Journalist's Guide to Reporting AI in Higher Education: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Introduction

This introductory guide is for journalists seeking to understand and effectively cover using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education.

As AI technologies become increasingly integral to educational processes—from admissions and grading to research and administrative functions—journalists play a critical role in ensuring that the public remains informed and that institutions are held accountable.

This comprehensive guide thoroughly explores the ethical, technical, and social implications of AI in academia. It also includes in-depth analyses, investigative techniques, and narrative strategies that can help journalists frame AI stories in engaging, accurate, and ethically sound ways, ensuring they are well informed and prepared.

The guide contains ten sections, each focusing on different aspects of AI in higher education, from understanding its basic mechanics to investigating bias and ensuring transparency in institutional AI adoption.

1. The Journalist's Purpose and Responsibilities in Covering AI in Higher Education

Purpose

Journalists covering Al in higher education have a crucial role as translators and gatekeepers of information. The purpose is to:

- Educate the public: Higher education is deeply influential in shaping society, and as AI begins to automate and influence key decisions, journalists must make these developments understandable to a broad audience.
- Demystify AI: AI is a subject rife with misunderstandings and myths.
 Journalists need to bridge the gap between technological advances and public understanding by explaining how AI is being used in universities, what it can (and cannot) do, and the potential benefits and risks.

 Serve as the conscience of society: Journalists play a critical role in holding institutions accountable. Their work ensures that AI is used ethically, transparently, and for the benefit of all students, not just the privileged few.

Responsibilities

Journalists have several key responsibilities when covering AI in higher education, including:

- Investigative Scrutiny: Journalists need to dig deep into how AI is applied in higher education institutions, ensuring that the public knows the advantages and potential drawbacks. Their investigations should uncover any hidden biases or ethical concerns related to using AI systems.

 Transparency is critical. Institutions may use proprietary AI systems, but journalists must push for transparency about decisions (e.g., admissions, grading). They must also question the accountability of universities and technology providers. Who is responsible when AI makes an incorrect or biased decision, and what safeguards are in place?
- Ethical Reporting: Journalists are responsible for ethical reporting, ensuring their stories are accurate, unbiased, and presented with integrity. This responsibility includes avoiding sensationalism around AI, especially when discussing its potential for bias, surveillance, or academic misconduct.
 - Ethical considerations also extend to privacy. Al tools often collect vast student data (e.g., learning habits and academic records). Journalists should be transparent about how data is collected, used, and stored by universities and their tech partners.
- Advocating for Equity: All has the potential to either enhance or undermine equity in education. Journalists need to highlight whether All systems promote fairness or, conversely, reinforce existing inequalities. It's their responsibility to investigate how All affects underrepresented and marginalized groups, ensuring that the technology doesn't widen the educational divide.
- Public Advocacy: Journalists also serve as public advocates, ensuring the responsible use of AI and its benefits are broadly shared. Their work should

call for more public discourse, regulations, and oversight to ensure educational systems use AI ethically.

Public Watchdogs

Journalists, as public watchdogs, are responsible for keeping higher education institutions accountable for their Al decisions. They need to:

- **Ensure accountability:** Journalists must scrutinize decisions made by algorithms that affect students' futures, such as admissions or grading, and demand transparency from institutions on how these decisions are made.
- Expose harmful practices: When AI tools are found to be biased or harmful, it is a journalist's duty to report on these issues so that institutions can be held accountable, whether through public opinion, policy changes, or legal action.
- Promote best practices: Journalists should also focus on institutions that are
 using AI ethically and effectively. By showcasing these best practices,
 they help other institutions learn how to implement AI responsibly and
 ethically.

2. The Significance and Value of Covering AI in Higher Education

Why It Matters

All is profoundly altering higher education, making it critical for journalists to cover its impact. The significance of reporting on All in higher education lies in:

- Widespread Impact on Education Systems: All touches many facets of higher education, from administrative processes to learning outcomes, faculty roles, and research. All is increasingly being integrated into predictive analytics for student success, grading automation, and personalized learning, all of which transform daily university operations. Journalists must cover the entire scope of Al's impact, including how universities make key decisions like admissions or use Al-based learning platforms, providing stakeholders with a comprehensive understanding of the technology's influence.
- Shaping the Future of Higher Education: All has the potential to change universities' structure, enabling new learning models, such as personalized and adaptive learning. Journalists must address the question: Will All replace or enhance traditional educational models? They should investigate how All may lead to hybrid models of education, with a mix of online and in-person learning, and the consequences of these developments on faculty roles and student engagement.
- Democratizing or Reinforcing Inequality: All has the potential to democratize education by providing personalized learning to more students, especially those in under-resourced or remote areas. However, All could also exacerbate inequality if the technology is disproportionately available to students or institutions with more resources. Journalists must report on whether All is bridging or widening educational gaps.

