

1. “Will A.I. Make College Obsolete?” by Jay Caspian Kang
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/fault-lines/will-ai-make-college-obsolete>
2. “What 370,000 College Essays Tell Us About A.I.'s Effects on Creativity” by Rebecca Winthrop
https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/27/opinion/writing-creativity-ai.html?eafs_enabled=false
3. “With AI in the Classroom, Professors Are Walking a Tightrope” by Beth McMurtrie
<https://www.chronicle.com/newsletter/teaching/2026-06-25>

FAULT LINES

WILL A.I. MAKE COLLEGE OBSOLETE?

Americans already distrust institutions, including academia. More and more people may decide that its stamp of approval isn't worth the cost.

By Jay Caspian Kang

May 5, 2026



Listen • 13 minutes

This is part of a series of columns about the viability of the American university system.

A few weeks ago, while I was dealing with taxes, it occurred to me that the money my wife and I were putting away in a college fund for our children might be better used somewhere else. This wasn't a novel musing, but it felt particularly pressing as I watched my account balance go down, a portion of its resources funnelled into something that can't be touched for at least the next nine years. When my nine-year-old daughter graduates from high school, in 2035, I asked myself, will the landscape of higher education look the way that it does now? Will it still be as expensive? Do I actually need to squirrel away money for tuition, or should I just put what I have into a stable-growth account so that later I can cash it in to buy her an apartment, an iPhone, and whatever other tools she needs to deal with a world governed by our coming A.I. robot masters? (Maybe a machete and a copy of "My Side of the Mountain.")

For the next few weeks of this column, I will dig into questions about the viability of the American university system. The pressures on higher education seem extraordinary, even to someone like me, who is generally convinced that real change is rare, perhaps especially when it comes to America's tried-and-tested system for replicating its élites. Private and state universities have had their funding cut by the Trump Administration, professors report rampant A.I.-assisted cheating by their students, and seemingly every week brings a new report about how nearly all entry-level white-collar jobs—whether they're in consulting, insurance, finance, management, or the sciences—will be replaced by friendly chatbots that may or may not someday destroy the world. A recent survey found

that more than one in four college students in America believe that their tuition was not a good investment, at a time when more than forty per cent of college graduates between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven hold a job that does not require a college degree. According to Pew, seven in ten Americans think that the “higher education system in the United States is going in the wrong direction,” with most respondents expressing concern about the high price of tuition. With all this happening, should I continue to contribute to my children’s 529s?

The short, easy, and most likely correct answer is yes—I should assume that, when my nine-year-old reaches high school, she will go through the familiar gantlet of academic competition and spend much of her time building a résumé for college-admissions committees. I should also assume that the cost of whatever college she attends will not come *down* during the next nine years. The university system in America has survived worse than A.I.: pandemics, wars, campus unrest, massive open online courses, the internet. If colleges seem impervious to revolutions in information technology, is it possibly because their actual appeal has less to do with the transfer of knowledge than their administrators might want to admit? As the economist Bryan Caplan has observed, “The main function of education is not to teach useful skills (or even useless skills), but to *certify* students’ employability. By and large, the reason our customers are on campus is to credibly show, or ‘signal,’ their intelligence, work ethic, and sheer conformity.” As long as college remains a way for upwardly mobile kids to stand out from one another, and as long as employers believe that a better college degree is a sign of a better potential worker, the American university system should survive, even if teaching methods change.

Nonetheless, it seems a bit odd that, when it comes to predictions about our A.I. future, which typically range from friendly revolution to organ-harvesting apocalypse, declarations about higher education have been relatively mellow. Granted, many of the commentators offering these predictions are employed by

traditional universities, and might tend to believe more strongly in the enduring relevance of the academy. There are exceptions: the OpenAI C.E.O. Sam Altman has suggested that his own kid might not attend college; Howard Gardner, a psychology professor at Harvard, recently surmised that A.I. will significantly shorten the time children need to be in school. But the consensus is that college will still exist in ten or twenty or thirty years, a forecast that, for a parent of two staring down future tuition bills, is a bit disappointing.

