focused approach allowed the team to gain actionable insights within weeks of launch.

Q: Typical implementations can take months. How long did it take to configure the platform to CNM’s resources and course catalog?

A: Within four weeks, the CNM and Advisor AI teams configured the initial pathways, aligned institutional resources, and trained key staff members. This rapid timeline demonstrates the efficiency of a streamlined setup process compared to traditional, months-long implementations.

Q: How did staff provide feedback and iterate during the pilot?

A: CNM teams participated in weekly review sessions, offering feedback on clarity, accuracy, and the overall student experience. Updates were implemented within days, allowing the platform to evolve quickly in response to staff insights and observed student needs.

Q: Did the platform engage students effectively from the start?

A: By week six, hundreds of prospective students had signed up for the platform. Early engagement reflected both the intuitive design of the experience and the value of applying cross-functional expertise to align the system with how students actually explore next steps.

“Working closely with Advisor.AI, our teams were able to iterate in real time and incorporate institutional best practices at every step. This approach allowed us to move with speed while keeping students and advisors at the center of every decision.” - said Matthew Thomas, Dean of Health, Wellness & Public Safety at CNM

4. Evaluation: Building Momentum & Measuring What Matters In The First 100 Days

The program’s initial user testing and setup were completed in under four weeks. Early outreach—such as an in-person student event—helped introduce learners to the platform, sparked initial participation, and provided actionable insights to shape future roadmap.

During the initial weeks, CNM observed:

- **Engagement:** Over 100 students interacted with the platform, with an 83% activation rate—far exceeding typical post-sign-up adoption rates of 5–10%. Students engaged in meaningful advising and early exploration tasks, increasing the likelihood of enrollment.
- **Momentum:** Students completed more than 600 exploration activities, including career assessments, pathway recommendations, and chatbot inquiries. Early career-connected exploration fosters both clarity and motivation, helping students see tangible connections between their interests and program opportunities.
- **Actionable Insights:** Feedback from the initial experiments is already informing enhancements for the next phase, ensuring that the platform continues to evolve alongside CNM’s goals for access, engagement, and long-term student success.

Milestone	My Notes ⓘ
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>Discover Your Next Step Go to the career explorer tab to discover options across healthcare, business & other fields. Save your top 2-3 pathway preferences. Try it out a few times.</p>	No notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>Get Help Starting Your Journey Schedule an appointment with an advisor to discuss your saved options.</p>	No notes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <p>Submit Your Admissions Application Complete your online application and secure your student ID. (Before your meeting, ask the AI chat: "How did other students prepare and get admitted into programs?")</p>	No notes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <p>Submit Your FAFSA Complete the FAFSA / College Scholarship Application to support your next step. Not sure about options? Ask the AI chatbot: "What are some of the Scholarships options provided by the university?"</p>	No notes
<input type="checkbox"/> <p>Meet with an Advisor & Register for Courses Schedule a session with your academic advisor here to plan your courses. (Before your meeting, ask the AI chat: "What does a term-by-term plan look like for math?"). After your meeting, check the schedule of classes and register here</p>	No notes

A student using Advisor.AI to build a personalized roadmap.

5. Strategic Planning: Leveraging Data to Build a 3 Year Roadmap for Scalable Success

Insights from the pilot informed a multi-phase roadmap for expanding support across additional student populations, ensuring that lessons learned could be applied consistently and effectively.

The roadmap now spans:

- **Dual enrollment**, helping learners navigate high school and college concurrently
- **Enrolled students**, supporting advising, progress tracking, and career readiness
- **Workforce-aligned pathways**, emphasizing completion towards meaningful outcomes

To support accountability and ongoing growth, the teams established a quarterly reporting and review process. This ensures teams can monitor outcomes, review ethical and technical safeguards, and adjust pathways based on both student feedback and advisor insights—creating a repeatable, scalable model for success.

“Iteration is where we turn insight into action,” said Rosenda Minella, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Success at CNM. “By analyzing engagement data and listening closely to both staff and students, we can refine pathways, strengthen guidance, and ensure that each new cohort benefits from what we’ve learned in the past.”

A Model for People-Centered AI in Higher Education

The CNM–Advisor.AI collaboration demonstrates that responsible AI adoption is a process, not a product. By starting with exploration, establishing cross-functional governance, piloting with intent, evaluating meaningful outcomes, and iterating based on real feedback, CNM has created a replicable, human-centered model for higher education.

This approach shows that technology can expand access, strengthen trust, and enhance student and advisor experiences—without replacing the expertise and judgment that drive student success.

CNM plans to share insights and lessons learned with peer institutions, contributing to a sector-wide dialogue on responsible, people-first AI adoption that empowers teams nationwide.

About Central New Mexico Community College

Central New Mexico Community College is the largest community college in New Mexico, and has the largest undergraduate student body in the state. serving more than 30,000 learners each year through career-focused, transfer, and workforce training programs. CNM is committed to expanding access and providing clear, supportive pathways that help students achieve their educational and professional goals while supporting the workforce needs of the state’s economy.

About Advisor AI

Founded in 2023, Advisor AI’s mission is to transform student success and economic mobility by delivering guidance that is personalized, comprehensive, and accessible to every learner. Built on research and collaboration with more than 100 colleges, the platform was developed by higher education leaders and ethical AI experts committed to responsible, evidence-based innovation. Advisor AI partners with institutions to provide trusted, AI-native infrastructure that strengthens advising and connects education to career outcomes. Leading enterprise partners include Ivy Tech Community College and Central New Mexico Community College, along with one of the largest workforce research organizations, National Association of Colleges and Employers, supporting students & advisors across 100+ colleges through AI-enabled services.