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# The University of Mississippi’s AI Institute for Teachers

## Response to Question 6

In the Spring of 2023, university leadership at the University of Mississippi in the United States recognized the evolving nature of generative AI and its impact on education and through partnerships between the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, The Institute of Data Science, and the Academic Innovations Group, helped found the [AI Institute for Teachers](https://mississippi.ai/). Generative AI is moving so swiftly that we must rethink how we train faculty at institutions of higher learning to respond to the opportunities and challenges posed by generative AI. UM settled on a model of an in-person institute, one where we invited both skeptics and early adopters of the technology to engage in productive discourse about how AI is reshaping the way students learn.  We believe in funding participants for projects they develop to support their exploration of new ways AI can meaningfully help educators.

Thus far, we have hosted two institutes for University of Mississippi faculty, training over 80 faculty members in AI literacy. The curriculum for each AI Institute is developed by Marc Watkins and he uses his expertise in AI and his teaching background as a non-tenure track faculty member to establish content for faculty. For each of UM’s previous AI Institutes, Marc had to redesign the curriculum, often from scratch, just to keep up with the challenges and changes AI poses for teaching. You can read more about how the AI Institutes are structured below and access the open-sourced curriculum.

* Summer 2023 AI Institute for Teachers profiled in the Washington Post: [AI is forcing teachers to confront an existential question](https://wapo.st/3yjM79N)
* Winter 2024 AI Institute for Teachers [recap from the University of Mississippi’s Center for Teaching and Learning, with an open-sourced curriculum](https://open.substack.com/pub/umcetl/p/recap-winter-ai-institute-for-teachers?r=1z9b3o&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web)

## Teaching *With* and *Against* Generative AI

With ChatGPT’s arrival, some universities turned to the fleeting promise of AI detection and invested in software powered by AI to try and catch AI. Many institutions, like Vanderbilt, have since [switched off their AI detectors](https://www.vanderbilt.edu/brightspace/2023/08/16/guidance-on-ai-detection-and-why-were-disabling-turnitins-ai-detector/) because of too many false positives, rising prices, and unreliable results. Social media is filled with students [claiming AI detectors falsely identified their writing](https://www.tiktok.com/%40gothfeet/video/7361477759832526122?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7276535209349678638) as being generative text and teachers coming up with deceptive assessments, [like hiding phrasing in assignments](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C0AetCixWRx/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet), to try and catch would-be cheaters.

Education has to move beyond worrying about AI’s impact on assessment integrity and start focusing on generative AI’s impact on learning. Social media is filled with examples of [influencers marketing AI to students as an easy solution](https://marcwatkins.substack.com/p/the-ai-influencers-selling-students) to help them save time. While AI can have many benefits for students, learning is not a problem for AI to solve. We present these examples below from TikTok and Instagram to give readers a full sense of how students are being sold these different use cases via social media and ask you to consider how deeply generative technologies will challenge what it means to learn in.

* [Reading](https://www.tiktok.com/%40mylegalera/video/7297732998982569262)
* [Lecture/ Notetaking](https://www.instagram.com/reel/C6Tzkonrm0t/?utm_source=ig_web_button_share_sheet)
* [Feedback](https://www.tiktok.com/%40jessicam.reid/video/7261414594441202949)
* [Tutoring](https://www.tiktok.com/%40ashleyb4253/video/7312250450890476846)
* [Research](https://www.tiktok.com/%40skolar.gpt/video/7300120801146162438?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7276535209349678638)
* [Writing](https://www.tiktok.com/%40livvy/video/7204604907792485678)

The AI Institute raises awareness of how these tools are marketed to students and invites faculty to consider ways they can use AI productively to support student learning, not offload it. Since many AI tools are designed to offer users a frictionless experience, we work with faculty to identify areas where they can introduce a little bit of friction in the learning process so that students can slow down when using the technology and reflect on what they’ve learned. Some examples of what this looks like in practice:

* Assigning students to write reflectively about what they’ve learned and how they’ve learned invites them to take the time to thoughtfully consider what their education means to them. Having an AI write for them in this instance may be antithetical to this process.
* When a faculty member assigns a reading, they do so with the hopes that students will read closely, critically engaging with the author’s content, not relying on an AI reading assistant to offload the process by generating concise summaries for the student.
* During a lecture, discussion, or debate, students are expected to listen closely and participate in the process actively, which may not happen if a student uncritically adopts an AI transcription tool to record lecture and use it to create summaries of the content.
* Students completing assessments provides faculty with a snapshot of their knowledge within the context of a course and using AI to answer questions may be academically dishonest and rob students of crucial skills.

