

Houston Youth Gather at University of Houston to Discuss Human Leadership in an AI World

2026 National Youth Leadership Certificate Program drew nearly 200 students, educators and professionals for a day of discussion on AI, careers and human responsibility

HOUSTON — About 200 students, educators, professionals, volunteers and community guests gathered at the University of Houston on Aug. 8 for the 2026 National Youth Leadership Certificate Program, “Human Leadership in an Artificial Intelligence World,” a conference exploring how artificial intelligence is reshaping education, careers and leadership.

The program, presented by the University of Houston Asian American Studies Center’s Global Leadership Studies program and co-organized by Youth Voice for Small Businesses (YVSB), drew 130 registered students. With speakers, teachers, volunteers and guests, total attendance approached 200.

The conference brought together professionals, educators and college students to discuss not only how AI is changing the way people learn and work, but also the importance of judgment, communication, responsibility and other human qualities as technology advances.

Simon Zhong, a senior at St. John’s School and president of Youth Voice for Small Businesses, helped organize the conference with the University of Houston team and fellow student leaders. He opened the program with Dr. Yali Zou, Director of the Asian American Studies Center, and later moderated the professional panel discussion.



Simon Zhong, a senior at St. John’s School and president of Youth Voice for Small Businesses, addresses attendees during the conference. (University of Houston)



Students and guests fill the ballroom for opening remarks at the University of Houston Student Centers. (University of Houston)

Professionals Discuss AI and the Workplace

The keynote address, “Why AI Is a Human Issue,” was delivered by Mark DiBella, Chief Executive Officer of YES Prep Public Schools, following an introduction by Dr. Cathy Horn, Dean of the College of Education at the University of Houston.

A professional panel titled “AI, Careers, and Human Responsibility” brought together speakers from technology, higher education and the energy industry. Moderated by Zhong, the panel featured Dr. Salenah Cartier, a researcher of AI in learning environments; Yunjie Chen, Principal Customer Solutions Manager at Amazon Web Services; Dr. Jinghui Hou, Assistant Professor of Information Systems in the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston; and Dr. Bo Hu, Director of Data Science and AI at ConocoPhillips.

The discussion examined how AI is being incorporated into different fields, how it may affect future careers and what responsibilities come with increasingly powerful technology.



A speaker addresses attendees during the conference's keynote and panel sessions. (University of Houston)

College Students Share Their Perspectives

The conference also included a student panel, “Youth Voices on AI, Identity, and the Future,” moderated by Edward Kang and Katelyn Hu of YVSB. Panelists included Chloe West, Cornell University Class of 2029; Benjamin Who, Harvard College Class of 2028; Allen Wu, Carnegie Mellon University Class of 2029; and Sara Guo, The Juilliard School Class of 2028.

The college students discussed AI from the perspective of a generation entering higher education and preparing for careers during a period of rapid technological change. Their participation gave younger students an opportunity to hear perspectives from peers as well as established professionals.



College panelists share their perspectives on AI, identity and the future during the student panel. (University of Houston)

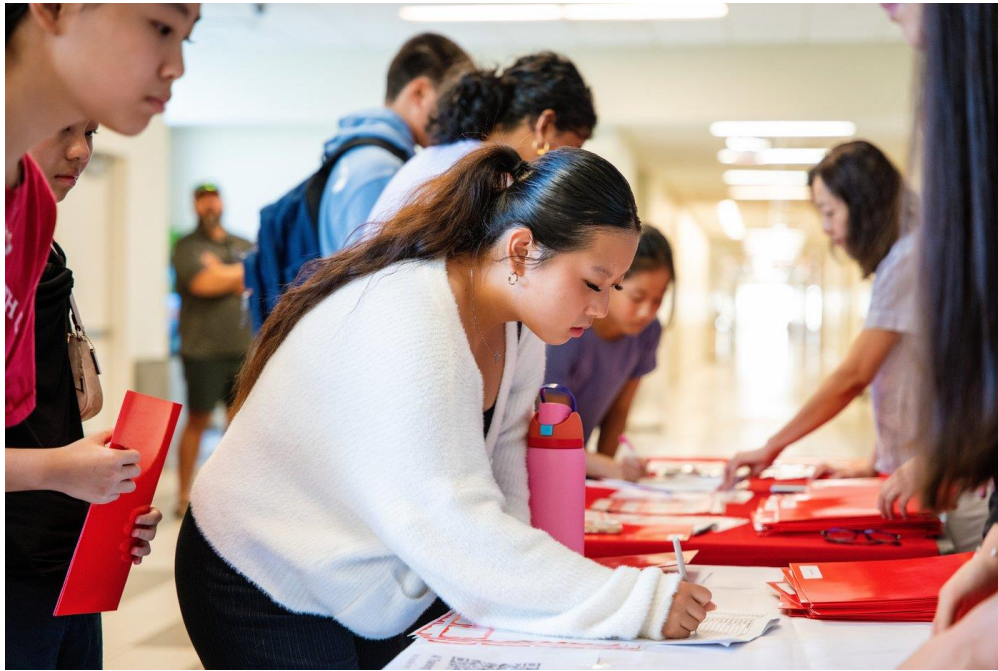
Students Take an Active Role

Student involvement was an important part of the program. YVSB members participated in planning, speaker coordination, moderation, volunteering and day-of event operations, giving students an opportunity to practice many of the leadership skills being discussed at the conference.

The event concluded with a certificate and leadership award presentation ceremony led by Zou and Zhong, followed by a closing reflection around the theme “Technology Should Serve Humanity.”

The strong turnout — particularly 130 student registrations for a Saturday morning program — reflected growing interest among young people in understanding how AI may affect their education, careers and communities.

Rather than focusing solely on what artificial intelligence can do, the conference encouraged students to consider a broader question: how people can use rapidly developing technology while keeping human responsibility and values at the center.



A student checks in at registration ahead of the day's sessions. (University of Houston)

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About the National Youth Leadership Certificate Program

The National Youth Leadership Certificate Program is presented by the University of Houston Asian American Studies Center's Global Leadership Studies program and co-organized by Youth Voice for Small Businesses (YVSB), a student-led organization focused on developing young leaders. The program brings together students, educators and professionals to explore leadership in the context of emerging technology and a changing workforce.