AI in Higher Education

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Higher education finds itself suspended between two realities: one where AI has already become embedded in student practice, and another where institutions scramble to create governance frameworks for a transformation already underway. The evidence is stark—[3] documents adoption rates that would have seemed impossible just two years ago. Yet as [12] reveals through its comprehensive analysis, the institutional response remains fragmented, reactive, and surprisingly disconnected from pedagogical concerns. What emerges from surveying the current discourse is not a debate about whether AI belongs in higher education, but a revealing portrait of misaligned priorities, missing voices, and the painful gap between policy and practice.

[3] AI in higher education is now the norm—not the exception

[12] Frontiers | Artificial intelligence in higher education: a systematic ...

The numbers tell a story of inevitability poorly met. Across 1,458 articles analyzing AI's arrival in higher education, governance challenges dominate 38.2% of the discourse while pedagogical considerations appear in fewer than 5% of sources. This imbalance reveals something profound about institutional priorities—a fixation on control and compliance that obscures more fundamental questions about learning, thinking, and human development in an automated age.

The Governance Obsession

The administrative machinery of higher education has responded to AI with an avalanche of frameworks, policies, and guidelines that reveal more about institutional anxiety than educational vision. [19] exemplifies this approach, offering comprehensive governance structures while remaining notably silent on actual classroom implementation. The pattern repeats across continents: [4] documents how 15 European institutions prioritize ethical frameworks and compliance mechanisms over pedagogical innovation.

[19] PDF Intelligence artificielle et éducation

[4] Analysis of Artificial Intelligence Policies for Higher Education in Europe.

This governance fixation reaches its apex in detection and surveillance technologies. [14] reveals the financial scale of institutional investment in control mechanisms—millions spent on tools that [6] demonstrates are already obsolete. The irony cuts deep: institutions pour resources into detecting AI use while their students have already integrated these tools into their daily practice.

[14] How Universities Buy Turnitin and AI Detection Tools: $15 Million ...

[6] ChatGPT: The End of Online Exam Integrity? - MDPI

What these governance documents reveal through omission speaks louder than their prescriptions. They imagine AI as an external threat to be managed rather than a collaborative partner already reshaping how students think and learn. [13] acknowledges this disconnect, noting how governance frameworks consistently lag behind on-the-ground reality.

[13] Gouverner avec l'IA : une feuille de route pour la mise en ...

The Missing Pedagogical Voice

While administrators draft policies, faculty face immediate classroom challenges with minimal institutional support. [25] captures this predicament through focus groups revealing educators caught between recognition of AI's potential and lack of resources for meaningful integration. The pedagogical voice, when it emerges, tells a different story than the governance narrative—one of opportunity constrained by institutional inertia.

[25] STEM Faculty Perspectives on Generative AI in Higher ...

[20] offers a rare example of deep pedagogical thinking, exploring how AI fundamentally alters the writing process and what this means for teaching composition. Yet such nuanced engagement remains exceptional. More common is the experience documented in [22], where individual faculty members improvise responses to a transformation that demands collective reimagining.

[20] Penser l'écriture à l'heure de l'intelligence artificielle

[22] professors scramble to save critical thinking in an age of AI

The most innovative pedagogical responses emerge not from institutional directives but from educator experimentation. [We designed an AI tutor that helps college students reason ...] demonstrates what becomes possible when pedagogical design drives AI integration rather than governance concerns. Their AI tutor doesn't replace human judgment but scaffolds student thinking—a collaborative model that remains notably absent from most institutional frameworks.

Students as Early Adopters

The discourse's most striking blind spot may be its failure to center student experience and agency. While institutions debate policies, students have already normalized AI use. [27] provides crucial empirical evidence of this reality, documenting usage patterns that render prohibition fantasies moot. Students don't see AI as an optional tool but as integrated infrastructure for academic work.

[27] To adopt or to ban? Student perceptions and use of generative AI in ...

[18] offers rare insight into how students actually engage with AI—through trial, error, and gradual sophistication. They develop what the authors term "repair literacy," learning to recognize and correct AI limitations through use rather than instruction. This organic skill

[18] Learning to Live with AI: How Students Develop AI Literacy Through Naturalistic ChatGPT Interaction

development happens despite, not because of, institutional guidance.

The dependency question looms large. [8] investigates the darker implications of ubiquitous AI access, finding correlations between heavy use and decreased academic self-efficacy. Yet even critical analyses acknowledge that prohibition isn't viable—students will use AI regardless of institutional policies.

[8] Do you have AI dependency? The roles of academic self-efficacy ...

The Cognitive Offloading Dilemma

Perhaps no concept better captures the stakes of AI integration than cognitive offloading—the risk that external tools diminish internal capacities. [5] sounds the alarm, warning of potential "cognitive atrophy" when students outsource thinking to machines. The concern isn't hypothetical: [16] provides empirical evidence that unstructured AI use correlates with decreased critical thinking performance.

[5] Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications ...

[16] Investigating the Effects of LLM Use on Critical Thinking ...

Yet the cognitive impact story proves more nuanced than simple decline narratives suggest. [28] distinguishes between different types of AI use, finding that the design of human-AI interaction matters more than the technology itself. When AI serves as a thinking partner rather than an answer machine, cognitive benefits can emerge.