Transparency and Accountability

As AI becomes more embedded in higher education, transparency and accountability become paramount:

- Algorithmic Decision-Making: Al systems, particularly those used for grading, admissions, and student monitoring, can function as black boxes with decision-making processes that are difficult to understand. Journalists need to push for transparency around how these systems work, what data they rely on, and the impact of these decisions on students.
- Accountability of AI Vendors and Universities: Al systems, particularly
 those used for grading, admissions, and student monitoring, can function
 as black boxes with difficult-to-understand decision-making processes.
 Journalists need to push for transparency around how these systems work,
 what data they rely on, and the impact of these decisions on students.
- Shaping Policy Through Reporting: Through their reporting, journalists can shape policy decisions by raising awareness about Al-related ethical concerns and prompting policymakers to regulate Al's role in education.
 By offering evidence-based investigations, journalists help ensure the responsible use of Al.

Impact on Equity

Al's potential to either promote or undermine equity in education is significant:

- Highlighting Bias in AI Systems: Journalists should investigate whether AI
 systems perpetuate bias, particularly in areas like admissions, grading, and
 student assessments. Many AI systems are trained on historical data, which
 may reflect societal biases that unfairly impact certain student groups.
- Unequal Access to Al Tools: Al adoption varies greatly between
 institutions. Wealthier universities may have access to cutting-edge Al tools
 that enhance learning, while underfunded institutions may lag behind.
 Journalists must explore whether the digital divide is widening as a result of
 unequal access to Al.
- **Reporting on Success Stories:** While it's important to investigate where Al is failing, journalists should also report on success stories where Al has improved access and outcomes for underserved students. Highlighting these cases can provide models for other institutions to follow.

Shaping Public Discourse

Journalists have a key role in shaping the public discourse around AI in higher

education. Their coverage informs the public, policymakers, and stakeholders about the ethical, social, and practical implications of AI in universities.

- Creating Informed Public Debate: By providing clear, accurate, and
 well-researched reports, journalists can help the public engage with AI as
 an important, evolving issue in higher education. They can ensure that
 discussions about AI's role in education are grounded in facts rather than
 fear or misinformation.
- Influencing Policy and Practice: Investigative journalism has the power to
 influence policy and institutional practices. By uncovering ethical
 concerns, biases, or risks, journalists can prompt universities to adopt more
 responsible AI practices and help shape regulatory frameworks that
 govern AI use in education.
- Exploring the Long-Term Implications of AI: Al's integration into higher education is not just a short-term phenomenon. Journalists should cover the long-term impacts of AI, including how it will reshape universities, the future workforce, and learning models for decades to come.

3. Al Basics for Journalists

Technical Overview of Al

To cover AI effectively, journalists need a basic understanding of the core technologies that underpin AI:

- What is AI?: Al refers to systems capable of performing tasks that
 traditionally require human intelligence, such as recognizing patterns,
 processing natural language, or solving problems. Al in education
 automates administrative tasks, supports personalized learning, and
 enhances research capabilities.
- Machine Learning (ML): A subset of AI where systems are trained on large datasets to identify patterns and make decisions without explicit programming for each task. Machine learning models can be used in higher education for predictive analytics, student success models, and automating grading processes.
- Deep Learning: A more complex form of machine learning that uses neural networks to identify patterns in data, such as detecting trends in student performance. Deep learning systems are capable of processing vast datasets and are used in Al-driven grading, adaptive learning platforms, and student monitoring systems.
- Natural Language Processing (NLP): NLP involves teaching machines to understand and generate human language. In higher education, NLP is often used for chatbots, virtual tutors, and systems that process student inquiries.

Key Al Concepts for Journalists

Journalists should familiarize themselves with the following key AI concepts:

- Algorithms: At its core, Al relies on algorithms, which are sets of rules or
 procedures for solving problems. Journalists should understand that Al
 algorithms are only as good as the data they are trained on, and
 poor-quality or biased data can lead to biased decisions.
- **Training Data:** All models are trained using large datasets. If these datasets are incomplete or biased, the resulting All system may perpetuate

- inequities. It's crucial for journalists to ask how AI systems are trained and whether bias checks are conducted.
- Supervised vs. Unsupervised Learning: In supervised learning, the
 algorithm learns from labeled data (data that has been categorized in
 advance). In unsupervised learning, the algorithm identifies patterns
 without labeled data. Journalists should understand these approaches to
 assess how AI systems make decisions.

Al Bias and Limitations

Al is not without its flaws, and journalists must be aware of these limitations:

- Algorithmic Bias: Bias can enter AI systems through the training data. For example, an admissions algorithm trained on historical data may perpetuate discrimination against minority or low-income students if the dataset reflects existing biases. Journalists should investigate how universities address these risks.
- Lack of Explainability: Many Al systems, particularly those using deep learning, operate as "black boxes," producing results without revealing how decisions were made. This lack of transparency makes it difficult to challenge Al decisions or understand their rationale.
- Data Privacy and Ethics: Al often relies on large datasets, which may
 include sensitive personal information. Journalists should investigate the
 ethical concerns surrounding data privacy, particularly when it comes to
 student information collected by universities.

