

Avoiding the Inevitable: Adapting to Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

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RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent is AI a tool in higher education, to what extent is its use unethical, and how should institutions respond?

THESIS

Rather than avoiding AI, administrators and professors should integrate AI and its literacies into higher education, using it as a personalized tutor and a tool to enhance efficiency to prepare students for an AI-driven workforce.

BACKGROUND

Large language models (LLMs) — such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and DeepSeek — can now complete complex academic tasks. Institutional responses have been inconsistent: some colleges ban AI outright, others permit it with unclear guidelines, leaving students confused and underprepared for the workforce.

AI LITERACY

Long & Magerko (2020) define AI literacy as competencies enabling individuals to critically evaluate AI, collaborate with it, and use it responsibly. Teaching students to verify AI outputs, similarly, to checking a source reliability, is essential fundamental building before broader integration.

GROWING INVESTMENT

\$109B

U.S. private AI investment, 2024
According to Stanford HAI

88%

businesses use AI in at least one
function according to McKinsey
& Company

≤2.9%

LLM hallucination rate, 2025
According to Stanford HAI

30+

empirical studies reviewed on
AI in higher ed

MAIN FINDINGS

- AI can function as an accessible, judgment-free personalized tutor — especially beneficial for ESL students to bridge the language gap
- Khan Academy's Khanmigo (GPT-4) demonstrates AI tutoring at scale for both students and teachers.
- MIT essay study: heavy LLM reliance without guidance reduced brain connectivity — the problem is uninformed use, not the tool itself.
- Review of 30+ international studies: students should be taught AI capabilities and limitations holistically alongside course content (Xia et al., 2024).
- Blanket bans push students toward unsupervised AI use with no guidelines to ethically use it

PROPOSED INTEGRATION

- Embed AI literacy into introductory courses (e.g., Intro to Engineering, first-year College Writing).
- Hold faculty workshops to build comfort with AI tools and reduce bias from prior academic integrity incidents.
- Follow Cornell's balanced model: institution-wide support with professor-level flexibility grounded in accuracy and ethics.
- Adopt Harvard's stance of 'reasonable experimentation' as a starting point, expanding as fluency grows.
- Update assessments to emphasize critical thinking AI cannot replicate.

Conclusions & Significance

AI integration in higher education is not optional, it is inevitable. Institutions that teach AI literacy and ethical use will produce graduates equipped for a rapidly evolving professional landscape; those that ban it will leave students underprepared. The path forward is guided integration, not avoidance.