Even some pundits who are open to A.I. as a major development agree that higher education isn't going anywhere. Tyler Cowen, for instance, Caplan's colleague in George Mason University's economics department, has argued that more instruction time should be devoted to A.I. in American classrooms—and mused that A.I. might help students better understand the Odyssey—but maintains that the traditional subjects and pedagogy of higher education should largely remain intact. Sal Khan, the founder of the free online-learning service Khan Academy, has launched a partnership with TED and the Educational Testing Service called the Khan TED Institute, which aims to provide a “world-class higher education accessible throughout the world at a radically low cost.” (Around ten thousand dollars, he says; details are a bit thin. The institute's website is filled with a lot of pablum about opening “new pathways into the AI economy where skill-based measurement becomes the critical link between learning and livelihood.”) But Khan doesn't see his latest venture as a wholesale replacement for the brick-and-mortar university; he has described it as a reasonably priced alternative that can keep pace with a world that is changing “very, very fast.” (Khan also believes that tutoring, which is both effective and expensive, could ultimately be done by A.I. agents, making one-on-one instruction more accessible, though one of the parties would be a robot.) Scott Galloway, a professor, a popular podcaster, and perhaps the most influential public voice on the value of a university education, has declared that “this narrative that A.I. is going to destroy higher education is such ridiculous bullshit.” Higher education could drastically change soon, he says, if tech giants start partnering with prestigious universities to expand their

enrollment through online degrees, thereby effectively shutting down hundreds of smaller, private colleges. But those changes would be driven by supply and demand, rather than a fundamental shift in opinion about whether it's still good to go somewhere, in person, to learn things.

I don't believe that these thinkers are necessarily wrong to dismiss the idea that enormous changes will come to higher education during the next two decades; as long as Americans want to distinguish their children from other children, the hierarchical college system will prevail. But these defenses of higher education feel almost performatively cynical, especially for an institution that has traditionally draped itself in high-flown sentiment about the pursuit of truth and the shaping of young minds, or whatever. (The motto splashed on all the brochures for my alma mater was "The Best Four Years of Your Life." They were not, but I recall genuinely believing that they would be.) I also wonder if the skeptics might be overstating the power of inertia, especially at a time of extremely low public trust in all institutions, not just those of higher education. In the world of prestige media that includes *The New Yorker*, for example, it has long been much harder to break in without an Ivy League degree, and that remains the case; but the draw of working at a legacy-media institution has also never been weaker. Would a fifteen-year-old hellbent on a journalism career be best served by working himself to the bone both academically and extracurricularly to get into Harvard, or should he just start a Twitch stream and get to work?

Reasonable people can disagree about that. But I feel certain that most of the ambitious fifteen-year-olds who already know what they want to do these days would choose the self-made option—particularly if they come from families that can't easily afford college tuition, let alone thousands of dollars in supplemental application prep. A.I. might not factor directly into such a decision for an aspiring reporter, but the already impressive abilities of large language models to hone research, approximate historical knowledge, and target potential sources would soften any disadvantages that this hypothetical student might suffer from skipping

college. Perhaps this ambitious teen would be more susceptible to the algorithmic and predictive gutters of these machines—when the A.I. companies set the guidelines for what the L.L.M. says back, you will always be receiving their version of the truth—but professors and college curricula also have their gutters, some of which are far deeper than what you’ll find at the bottom of Claude.

Can college really be laid so bare and survive? Will the roughly sixty per cent of recent high-school graduates who invest in higher education still see the value of it if they come to believe—rightly or wrongly—that the whole knowledge part of college has been replaced by an agreeable chatbot? Our hypothetical ambitious fifteen-year-old is exceptional, of course, and certainly not the bellwether for today’s disaffection about higher education. Few teen-agers know what they want to do in life, and it’s not always good for kids of that age to limit their choices. What I find concerning, however, is that so many other white-collar industries and professions—finance, consulting, the law—are even more institutional in their thinking than the media is. They, too, are held in low esteem by the public, and that decline in trust has frayed the traditional line of thinking that you should join one storied institution, a university, to later work at another. If we agree that college primarily serves a credentialling process that stamps select young people as worthy of work, and, if we agree that A.I. helps to expose it as such, might we not conclude that, at some point, people will collectively stop paying into the system, or will start seeking out other, less expensive credentials?

I do not think that A.I. will singlehandedly destroy college. But I do think that it will accelerate an already growing disillusionment with higher education. In 2013, seventy-four per cent of eighteen-to-thirty-four-year-olds polled by Gallup said that a college education was “very important.” By 2019, three years before the public adoption of ChatGPT, that number had dropped to forty-three per cent; it fell again, in 2025, to thirty-five per cent, a decline that represented the steepest drop among all age groups that were surveyed. This drop might level off at some point, simply because most things regress to previous norms. But I cannot come

up with any reason why the trend would reverse direction without radical changes to cost and access at the types of elite colleges that facilitate class mobility. What seems likely is a winner-takes-all scenario, in which the elite schools and flagship state universities survive on account of their cultural, financial, and reputational advantages, while other schools die out, leading to either a huge expansion in enrollment among the survivors (unlikely) or a steady drop in the number of young people who seek out a four-year degree. That may be a good outcome, but the gospel that I grew up with—the idea that everyone should get a college education not only for upward mobility but also to explore reading, thinking, and writing for their own sake—will be dead.