Common Al Applications in Higher Education

Al is used across various areas in higher education:

- Al in Admissions: Universities increasingly rely on Al-driven admissions systems to pre-screen applications or predict which students are most likely to succeed. These systems increase efficiency but may introduce bias if not properly audited.
- Al in Teaching and Learning: Al-powered platforms personalize education by adjusting content and pacing to meet individual student needs. Virtual assistants and Al tutors provide real-time feedback in large online courses.

- Al in Grading and Evaluation: Al grading systems automate the grading of multiple-choice tests, essays, and even complex problem sets. While this saves time, it may lead to concerns about fairness and accuracy.
- Al in Research and Academic Publishing: Al tools enhance research by analyzing large datasets and helping researchers identify trends. Al can also assist in academic publishing, streamlining processes such as literature reviews or recommending reviewers for papers.

Journalists' Role in Covering Al Technologies

Journalists should be equipped to cover the development and deployment of Al in higher education:

- Asking the Right Questions: Journalists must probe into how AI models are trained, whether bias checks have been performed, and how AI systems impact students. They must ask whether AI decisions are transparent and whether there are mechanisms in place for students to appeal AI-driven decisions.
- Communicating AI Concepts Clearly: Journalists should translate complex
 Al concepts into clear, accessible language for the public, ensuring
 readers understand how AI impacts their lives without oversimplifying the
 issues.
- **Spotting Red Flags:** Journalists who understand AI can spot red flags, such as opaque decision-making or biased datasets, and raise important questions about whether AI is being used ethically.

4. Al Applications in Higher Education

Al in Admissions

Al-driven systems are increasingly used to automate parts of the college admissions process:

- Automating Admissions Decisions: Al tools can pre-screen applications or predict which students are most likely to succeed based on historical data. These systems can save time and resources, especially for large institutions. However, they raise concerns about transparency and fairness.
- Bias in Admissions Systems: Al admissions systems may inherit biases from
 the training data, potentially disadvantage students from
 underrepresented groups. For example, an algorithm trained on data
 from predominantly wealthy applicants might favor students from similar
 backgrounds, perpetuating inequality.
- Transparency and Accountability: Universities using AI in admissions should be transparent about how these systems work. Journalists should investigate how AI systems are evaluated for fairness and whether students are informed about the role AI plays in their admissions decisions.

Al in Teaching and Learning

Al plays an increasingly important role in shaping how students learn and how courses are delivered:

- Adaptive Learning Platforms: Al-powered platforms adjust the pace and
 content of a course based on the student's progress and needs. These
 systems can enhance learning by providing personalized education, but
 they also raise questions about student data privacy and how learning
 algorithms are tested for fairness.
- Al Tutors and Virtual Assistants: Al systems can serve as virtual tutors or assistants, answering student queries in real-time and offering personalized feedback in large classes. While they increase efficiency, concerns about over-reliance on Al and the loss of personal interaction between students and instructors should be considered.

 Automated Grading Systems: Al tools that grade assignments, essays, and exams are becoming more common. These systems can reduce the grading burden on faculty but may struggle with nuances such as creative or unconventional answers. Journalists should explore how Al grading tools are being tested for fairness and accuracy.

Al in Student Monitoring and Engagement

Al tools are often used to track student engagement and performance:

- Predicting Student Success: Al systems can analyze data on student attendance, participation, and academic performance to predict which students are at risk of failing or dropping out. While this enables universities to intervene early, it also raises concerns about surveillance and student privacy.
- Bias in Student Monitoring: All monitoring systems may disproportionately
 flag students from certain demographic groups as at risk, even if their
 academic performance is similar to their peers. Journalists should
 investigate whether these systems are being regularly audited for bias and
 fairness.
- Data Privacy Concerns: Al systems collect and analyze vast amounts of student data, raising questions about how this data is stored, who has access to it, and how it is used. Journalists should explore whether universities are transparent about data collection practices and whether students have a say in how their data is used.

Al in Research and Academic Publishing

Al is revolutionizing how research is conducted and published:

- AI-Driven Research Tools: Al tools can analyze large datasets much faster than humans, enabling researchers to identify trends and develop hypotheses more quickly. Al is also being used in fields such as medicine and social sciences to process complex data sets, improving research efficiency.
- Ethical Concerns in Research: As Al takes on a greater role in research, concerns about transparency, reproducibility, and accountability arise.