Education has to shift from a mindset of AI-proofing assignments into one where we examine how this emerging technology impacts learning and what frameworks we can use to establish more agency and control in how students integrate AI within their studies. This isn’t going to be an easy process and we are bound to make mistakes, but AI is here and we must take the time to explore its potential in ways that do not threaten to deskill students or rob them of opportunities to learn. The following key recommendations outline crucial areas that warrant focused efforts from all educational stakeholders and guide the AI Institute for Teachers:

Key Recommendations for Responsibly Integrating AI in Education

* Building basic AI literacy and more nuanced critical AI literacy will be crucial for all stakeholders. AI literacy involves knowing how generative AI systems function, what they can and cannot do, and how limitations, like hallucinations, can impact an output. Critical AI literacy calls upon users to develop a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, environmental, economic, and ethical challenges generative AI systems play in our world. Above all, teachers should embrace transparency when using generative AI to model ethical usage for their students.
* AI apps fall under existing guidelines in the United States for K-16 and it is paramount that AI developers, institutions of higher learning, and individual faculty and students understand this before adopting any AI tool. In the US, FERPA protects students’ personal information, while COPPA requires parental consent for apps to collect data from students under 13. Likewise, ed-tech tools must adhere to the IDEA Act to ensure the technology does not discriminate against those with disabilities.
* Professional development must evolve to meet the needs of faculty and staff throughout education as they explore ways generative AI can support learning, and rethink educational practices to safeguard skills exposed to uncritical adoption of AI. This involves moving away from technological solutions like AI detection or using AI proctoring systems, and instead focusing on supporting human beings as they make critical choices in parsing use cases that involve AI-powered tools.
* Administration must address the material conditions present in education to fully support faculty and staff as they explore this technology’s impact on learning and teaching. This involves funding sustainable pathways for educators and support staff to establish best practices and audit existing degrees, even examining how learning occurs within their disciplines. Instead of providing higher education faculty professional development funds to attend a conference, institutions would be well advised to explore paying faculty for group and self-directed inquiry into the uses of this technology. Only then will we see educators develop the needed skills to establish best practices for the use of AI in education.
* Faculty should work in tandem with students to explore generative AI’s implications for supporting their learning in thoughtful use cases, embracing Open Pedagogy when possible, to cocreate knowledge with students. Using cooperative frameworks like this will lead to equitable and informed adoption of AI in education. It will also help teach students AI literacy by inviting them into the conversation and asking them to advocate for ways using AI supports their learning.

The rise of generative AI presents profound challenges and opportunities for education. As new multimodal AI assistants like OpenAI’s GPT-4o and Google’s Project Astra become more prevalent, we must redouble our efforts to develop critical AI literacies among students, faculty, and staff. Simply trying to "AI-proof" assignments will prove futile—we must rethink our pedagogical approaches from the ground up to foster the skills of critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning that AI might augment, but cannot replicate.

This will require deep institutional investment in sustainable professional development models that empower educators to explore generative AI's impacts through inquiry-based approaches. It will mean moving away from technological "solutions" like AI detection tools and towards human-centric frameworks that preserve student agency and autonomy in the learning process. Most crucially, this transition must happen collaboratively and transparently, involving all stakeholders. The path will not be easy, but by critically engaging with this technology, we can ensure AI remains a tool in service of deeper human understanding—not its replacement.

Our world is being reshaped by AI and education has a vital role to play in guiding that future responsibly and ethically. The alternative—an uncritical adoption of generative AI that deskills both students and educators—is too dire to accept.