[28] Why Johnny Can't Think: GenAI's Impacts on Cognitive Engagement

The French discourse contributes sophisticated analysis here. [15] synthesizes research showing that AI's cognitive impact depends entirely on pedagogical framing. Used thoughtlessly, AI undermines critical thinking. Integrated thoughtfully, it can enhance reasoning by providing cognitive scaffolds for complex tasks.

[15] Impact de l'IA générative sur la « pensée critique »

Assessment as the Breaking Point

If governance frameworks struggle with AI's implications, assessment practices face complete upheaval. [2] cuts to the heart of the matter: AI doesn't create assessment problems so much as reveal that traditional assessments never measured deep learning effectively. When students can generate passing answers without understanding, the failure lies not with AI but with assessment design that prioritizes reproduction over reasoning.

[2] AI Exposes Where Learning Was Thin to Begin With (opinion)

[23] quantifies this crisis, demonstrating how even advanced AI evaluation systems fail to capture genuine mathematical understanding. The implication is sobering: if AI can't reliably assess complex thinking, and students can use AI to simulate understanding, the entire assessment apparatus requires fundamental redesign.

[23] QEDBENCH: Quantifying the Alignment Gap in Automated Evaluation of University-Le

Some educators embrace this challenge. [7] provides practical

[7] Concevoir des évaluations anti IA : guide complet et 5 méthodes

strategies for assessments that require genuine thinking rather than information retrieval. Yet such innovation remains exceptional. Most institutions cling to traditional formats while adding detection software—a response [10] demonstrates is both ineffective and ethically problematic.

[10] Evaluating the Effectiveness and Ethical Implications of AI Detection ...

Beyond Detection: The Failed Surveillance Approach

The detection and surveillance response to AI reveals institutional priorities at their most problematic. [9] systematically dismantles the detection approach, showing how these tools produce false positives, discriminate against non-native speakers, and fundamentally misunderstand how contemporary students write. The surveillance extends beyond writing: [24] documents how AI monitoring leads to false alarms and genuine harm.

[9] El problema de los detectores de IA en la universidad: Una guía ...

[24] Schools are using AI to spy on students and some are getting arrested ...

[21] identifies the fundamental paradox: students learn to use AI more sophisticatedly precisely to evade detection, creating an arms race that enhances AI literacy while undermining trust. The surveillance approach fails not just technically but pedagogically, treating students as threats rather than partners in navigating educational transformation.

[21] Pourquoi les détecteurs d'IA en classe sont dans une impasse

Toward Collaborative Futures

The discourse surveyed here reveals higher education at a crossroads. The path of prohibition and detection leads nowhere productive—[11] documents how even initially restrictive faculty are abandoning ban approaches. Yet the alternative isn't uncritical embrace. [26] catalogs risks from equity gaps to stunted human development that demand serious engagement.

[11] Faculty Ditch AI Bans: Study Shows Policy Shift - AcademicJ…

[26] The Unintended Consequences of Artificial Intelligence and Education

What emerges as necessary is a fundamental reframing—from AI as threat to AI as collaborator, from detection to design, from governance to pedagogy. [1] points toward this future, synthesizing evidence that thoughtful integration enhances rather than diminishes human capacities. The key lies in that qualifier: thoughtful.

[1] A Systematic Literature Review on the Pedagogical Implications and Impact of GenAI on Students' Critical Thinking

Higher education's response to AI reveals institutional cultures struggling to adapt to technologies that blur traditional boundaries. The fixation on governance and detection represents a last grasp at control in a domain where control has already slipped away. Students have voted with their keyboards—AI is here to stay. The question now is whether institutions can move beyond defensive postures to engage the genuine challenges and opportunities AI presents.

The sculpture professor reading this analysis might recognize parallels to their own domain. Just as power tools didn't end craftsmanship but transformed it, AI need not end critical thinking but can reshape how we develop and express it. The discourse surveyed here suggests we're still in the early, reactive phase of this transformation. The collaborative phase—where AI becomes a partner in developing distinctly human capacities rather than a threat to them—remains largely unimagined in institutional frameworks.

That absence may be the most telling finding of all. In 1,458 articles, fewer than 6% frame AI as a collaborative partner. Yet this framing may hold the key to moving beyond the current impasse. When we stop asking how to prevent AI use and start asking how to design AI-enhanced learning environments that develop critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning, the conversation shifts from defense to possibility.

The evidence suggests this shift is beginning, led by innovative educators and demanded by student reality. Whether institutions can overcome their governance obsession to engage the pedagogical opportunity remains the open question. What's certain is that the answer will shape not just higher education but the kinds of minds we cultivate for an automated age. The discourse mapped here represents not an endpoint but a beginning—the first chapter in higher education's negotiation with its AI future. [17] may have it right: the greatest danger isn't cheating but missing the opportunity to reimagine what education could become.

[17] Le plus grand danger de l'IA à l'université n'est pas la triche ...

References

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5. Artificial intelligence, cognitive offloading and implications ...
6. ChatGPT: The End of Online Exam Integrity? - MDPI
7. Concevoir des évaluations anti IA : guide complet et 5 méthodes
8. Do you have AI dependency? The roles of academic self-efficacy ...

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