- Journalists should investigate how AI systems are integrated into research practices and whether universities are ensuring ethical standards are maintained.
- Al in Academic Publishing: Al tools are also being used in academic
 publishing to identify trends, recommend peer reviewers, and even assist
 in writing or reviewing papers. Journalists should explore how Al is
 influencing academic publishing and whether it is impacting the quality of
 peer review and the accessibility of research.

Journalists' Role in Investigating AI Applications

Journalists covering AI in higher education must critically assess the systems being deployed:

- Identifying Bias in Al Systems: Al systems used in admissions, grading, or student monitoring may introduce or perpetuate bias. Journalists should ask whether universities are regularly auditing these systems and if independent audits are being conducted.
- Exploring Transparency and Fairness: Journalists must investigate whether
 universities are being transparent about how AI systems are used, how
 they make decisions, and what data they rely on. Fairness in AI decisions
 should be a key concern, particularly when these decisions affect
 students' academic careers and futures.
- Reporting on Success Stories and Challenges: While it's important to
 expose the risks and shortcomings of AI systems, journalists should also
 highlight success stories where AI has improved education. Balanced
 reporting that showcases both the potential and pitfalls of AI in education
 is crucial for informing public discourse.

5. Ethics of AI in Education

Bias in Al Algorithms

Al systems, particularly those used in education, can unintentionally perpetuate bias if they are trained on biased data. Journalists should focus on investigating how bias manifests in Al systems used in higher education:

- Bias in Admissions Algorithms: Al tools used in admissions can inherit
 biases from the data they are trained on, resulting in unfair outcomes for
 minority or low-income students. For example, an algorithm might favor
 students from wealthy backgrounds based on historical patterns in
 admissions data.
- Bias in Grading Systems: Al systems used for grading may penalize students with non-traditional writing styles or those from non-native English-speaking backgrounds. It's important to investigate whether Al grading tools have been tested for fairness across different student demographics.
- Mitigating Bias: Universities and AI developers must implement bias
 detection and mitigation strategies. Journalists should ask whether
 universities conduct regular audits of their AI systems and whether they
 use diverse datasets to train AI models, ensuring fairness for all student
 groups.

Privacy Concerns

Al systems in higher education rely heavily on data, raising significant privacy concerns:

- Data Collection and Consent: Al systems collect large amounts of data, such as student academic performance, behavior, and even biometric information. Journalists should investigate whether students are informed about what data is being collected, how it is used, and whether they can opt out of data collection.
- Data Security and Storage: Universities must ensure that the data collected by AI systems is securely stored and protected from breaches.
 Journalists should explore whether universities are using strong data

- protection measures, such as encryption and anonymization, and whether there are clear policies in place for data retention and deletion.
- Transparency Around Data Use: Journalists should investigate whether
 universities are transparent about how student data is being used,
 particularly when third-party AI vendors are involved. Are students and
 faculty aware of how their data is shared with external parties?

Academic Integrity and Al

Al tools in education raise new questions about academic integrity:

- AI-Driven Cheating: Al tools can be used by students to cheat, such as
 using Al-generated essays or code to complete assignments. Journalists
 should explore how universities are addressing this new form of academic
 misconduct and whether they are implementing detection systems for
 Al-enabled cheating.
- Al in Plagiarism Detection: Many universities use Al tools to detect
 plagiarism. While these systems can be effective, they may also flag
 legitimate work as plagiarized. Journalists should investigate whether Al
 plagiarism detection tools are fair and whether students have recourse if
 they are wrongly accused.
- Impact on Human Agency: As AI takes on more responsibilities in education, such as grading and monitoring, there is a risk that students and faculty may feel disempowered. Journalists should explore how AI is changing the role of educators and whether students feel their academic integrity is being compromised by automation.

Al and Ethical Decision-Making

The use of AI in education raises ethical concerns about decision-making:

Automated Decision-Making: All systems make automated decisions that
affect students' academic futures, such as admissions rejections or
automated grades. Journalists should investigate whether students have
the ability to challenge All decisions and whether human oversight is part
of the decision-making process.

- Human Interaction in Learning: As AI systems increasingly take on teaching and administrative roles, students may lose out on the personal interaction that is essential to education. Journalists should explore how AI is impacting the teacher-student relationship and whether students feel disconnected from their instructors due to automation.
- **University Responsibility:** Universities must ensure that AI systems are used ethically and in a way that aligns with their mission to provide equitable and fair education. Journalists should investigate whether universities are putting ethical considerations at the forefront of their AI strategies.

Key Competency: Ethical Reporting on Al

Journalists covering AI in higher education need to develop a deep understanding of the ethical implications of AI systems. They should:

- Investigate Ethical Concerns: Journalists must report on potential ethical violations, such as biased algorithms, data privacy breaches, and the disempowerment of students and faculty by AI systems.
- **Report Transparently:** Ethical reporting requires transparency. Journalists should disclose their sources, data, and methods, ensuring their reporting on AI is accurate and fair.
- Hold Institutions Accountable: Journalists play a crucial role in holding universities accountable for their use of Al. Their reporting can push institutions to adopt more ethical Al practices and increase transparency in how Al systems are used.