The future of college as we know it may rely on the ability of people who have a stake in the credentialing economy to convince the youth that there is still value in classroom instruction, in writing papers without A.I. assistance, in talking to imperfect humans about misshapen ideas. But they will be making this case to a generation of students who learned many things—skateboarding, the piano, cooking—from YouTube, and who have been able to ask Claude to assist them in every academic endeavor they've undertaken. Who will be the most receptive audience for this sales pitch? Probably those who trust institutions the most, and who can sacrifice some efficiency for an outdated but fancy stamp of approval—in other words, the children of the wealthy and educated. But, when you consider that the vast majority of students at elite private colleges—which is to say, this same group—already use A.I. in nearly all aspects of their academic lives, it can seem as though this fight has already been lost.

College will still exist as a place—or, at least, as a website or app—that employers will use to distinguish one applicant from another. But will it still look the way it does today, with thousands of campuses around the country, of varying reputation, quality, financial health, and philosophical missions? We'll get into all that next week. ♦

GUEST ESSAY

What 370,000 College Essays Tell Us About A.I.'s Effects on Creativity

May 27, 2026



Listen · 5:30 min

By Rebecca Winthrop

Ms. Winthrop is the director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution and led its global task force on A.I. and education.

I am a big fan of technology. I've blissfully given over my spatial reasoning to Google Maps. I use artificial intelligence to chase down articles, do research, fix my grammar mistakes and whip up last-minute school-night recipes.

But I've recently drawn a sharp line in the sand: no A.I. for writing. I'm not talking about expense reports or routine emails. I mean actual writing, and the creative brainstorming that precedes it to explore different perspectives or develop novel insights. Increasingly, many people I talk to — from students to teachers to peers — tell me that they think it's OK to use A.I. chatbots for brainstorming as long as they do the “real work” of writing.

But this misunderstands something critical: Brainstorming is the work that's fundamental to writing. As a researcher studying A.I.'s effects on education, I have concluded that these tools only superficially improve writing. The bigger and more alarming impact they have is to constrict our full range of thoughts and our ability

to generate original and useful ideas — what we call creative thinking. This seems to be especially true for students. A.I.'s smooth sentences, elegant transitions and rich vocabulary give the illusion of expansive creativity and individuality. But the underlying ideas often converge into a few homogenized categories.

The erosion of creative thinking means young people will struggle to navigate uncertainty. Workers will strain to adapt to a shifting labor market. And society will miss out on the new ideas that can solve complex problems and enhance lives.

For the past eight years, the Georgetown University neuroscientist Adam Green has been leading a national research team tracking the range of novel ideas that college-bound high school students present in their application essays, before and after the introduction of ChatGPT. In one study, he and his team examined personal statements from more than 370,000 students, and found that after ChatGPT became available, their essays suddenly used diverse and colorful language, but lacked truly creative ideas. And the linguistic coverup worked; post-ChatGPT essays were rated as more “creative” by human judges, even if the substance of the essays trod familiar territory.

In a separate study, the team found that human-written essays offered up to eight times more new ideas than those produced by A.I.

Another experiment run by a different research team compared short stories written by humans to those written with A.I. assistance. As with the student essays in Dr. Green's study, A.I.-assisted works had more interesting vocabulary and were rated more enjoyable to read, but the underlying story lines were more homogeneous. Distinctive and offbeat ideas — with surprising characters or unusual settings — are often shunted to the side when A.I. is involved.

For the first time in human history, we have a technology that can generate words separately from the thoughts they represent. When a chatbot writes, it is predicting the next word that is most likely to make a “good” sentence or essay, based on the text it's been trained on. It can identify sophisticated and creative word patterns independently of whether the underlying ideas represent something new.

When teenagers write their own essays, the work reflects their thoughts and personalities, their attempts to make meaning of their experiences. When we search for words, we are sifting through the same brain networks that form connections between ideas. A student who writes, “I’ll always think of learning to swim when I see a kite flying,” is connecting unique personal experiences in her life, which until recently was a clear signal of truly creative thinking.

Another way A.I. interaction can narrow ideas is through the power of suggestion. Once a chatbot suggests a direction, humans tend to lock in on it. The conversational nature of A.I. can make it difficult to distinguish where the user’s thinking ends and the bot’s begins, making it effortless for people to adopt A.I.-generated perspectives as their own. It’s easy to see how an impressionable teenager could forgo writing the unconventional essay — about, say, what it feels like to play jazz or cook with your grandmother — in favor of whatever A.I. suggests.

