

‘We believe in college’: inside Andreessen Horowitz’s \$42m unaccredited academy that will charge Harvard prices without degrees

By Eva Roytburg



For elite students, college has never looked like a worse deal. Tuition is nearly half a million dollars, AI is threatening to destroy the entry-level jobs a degree used to guarantee, and now in the hottest industry—tech—it’s cool to skip school entirely. So on Tuesday, Andreessen Horowitz became the first venture capital firm to sell an alternative.

“The bet is that there’s an opportunity to educate the next generation in a way that is more future-forward, and that’s a big market opportunity,” Gagan Biyani, a cofounder of [\\$3.2 billion ed-tech unicorn Udemy](#) who is now running the new Horowitz Andreessen Academy, told *Fortune*. Higher education, he noted, is a \$2 trillion industry. “We think there are lots of ways to turn this into a successful business.”

The Academy is putting \$42 million from a16z and a group of individual investors into the one-year San Francisco-based program. It is a separate for-profit company from the VC firm. It is not accredited, will award no degree, will not take federal student aid, and does not guarantee a job or a paid internship. The founding class will be about 50 students starting Sept. 2027, and it’s tuition-free—plus every student will get \$50,000 in compute credits and a \$5,000 travel budget.

The Academy then intends to seek regulatory approval for a two-year program starting in 2028. If approved, Biyani said, it expects “to charge something similar to elite private universities”—in the range of \$60,000 to \$90,000 a year.

Biyani insisted that the school isn’t a rejection of the premise of higher education—“we believe in college,” he said. Instead, it’s rejecting the idea that

18-year-olds in SF are only valuable insofar as they have a startup idea to dedicate a decade to. Indeed, they are looking to find the best and the brightest high schoolers—call them pre-idea founders.

The Academy's homepage promises students will learn from the people “shaping the future,” with a campus “buzzing” from visits from Sam Altman, Jensen Huang, Satya Nadella, Mira Murati, Fei-Fei Li and Travis Kalanick. Most of those names, Biyani said, are guest speakers who “come in for a talk or a fireside chat.”

A second tier, the faculty, has committed to teaching multi-session courses; Biyani said [Instacart](#) co-founder Max Mullen and former Windows president Steven Sinofsky are two who have agreed. A third tier, mentors, will hold office hours. The course list cited in a blog post lists “The Craft of Selling” to “AI Inference Engineering” to “Origins and Innovations in Digital Computing 1940–2025.”

Yet teaching, in any case, “is not the primary thing we plan on doing,” Biyani said. “The primary thing we’re offering is the ability for students to pursue their own objectives.” The year is split three ways: September through April on campus in San Francisco, May travelling abroad, and June through August spent in a “co-op” at a partner company.

That’s where the 10 founding partners come in, mostly from A16Z’s vast network—Anduril, Anthropic, Coinbase, Google, [Meta](#), [Nvidia](#), OpenAI, [Palantir](#), Replit and Stripe. Their commitments “vary,” Biyani said. “Not all of them are going to take students for hiring.”

Rather, some are providing compute, hardware credits or advice on curriculum; another 50-odd hiring partners, from Databricks to Boom Supersonic, “are not committed to hiring a certain number, but they’re committed to interviewing or considering our students.” Co-ops are “typically” paid, the school’s FAQ says, but not guaranteed to be.

There is no minimum age and all students have to arrange their own housing. The sample applicants that the site features includes a teenager who built an AI book indexer with “six-figure ARR” and one who “created an AI dating coach with

1.7M likes.” Admissions, Biyani said, is “proof of work,” though transcripts and test scores are still required.

Future of higher ed? Experts aren’t sure

So is this the future of education? Experts are skeptical. Bryan Caplan, the economist at the famously libertarian George Mason University, who wrote a book arguing that college is mostly just a credential, thinks it will work—for the first 50 students. But “something that can work for 50 handpicked people isn’t going to work even for the top 5,000,” he said. “MIT is going to last for centuries. Don’t worry about it.”

The idea of the Academy, Caplan said, is that skipping college generally signals that “you’re a weird person, and people are understandably nervous about hiring weird people,” he told *Fortune*. The Academy’s selection is severe enough that the prestige overcomes the weirdness- but only insofar as they keep it elite.

Ryan Craig, a managing director at Achieve Partners, which builds apprenticeship programs, is excited about the idea but isn’t sure their model makes sense on year two, when it attempts to become a school. “It’s a bootcamp with a plan to be a college, but I’d say not a realistic plan to be a college,” he told *Fortune*. Legions of “alternative, innovative universities” charging elite-private tuition without federal aid have been tried before, and failed. “It’s hard to compete with free money from the government,” he said.

The idea that Craig was enthusiastic about was a 21st-century work college, where students earn enough in the paid co-ops to cover tuition. But that requires the partners to actually pay high school students near six-figure salaries.

Biyani said the school will figure that out after year one. “We will see over time how students will finance this,” he said.