6. Al and the Future of the Academic Workforce

Job Automation and Task Restructuring

Al is automating various administrative and teaching tasks, reshaping the academic workforce:

- Automation of Administrative Tasks: All systems are used to automate tasks such as scheduling, student advising, and financial aid processing. While this improves efficiency, it may lead to job displacement among administrative staff. Journalists should investigate how universities are addressing the potential loss of jobs and whether staff are being retrained for new roles.
- Al-Driven Teaching Tools: All is transforming teaching roles, with systems that automate grading, tutoring, and answering student questions. This allows faculty to focus on more complex tasks, but also raises concerns about the depersonalization of education. Journalists should explore how All is changing the day-to-day responsibilities of faculty and whether educators feel empowered or diminished by these changes.
- Impact on Faculty Hiring and Employment: The increased use of AI may reduce the need for adjunct faculty or teaching assistants, as AI takes over routine tasks. Journalists should investigate whether AI is contributing to job displacement or changing hiring practices in universities, particularly in large, resource-intensive programs.

Al as a Teaching Aid vs. Replacement

Al's role in education can be either a supplement to or a replacement for traditional teaching methods:

- Blended Learning Models: All can be used to create blended learning environments, where virtual assistants or All tutors support traditional teaching methods. While All can help with scalability and personalized learning, concerns arise over the loss of human interaction in learning environments.
- Al's Impact on Faculty Roles: As Al takes on more responsibilities, faculty
 roles may shift from teaching to mentorship, course design, or research.

Journalists should explore whether universities are providing professional development to help faculty adapt to these new roles and whether educators feel supported during this transition.

Ethical Concerns Around Job Displacement

The increasing use of AI in education raises ethical questions about job displacement and workforce changes:

- Job Displacement vs. Job Creation: While AI may displace certain roles, such as administrative staff or adjunct faculty, it can also create new jobs in fields like AI management, data analytics, and ethics. Journalists should investigate whether universities are actively creating new roles to offset job losses and whether staff are being retrained to take on these new roles.
- Equity and Inclusion in AI Adoption: All adoption may disproportionately impact adjunct faculty, part-time staff, or workers from underrepresented groups. Journalists should explore whether universities are considering equity and inclusion in their AI strategies, ensuring that all employees are given opportunities to adapt to the changes AI brings.

Preparing the Workforce for AI

Universities are responsible for preparing both students and staff for an Al-driven future:

- Upskilling and Retraining: Universities should offer professional
 development programs to help faculty and staff learn new skills related to
 Al. Journalists should investigate whether institutions are investing in
 upskilling programs and whether these programs are accessible to all
 employees.
- Teaching Al Literacy: As Al becomes more prevalent, students also need
 to be prepared for a future where Al skills are essential. Journalists should
 explore how universities are integrating Al literacy into their curricula and
 whether students are being taught both the technical and ethical
 dimensions of Al.

Key Competency: Reporting on Al's Impact on the Workforce

Journalists need to understand the broader implications of AI on the academic workforce and report on how universities are responding to these challenges:

- Investigating Workforce Displacement: Journalists should explore whether
 All is leading to job losses, and investigate how universities are handling job
 displacement and whether they are retraining staff for new roles.
 Journalists should also explore whether institutions are investing in creating
 new jobs related to All technology.
- Reporting on Faculty and Staff Experiences: It is important to capture the
 perspectives of faculty and staff who are directly affected by AI. Are they
 empowered by these new tools, or do they feel that AI is replacing them?
 Journalists should look for stories that reveal how educators and
 administrators are adapting to the changing nature of work in academia.
- Exploring Equity in Al Adoption: Journalists should examine whether Al
 adoption is impacting certain demographic groups more than others,
 particularly adjunct faculty, part-time workers, or underrepresented
 employees. Reporting on equity in Al use ensures that the story captures
 the full impact of Al on the academic workforce.

7. Policy and Regulation of AI in Academia

Regulatory Frameworks Governing AI in Higher Education

Al adoption in higher education is shaped by several regulatory frameworks:

- Data Privacy Laws and Regulations: All systems in higher education handle
 vast amounts of student data. Journalists should investigate whether
 universities are complying with data privacy laws such as GDPR in Europe
 or FERPA in the U.S. These regulations govern how data is collected,
 stored, and used, and they ensure that students have rights over their
 personal information.
- AI-Specific Legislation: Governments are beginning to develop legislation specifically aimed at regulating AI systems. Journalists should track emerging regulations that affect universities, ensuring that AI tools used in admissions, grading, and student monitoring are subject to legal oversight. Institutions may need to adopt new policies to comply with these regulations, and journalists can explore how these changes are implemented.