Even more problematic, Dr. Green’s research shows that A.I. has the largest homogenizing impact on students who are farthest from the mean and have unique perspectives, including neurodivergent students and those from racial and linguistic minorities.

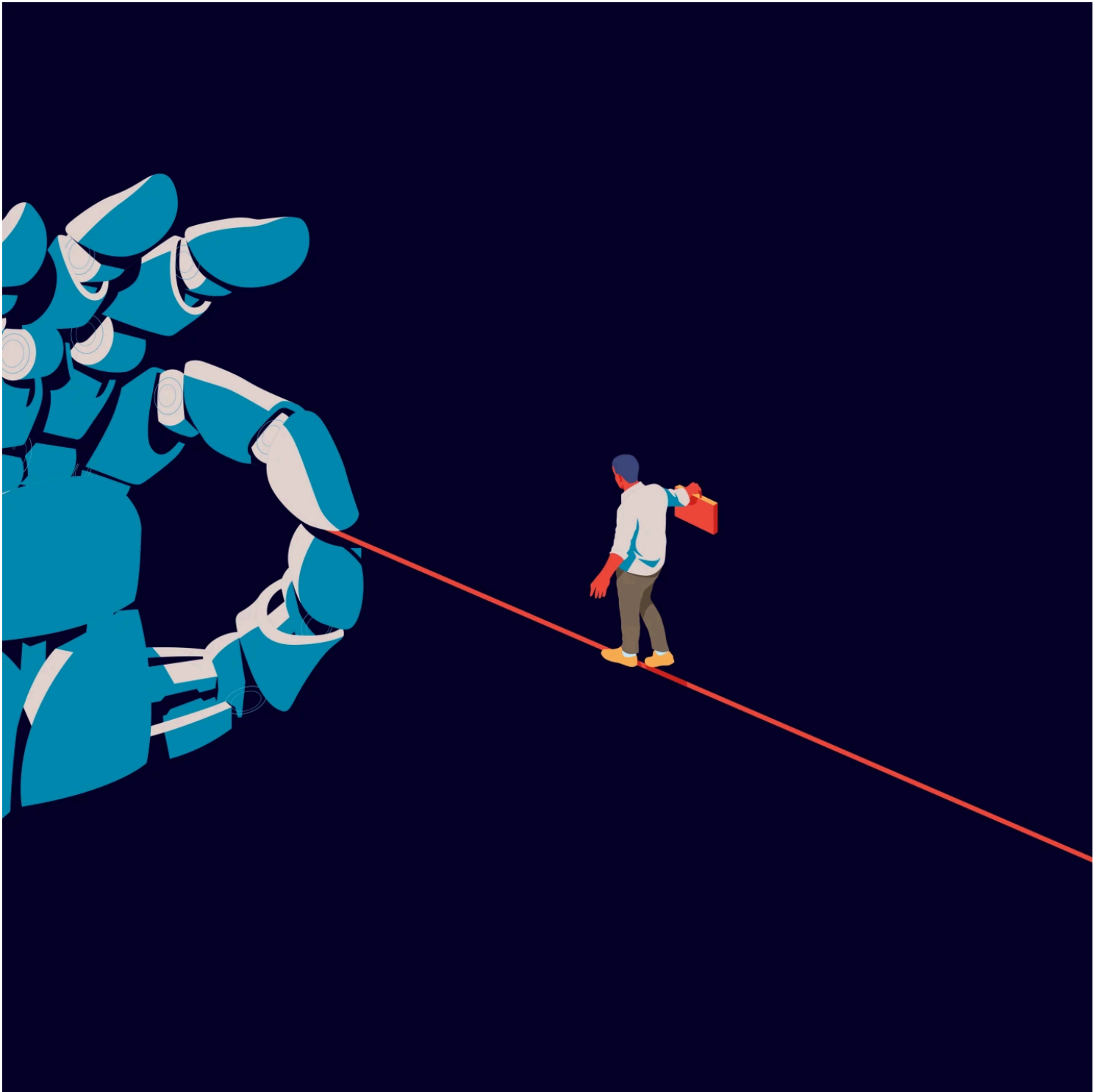
This is not to say that A.I. can never support human creativity. Workers with deep knowledge of their craft can use A.I. to streamline technical or administrative tasks in order to focus on the parts of their jobs where originality lives — including teachers having more time to devise engaging lessons and illustrators devoting more attention to developing visual concepts. A.I. gives specialists the time they need to do what humans do best: brainstorming ideas to creatively solve problems.