University Policies and Internal Governance of Al

Universities often establish their own policies to govern Al use:

- Institutional AI Policies: Some universities develop internal AI policies that
 address issues such as bias, accountability, and ethical AI usage.
 Journalists should investigate how robust these policies are and whether
 they align with ethical guidelines for AI deployment. Additionally, it's
 important to explore whether universities have established AI ethics
 boards to oversee decision-making processes.
- Al Accountability and Auditing: Al systems should be audited regularly to
 ensure fairness, transparency, and accuracy. Journalists should investigate
 whether universities are conducting independent audits of their Al tools
 and whether these audits are transparent and publicly accessible. When
 Al systems make high-stakes decisions, such as admissions rejections or
 automated grades, accountability is key.

Government Oversight and Regulation

Governments play a role in regulating AI systems used in public universities:

- Government Oversight and Auditing: Governments may require public
 institutions to conduct mandatory audits of their AI systems to ensure
 compliance with ethical standards. Journalists should track how
 government regulations are enforced and whether universities are subject
 to sufficient oversight.
- Regulating Al Vendors and Technology Providers: Universities often work
 with third-party vendors to provide Al systems. Journalists should explore
 whether Al vendors are subject to government regulations and whether
 universities vet these vendors thoroughly before adopting their
 technologies.

Public Advocacy for Ethical Al

Public pressure can drive universities to adopt ethical Al practices:

- Advocacy Groups and Public Pressure: Civil rights groups, student
 organizations, and AI ethics coalitions may push universities to adopt more
 transparent and fair AI practices. Journalists should track the influence of
 advocacy groups in shaping AI policies and whether universities are
 responding to this pressure.
- Institutional Responsibility and Accountability: Universities must ensure that
 All systems align with their ethical commitments. Journalists should
 investigate whether institutions are taking this responsibility seriously or
 whether they are primarily focused on cost-saving or efficiency gains at
 the expense of ethics.

Key Competency: Understanding AI Policy and Regulation

Journalists need to be well-versed in the legal and regulatory frameworks that govern AI in higher education:

 Reporting on Compliance: Journalists should investigate whether universities are complying with national and international regulations

- regarding AI use, including data privacy laws and new AI-specific legislation.
- Tracking Policy Developments: The legal landscape surrounding Al is constantly evolving. Journalists should track emerging regulations and explore how they affect universities, particularly when it comes to admissions, grading, and student monitoring.
- Exploring Institutional Accountability: Journalists should examine whether
 universities are holding themselves accountable for the ethical use of Al.
 Reporting on how universities are handling audits, transparency, and bias
 mitigation helps ensure that institutions use Al responsibly.

8. Al in Higher Education Access and Equity

Al as an Equalizer or Barrier

All has the potential to either democratize education or reinforce existing inequalities:

- Bridging Gaps in Access: All can enhance educational access by providing personalized learning experiences to students from diverse backgrounds. Al-powered online platforms, virtual tutoring, and adaptive learning systems can help students in underserved regions access high-quality education.
- Creating Barriers to Equity: However, AI can also exacerbate inequalities if
 not implemented carefully. For instance, AI systems used in admissions or
 grading may unintentionally favor privileged students or penalize those
 from underrepresented groups. Journalists should investigate whether AI is
 being used in ways that promote fairness and equity.

Al and the Digital Divide

The digital divide remains a significant barrier to equitable Al adoption in higher education:

- Access to Technology: All systems rely on access to technology, such as
 computers and reliable internet connections. Students from low-income
 families or rural areas may struggle to engage with Al-driven platforms,
 widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.
 Journalists should explore how universities are addressing this divide.
- Supporting Underserved Communities: All can support underserved
 communities by identifying students who are struggling and offering
 targeted interventions. Predictive analytics can help universities identify
 at-risk students, but care must be taken to avoid reinforcing biases against
 certain groups. Journalists should investigate whether All is truly supporting
 underserved communities or if it is unintentionally creating new barriers.

Al Bias and Its Impact on Equity

Al systems can perpetuate bias, particularly if they are trained on data that reflects existing inequalities:

- Bias in Al Systems: Al systems may unintentionally discriminate against
 minority students, low-income applicants, or first-generation college
 students if they are trained on biased data sets. Journalists should
 investigate how universities are ensuring that Al systems are fair and that
 they do not perpetuate existing inequalities.
- Equitable AI Development and Deployment: Universities and AI vendors
 must prioritize equity in AI system development. Journalists should explore
 whether universities are engaging diverse stakeholders in the
 development process and whether AI systems are regularly tested for
 fairness.

Al's Impact on Academic Opportunities

All has the potential to reshape academic opportunities for students:

- Personalized Learning: All systems can offer personalized learning
 experiences that accommodate different learning styles and needs. This
 can be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities, non-traditional
 students, or those from under-resourced schools. Journalists should
 investigate whether All is improving educational outcomes for these
 groups.
- Widening or Narrowing the Opportunity Gap: All has the potential to either
 widen or narrow the opportunity gap in education. Journalists should
 explore whether All tools are disproportionately available to wealthier
 students and institutions or whether they are truly leveling the playing field.