Our species’ ability to come up with unexpected and original ideas is something to protect and nurture. That’s especially true for today’s adolescents. A world where creative thinking flourishes is a world that has a better chance to weather the changes that A.I. will bring.

Rebecca Winthrop is an author of “The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better.” She writes the newsletter Winthrop’s World of Education.

With AI in the Classroom, Professors Are Walking a Tightrope

Embrace it or reject it, the tool is forcing faculty to change the way they teach.



THE DO-OVER



By [Beth McMurtrie](#)

June 17, 2026

Listen to this article

◀◀ — 1.0x + ▶▶



00:00 / 23:29

To hear more, [download the Noa app](#)

When it comes to generative AI, Jason Aleksander, like many professors, walks a tightrope. He wants students to use AI where it can be helpful, but not defer to it when developing their ideas and their voice.

Aleksander, a philosophy professor at San Jose State University, employs a host of strategies to maintain balance. He added “low-tech pedagogy,” distributing course packs so students read on paper, not screens. His classrooms are largely tech-free and class participation is expected. Primary assessments, such as tests and quizzes, are done in class.

But he’s fine with students using AI as a study aid and sounding board, including to help complete reading guides and in researching and writing papers. In every assignment he lets them know how much AI they can use.

To maintain both integrity and trust, he has students write papers in a shared Google doc, so he can “peek under the hood,” asking questions about their choices and thought process.

On the one hand, he said, all of this is good pedagogy. Students appreciate his attention and his commitment to academic integrity. On the other hand, it’s a heck of a lot of work.

How We Reported This Story

The Chronicle asked readers to tell us their stories about how generative AI has shaped their teaching this past academic year. More than 100 people wrote in. This article is based on their experiences, as well as on other survey data that show us how AI has altered course design, professor-student relationships, homework, testing and other facets of teaching.

"I have a lot of ambivalence about it but I don't think the right response is to try and pull up the drawbridge," he said of AI. "The longer it's with us, the more even the more skeptical among my humanities colleagues recognize that they can't simply try to prevent students from using it, that that's just not an effective solution."

Aleksander's approach illustrates how complicated teaching has become. Nearly four years after ChatGPT dropped into our lives, and as campus leaders pressure faculty members to incorporate AI into their teaching, there is little agreement — even within disciplines — about how to cope with this sea change.

Some professors think generative AI has no place in education. Others believe it can push students to new levels of comprehension and ability. Some are adamantly against any form of surveillance; others insist it is the only way to verify authenticity.

But whether they approach AI with a full-throated welcome, a full-on blockade, or something in between, professors have one challenge in common: The technology has forced them to overhaul the way they teach. More than 80 percent of those who responded to a *Chronicle* poll said they had tried to AI-proof assignments and assessments. Sixty-five percent had caught students using AI to cheat. All teaching faculty face the same fundamental questions: How can I ensure that students are actually learning? What do they need to know or be able to do now that AI is here? And, where do I find the time to figure this all out?

"This is so depressing," Jennifer Lynn, a history professor at Montana State University at Billings, wrote to *The Chronicle*. "Instead of talking about new ideas or our own projects, our hallway conversations are about how challenging it is to deal with AI and how we worry about our students."

Faculty members often lack the support they need from administrators to solve their most challenging dilemmas. This seems particularly true in writing- and reading-intensive disciplines, such as history and English, as well as in introductory and general-education courses.

As AI has rapidly evolved and students have begun using it in more sophisticated ways, “our administration has failed to recognize the enormous amount of labor that it takes to redesign assignments/coursework,” wrote Lynn, who also cited “the emotional toll of having to individually meet with 15 students in one class, for one assignment, who cheated using AI.”

While many of her upper-division students remain committed to intellectual independence, she said in a follow-up interview, that is less true among her general-education students. To mitigate the likelihood that students will use AI when researching and writing papers, Lynn created a “working day,” to which students bring their notes and outlines to work on their drafts. Even there, she said, it is clear that some students generated outlines with AI or pasted AI copy into a draft.

“How do I reach students who don’t necessarily see the value in taking a world history course?” she said. While that’s not a new challenge, “AI has made it harder for me to speak to them, because I can’t even get them to write something on their own, or to think through something on their own, and challenge them in that way.”

Julie Cidell, head of the department of geography and geographic information science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, also said campus leaders are not addressing the widespread problem of AI misuse in entry-level courses.

“So far we’re mostly focusing on the upper level: ‘This is how to get students to be workplace ready,’” she said. “But people are throwing up their hands and going, ‘Oh well,’ when it comes to these large introductory classes. And for disciplines like mine that rely on those classes to get students to know what we are and what we do as a discipline, it’s a real threat.”