University-Led Initiatives to Promote AI Equity

Universities have a responsibility to ensure that AI is deployed in ways that promote equity and inclusion:

- University-Led Initiatives: Some universities are taking proactive steps to
 ensure that AI systems are inclusive and equitable. These institutions may
 partner with AI ethics organizations, develop diverse data sets, or engage
 with advocacy groups to shape ethical AI strategies. Journalists should
 report on these initiatives and their impact.
- Institutional Responsibility and Accountability: Universities must be held accountable for ensuring that AI does not exacerbate inequalities.
 Journalists should investigate whether universities are prioritizing equity in

their AI adoption strategies and whether they are taking steps to address any unintended consequences.

Key Competency: Investigating Al's Impact on Access and Equity

Journalists need to understand the role AI plays in either promoting or undermining equity in higher education:

- Investigating the Digital Divide: Journalists should investigate whether Al
 systems are accessible to all students or whether they are creating new
 barriers for disadvantaged students. This includes examining how
 universities are addressing issues of access to technology and whether
 they are working to close the digital divide.
- Exploring Bias in Al Systems: Journalists should look for evidence of bias in
 Al systems and investigate whether universities are taking steps to mitigate
 these risks. Reporting on how Al systems are tested for fairness is essential
 for ensuring accountability.
- Highlighting Success Stories and Challenges: While it is important to
 expose where AI is failing, journalists should also report on success stories
 where AI has improved access and outcomes for underserved students.
 These stories can provide models for other institutions to follow and
 demonstrate the potential of AI to promote equity.

9. Investigating AI in Academia

Data Journalism and Al

Data journalism plays a crucial role in uncovering the effects of Al in higher education:

- Using Data to Investigate AI in Higher Education: AI systems produce and
 rely on vast amounts of data. Journalists can use data journalism
 techniques to analyze patterns of bias, trends in AI adoption, and the
 outcomes of AI-driven decisions. This could involve analyzing admissions
 data, grading outcomes, or student performance metrics.
- Scrutinizing Al Algorithms: Journalists should investigate how Al algorithms are developed and trained. Many Al systems function as "black boxes," with decision-making processes that are difficult to understand. Investigating whether Al systems have been tested for fairness and transparency is key to ensuring accountability.

Institutional Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are essential for ethical AI use in higher education:

- Investigating Institutional Partnerships with AI Vendors: Universities often
 work with third-party vendors to provide AI systems. Journalists should
 explore these partnerships, investigating whether universities thoroughly
 vet AI vendors and whether vendors are transparent about how their
 systems function.
- Exposing Lack of Transparency in Al Use: Many universities deploy Al
 systems without clearly disclosing how they work. Journalists should expose
 cases where institutions fail to inform students and faculty about how Al
 systems are being used, particularly in areas like admissions and grading.

Investigating Bias and Ethical Violations

Bias and ethical violations in AI systems can have serious consequences for students and faculty:

- Uncovering Bias in AI Systems: AI systems used in admissions, grading, and student monitoring may reflect biases that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups. Journalists should investigate whether AI tools are being regularly audited for fairness and whether institutions are taking steps to mitigate bias.
- Exposing Ethical Violations: Beyond bias, universities may also face ethical
 challenges related to privacy and student consent. Journalists should
 investigate whether institutions are using AI systems ethically and whether
 students and faculty are fully informed about how their data is being
 used.

Following the Money: Funding and Influence on Al Adoption

Financial considerations play a key role in Al adoption decisions:

- Investigating AI Funding Sources: Universities often receive external
 funding for AI initiatives, either from government grants or private tech
 companies. Journalists should investigate whether these funding sources
 influence AI adoption decisions and whether universities are prioritizing
 cost savings over ethical concerns.
- Examining the Financial Impact of AI on Universities: While AI systems may reduce costs in some areas, they can also create new financial burdens, such as ongoing maintenance and upgrades. Journalists should investigate whether AI adoption is leading to tuition increases or job losses, particularly among faculty and staff.

Building a Network of Sources

Journalists need to cultivate a network of sources to effectively investigate AI in higher education:

- Engaging with AI Experts and Whistleblowers: Journalists should develop relationships with AI experts, academics, and whistleblowers who can provide insights into how AI systems work behind the scenes. These sources can help journalists understand technical issues and uncover ethical concerns.
- **Engaging with Advocacy Groups:** Advocacy organizations, such as civil rights groups and AI ethics coalitions, can offer valuable perspectives on

the social and ethical implications of AI in higher education. Journalists should engage with these groups to stay informed about ongoing debates and investigations.