Cidell thinks introductory courses have been ignored in part because they are typically taught by contingent faculty members, graduate students, and early-career professors.

“The people who teach those courses,” she said, “by and large, are not the ones that have a lot of input into how decisions at higher levels are made in the university.”

Meanwhile, professors are spending an enormous amount of time trying to ensure the authenticity of student work.

Richard Niolon, an associate professor of clinical psychology at Adler University, teaches the history of psychology and ethics to graduate students. He devotes three pages on his syllabus to why he does not want students to use AI. He has created a complex system for grading research papers, which necessitates assigning fewer of them.

After a paper is submitted, Adler checks every reference to see if any are fabricated. Students must also provide quotes from key works and submit proof that those quotes exist, so Adler can check them. He asks students to write a reflection on parts of their



“I’m still exhausted from learning new tech during Covid, and can’t summon enthusiasm or energy to revamp my courses, assignments, and pedagogy again.”

He thinks the current system rests on a shaky foundation. News organizations may start to investigate the integrity of college degrees. Employers may question whether students are actually learning anything. And students have begun suing colleges, arguing they were punished after being falsely accused of cheating with AI.

“I used to think AI was just a threat,” he wrote to *The Chronicle*. “Then I started thinking it could be an asset or tool. I now think it will have to break our systems before that is possible.”

Some professors are torn by the decisions they have made, such as scaling back or eliminating out-of-class work because they cannot ensure its authenticity. They worry

this will deprive students of the opportunity to build the skills that come with working on a long project over a period of time on their own.

Allison Cummings, an English professor at Southern New Hampshire University, returned to in-class quizzes and exams but decided that independent writing was too important to drop entirely.

“I still assigned two out-of-class essays, unlike many colleagues in other humanities fields, because I value how much *I* learned from writing, slow thinking, and revision as a student,” she wrote. “Most students did write their own essays. But there were consistently two or three students who didn’t. I worry that if most teachers drop the out-of-class essay, those skills of thinking, writing, arguing, and interpreting will quickly wither.”

Cummings decided to retire this spring, at age 61, because of AI, a few years earlier than planned. “I know my colleagues will figure out how to teach around or despite AI (if the major in English exists in 10 years), but I’m still exhausted from learning new tech during Covid, and can’t summon enthusiasm or energy to revamp my courses, assignments, and pedagogy again.”

On the other end of the spectrum are instructors who see real benefits of incorporating AI into their teaching: Nearly half of those responding to *The Chronicle’s* poll had introduced assignments for which students are expected to work with AI.

Some professors said they encourage AI use to give students a leg up, even as they remain concerned about what these tools are doing to the environment and to society.

Sharon Doetsch-Kidder, an instructional associate professor of English at George Mason University, said many of their students come from less advantaged backgrounds and often juggle a lot of responsibilities as they work their way through college. Being technologically proficient can help level the playing field. “Ethically I don’t feel good about AI,” they said. “But I want our students to have all the advantages.”

Dan Myers, an associate professor of computer science at Rollins College, who runs workshops and offers support for colleagues interested in introducing AI into their courses, noted a shift in attitude this past year among his colleagues across campus.

“People are now moving off that bubble or off the fence and becoming more willing to think about, Well, yeah, there are some ways I could use this productively in my courses,” he said in an interview. Partly that has to do with improvements to the technology. “We now have many more models that people can draw on that are not simply just saying, Hey, ChatGPT, write this paper for me.”

This fall, for example, the history department, which has had a blanket ban on students using AI in coursework, will begin experimenting with AI in a research and methods course.

“One of my suggestions to them,” he said, “was that the best way to make progress is to pick a specific course where you feel comfortable experimenting. And then think about relaxing the guardrails just in the context of that one course, and then you will learn pretty quickly what works well, and what doesn’t.”

Many instructors adapting their courses to AI have done so with the help of AI. Of the 106 people who wrote into *The Chronicle*, 51 reported using the tool in course design. That aligns with a recent survey by [California State University](#) of 94,000 students, staff, and faculty members in the Cal State system, which found that 55 percent of instructors use AI to develop course materials.

“The challenge is to use AI to cultivate students’ curiosity so that they are inclined to learn the subject matter more so than the traditional way.”

The range of uses varies widely. One biology professor has had success asking students to use AI to create images illustrating biological concepts, then describe what it did correctly and incorrectly.

Sidaard Gunasekaran, an associate professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at the University of Dayton, created several AI tools to help his students understand complicated topics, such as [aircraft weight estimations](#) and [aircraft performance](#).

Another helps them visualize how changes in aircraft design will affect stability during turbulence. “The challenge is to use AI to cultivate students’ curiosity so that they are inclined to learn the subject matter more so than the traditional way,” he wrote.

He has found that students have become more engaged in their own learning, including testing themselves on optional questions through use of these AI tutors. “If students were motivated to take the quiz on their own without being prompted, I think I call that success,” he said in a follow-up interview.

Other faculty members have encouraged students to use AI as a form of peer feedback, as a co-developer on a project, or as a tutor. Several said their experiments underperformed, which was a lesson in itself, such as when students were surprised or frustrated by AI’s tendency to hallucinate or produce flat writing.

Professors have been consumed by examining every element of course design. The time spent felt worthwhile if it built on effective teaching practices.

Some faculty members said that slowing down the pace of their teaching and having students work together in class developing code, reading a difficult literary work, or constructing a research project has strengthened a sense of community. Many said they have come to care less about students turning out a polished product — because AI can do that — and instead ask students to demonstrate that they are using the critical-thinking skills needed to produce such a product.

“A student who can’t explain why they made a design decision, or who can’t articulate what they tried and abandoned, hasn’t done the work regardless of what tool they used,” wrote one art professor.

Oral presentations and exams are one strategy professors are turning to more often. Gianmarc Grazioli, an associate professor of computational chemistry at San Jose State University, follows a 70-30 rule. Seventy percent of a student's grade on a project comes from the work they submit. The remaining 30 percent comes from their ability to explain it.

Grazioli allows his students to use AI tools in any way they would like. He does this for two reasons, he said: Graduates in his field will be expected to use AI in their jobs and AI is impossible to police. So instead of monitoring for misuse, he focuses on whether students understand what they are learning.

In class they do this through "live" coding — coding together in real time. When students are stumped, he asks them to suggest a question for Google or ChatGPT. Then he ensures that students understand the solutions that AI helped generate.

In a follow-up interview, Grazioli said he models his oral exams on the job interviews he went through when he considered a career in industry before he began teaching in the fall of 2020.

"One thing that they all had me do was a coding interview, which is super stressful and difficult, because you're trying to say on the spot how you would code something," he recalled. "You can't look anything up, and I thought, Wow, this is an important skill to be able to think on your feet."

He models that for his students, asking questions and sometimes helping them out when they seem stuck, in what he described as similar to a "really friendly" coding interview. "You can tell in conversation when somebody doesn't actually know what they're talking about," he said.

Doetsch-Kidder, in George Mason's English department, gives students directions on allowable AI use, including sample prompts. Students must save all their chats and fill out an AI usage form, so Doetsch-Kidder can see if they are making their own decisions and not simply using whatever the AI tool gives them.

Because students in a freshman composition course may struggle with reading, Doetsch-Kidder suggests they use AI to help “pre-read” assignments at home, before reading together in class. Students may use AI to look up some of the main concepts they have identified in an academic article, for example, so they come better prepared to discuss the reading.

“I’ve seen some students doing a really good job using it for reading, starting with explaining the concepts in the title of an article, for example,” Doetsch-Kidder said. “I’ve had other students make really good use of it for support with their writing, or for revising.”

Adding AI into course design, Doetsch-Kidder said, has required thinking deliberately about what skills students should be mastering. AI “is this powerful tool, especially for multilingual and international students, especially for first-gen students,” they said. “I think it calls for deep rethinking about what we’re teaching and really focusing on that research and reading and inquiry process and letting go of our attachment to having these final products.”

Asked what strategies they employ to curtail unauthorized AI use outside of class, professors described a variety of approaches. Some have moved from assigning well-known texts to more obscure ones, thinking AI tools will be less likely to produce a decent essay. Others ask students to connect what they are writing about to something discussed in class, cite specific passages in an article, write by hand, or annotate printed reading material.

“No more Epic of Gilgamesh; no more Ibn Fadlan; no more document reader on Mongol history that apparently inspires slop production instead of engagement,” wrote one history professor. “I also make sure that all quizzes in my online courses are carefully and explicitly keyed to my lectures. None of this appears to have discouraged attempts to outsource work to gen AI instead of completing it honestly.”

Some are both adding complexity to homework and moving foundational work into class.

In an introductory computer-science course, Myers, the Rollins professor, increased in-class practice and lab activities, eliminated many homework assignments, and cut content that he would have taught during the last two weeks of class to make up for lost time. He conducts in-person quizzes and tests, including on whether students can look at a program and reason through what it's doing. Out-of-class projects have become more ambitious, because AI use is allowed, but students must keep a log of their interactions with AI.

In upper-division courses “the gloves are off,” he said, and students can use AI in any way they'd like. But that's where assignment design becomes critical, he said.