Investigative Techniques and FOIA Requests

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are essential tools for investigative journalists:

- Using FOIA Requests: Public universities are often subject to FOIA laws, allowing journalists to request information about AI systems, contracts with vendors, and audits of AI tools. Journalists should use FOIA requests to obtain documents that shed light on how AI is being deployed in higher education.
- Requesting Audits and Impact Assessments: Universities may conduct
 internal audits or impact assessments of their AI systems. Journalists should
 request these audits to determine whether AI tools are being tested for
 fairness, transparency, and accuracy.

Tracking Al Trends and Staying Informed

Staying informed about AI developments is essential for journalists:

- Following Developments in AI Research: AI is a rapidly evolving field.
 Journalists should stay up to date with the latest research on AI ethics, bias mitigation, and transparency. Engaging with AI researchers can help journalists anticipate future trends and understand emerging technologies.
- Tracking Legal and Regulatory Changes: All regulations and legal frameworks are constantly evolving. Journalists should track new policies and court cases related to All in education, ensuring that their reporting is current and relevant.

Key Competency: Investigative Skills for Covering AI in Academia

Journalists need to develop strong investigative skills to uncover hidden biases, ethical violations, and transparency issues in AI systems:

- Data Journalism: Journalists should use data journalism techniques to investigate trends and patterns in AI adoption, including whether AI systems are producing fair and equitable outcomes for students
- Investigative Techniques: FOIA requests, interviews with whistleblowers, and engaging with AI experts are essential for uncovering how AI systems are being used in higher education. Journalists must be persistent and creative in their investigative efforts.
- Reporting on Ethical Concerns: Investigating and reporting on ethical
 concerns related to AI use in higher education is crucial for ensuring
 accountability. Journalists should expose cases where AI systems are
 harming students or faculty and push for greater transparency and
 fairness.

10. Narrative Techniques for Covering AI in Education

Simplifying Complex Al Topics for General Audiences

All can be difficult to understand for the general public. Journalists must simplify technical concepts without oversimplifying them:

- Making Al Concepts Accessible: Journalists need to break down Al
 concepts such as machine learning, neural networks, and data algorithms
 into relatable terms. Using analogies and simple language helps make
 these ideas more accessible to non-experts while maintaining accuracy.
- Balancing Technical Accuracy with Storytelling: Journalists must strike a
 balance between providing enough technical detail to explain Al's
 complexities and crafting compelling stories that focus on the human
 impact. Technical details should support the narrative without
 overwhelming the reader.

Human-Centered Stories About Al

Al is not just about technology—it's about the people who are affected by it

- Focusing on Individual Impact: All systems influence students, faculty, and staff in significant ways. Journalists should focus on how Al-driven decisions affect individual lives, whether it's an admissions decision or a grade determined by an All tool. Personal stories help humanize the broader implications of Al.
- Illustrating Broader Trends Through Personal Stories: While personal stories
 are compelling, they should also be used to illustrate broader trends. A
 story about a student whose Al-driven grading experience felt unfair can
 highlight larger questions about bias and fairness in automated grading
 systems.

Using Data and Visualizations to Tell AI Stories

Data-driven journalism is essential for covering AI: Telling Stories with Data:
 AI relies on data, and journalists should use data-driven storytelling to
 uncover patterns, biases, and outcomes. Visualizations such as charts,
 graphs, and infographics can help readers understand complex
 information more easily.

 Combining Data with Personal Narratives: Combining data analysis with personal stories can create more impactful reporting. While data reveals trends, personal narratives provide emotional depth, making the issue more relatable for readers.

Framing AI Stories in Broader Social and Ethical Contexts

Al stories should be framed within the larger social and ethical issues they raise:

- Connecting AI to Broader Social Issues: All is deeply connected to broader social issues such as inequality, privacy, and bias. Journalists should frame their AI stories within these larger contexts to show readers the wider implications of AI adoption in education.
- Exploring Ethical Dilemmas in AI: Al introduces many ethical dilemmas, such as algorithmic transparency, bias, and the potential loss of human agency. Journalists should explore these ethical concerns, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of the trade-offs involved in AI use.
- Key Competency: Mastering Narrative Techniques for AI Reporting
- Journalists must develop strong narrative techniques to make AI stories engaging and informative:
- **Simplifying Complex Topics:** Journalists need to master the ability to explain complex AI concepts in simple terms without losing accuracy. This involves using analogies, storytelling, and clear explanations to make AI accessible to a broad audience.
- Combining Data with Personal Stories: The best AI reporting combines
 data-driven analysis with human-centered stories. This combination helps
 journalists highlight the real-world impact of AI while providing a factual
 basis for their reporting.
- Framing Stories in Ethical Contexts: All stories should always be framed
 within the broader ethical issues they raise. Journalists should explore the
 societal implications of Al, such as how it affects equity, privacy, and
 fairness in education.