“I try to avoid assignments that have one ‘right’ answer; or ones where the student is really deciding, ‘Is this correct or not?’ Instead, a good assignment challenges the student to pick a direction from among many possible options, then iteratively execute that vision. This can allow the use of AI,” he wrote, “but typically forces the student into a cycle, where they have to try things and experiment.”

Professors described the discomfort they have felt about becoming AI police. It has altered their relationship with students. AI use is often hard to prove, and it takes a lot of time to document. Students too have [complained about](#) instances of intense surveillance or false accusations of AI use.

For some professors, avoiding those scenarios was reason enough to scrap out-of-class assignments. But others turned to proctoring software specifically because they wanted to avoid having to make subjective judgments.

After seeing the percentage of F's rise dramatically in an introductory course this spring, Dan Garcia, a teaching professor in computer science at the University of California at Berkeley, will be taking “a panopticon approach” to outside work this fall. Students will have to do all of their work in a locked-down environment. Oral exams or reviewing student logs by hand, he said, are not an effective option in a course that enrolls 500 students.

"I'm recording every keystroke, every mouse click, every time you run a command and test your code. I record all of that," he said. Garcia will have an "AI sniffer" evaluate what students did and how they did it to determine whether it seemed AI or human.

Kirsten Thomson, a psychology lecturer at the University of New Mexico, teaches both in-person and online classes. She uses proctoring software with her online students. "I used to think AI detection was completely invalid and unreliable. Now I believe that much of it is, but that some are actually worthwhile and can be part of monitoring for AI use," she wrote.

In a follow-up interview Thomson said that she talks to students about the value of doing their own work, but AI misuse continued to be a problem in her online classes, where she felt like she had less rapport with students.

Yet attempting to authenticate student work made her uncomfortable.

"I don't like having an adversarial kind of relationship with students," she said. "And when I was looking to see, did this use AI, did this not use AI, I didn't like feeling that way."

So she scrapped research papers and turned to in-class exams for her in-person students. Her online students take an oral video exam, in which they receive the questions as the camera starts recording. Then they have 20 minutes to think about their answer, write it down, and speak it into camera.

Advances in technology, including agentic AI and the ability to create deepfakes — which have [proved problematic](#) in asynchronous online courses — will likely make things more complicated.

"I don't like having an adversarial kind of relationship with students."

Cidell, the geography professor, attended a panel of chief information officers from universities in her region. Someone asked what professors are supposed to do if online

students are not only using AI to do the work but to create a deepfake and pretend to be someone else.

“The response was actual laughter, and ‘Oh, well, if you figure out what to do about that, let us know,’” she recalls. “I was so shocked at this ... ‘Oh yeah, that sounds like a problem, you better work on that.’”

As one of several [AI faculty fellows](#) on the San Jose State University campus, Aleksander has been thinking a lot about how profoundly generative-AI tools have altered teaching, on the heels of other shocks to the system, like Covid. He has the luxury, he said, of deliberating about these issues in ways that many contingent faculty members, carrying heavy teaching loads across multiple campuses, do not. Meanwhile students are confused by what they see as AI boosterism from administrators and skepticism from the faculty members.

One thing Aleksander stresses with faculty members as he helps with professional development: The question should not be whether students are using AI, but how they’re using it, and how to get them engaged in their own learning. Professors, he said, need to be able to redesign their teaching with support from administrators and the freedom to make their own choices.

“I think it’s just going to have to be messy for a while. Until faculty get a better handle on this, both individually and collectively, it’s just going to be a kind of tense and anxious few years to navigate it all.”

We’d like to hear from you — [tell us how](#) The Chronicle has made a difference in your work or helped you stay informed. You can also [send feedback](#) about this article or [submit a letter](#) to the editor.

Tags

Teaching & Learning

Technology

Innovation & Transformation

Online Learning

Share



About the Author

Beth McMurtrie

Beth McMurtrie is a senior writer for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, where she focuses on the future of learning and technology's influence on teaching. In addition to her reported stories, she writes a weekly [Teaching](#) newsletter about what works in and around the classroom. You can [sign up here](#) to receive the Teaching newsletter in your inbox on Thursdays. It's free, and it helps us connect with our readers. Email her at beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com and follow her on [LinkedIn](#).

Top Jobs from Chronicle Careers

Chancellor

University System of Georgia

Dean of Business

Campbell University

Psychology – CFS-Professional Advanced Writing Faculty

Brigham Young University

DIRECTOR OF ATHLETICS

Texas A&M International University

Academy Scholar (postdoctoral fellow)

Harvard University
