

# 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 AI 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. AI 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:** AI has the potential to either enhance or undermine equity in education. Journalists need to highlight whether AI systems promote fairness or, conversely, reinforce existing inequalities. It's their responsibility to investigate how AI 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 AI 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

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

- **Widespread Impact on Education Systems:** AI touches many facets of higher education, from administrative processes to learning outcomes, faculty roles, and research. AI 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 AI's impact, including how universities make key decisions like admissions or use AI-based learning platforms, providing stakeholders with a comprehensive understanding of the technology's influence.
- **Shaping the Future of Higher Education:** AI has the potential to change universities' structure, enabling new learning models, such as personalized and adaptive learning. Journalists must address the question: Will AI replace or enhance traditional educational models? They should investigate how AI 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:** AI has the potential to democratize education by providing personalized learning to more students, especially those in under-resourced or remote areas. However, AI could also exacerbate inequality if the technology is disproportionately available to students or institutions with more resources. Journalists must report on whether AI 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:** AI 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:** AI 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 AI-related ethical concerns and prompting policymakers to regulate AI's role in education. By offering evidence-based investigations, journalists help ensure the responsible use of AI.

## Impact on Equity

AI'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 AI Tools:** AI adoption varies greatly between institutions. Wealthier universities may have access to cutting-edge AI 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 AI.
- **Reporting on Success Stories:** While it's important to investigate where AI is failing, journalists should also report on success stories where AI 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:** AI'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. AI Basics for Journalists

#### Technical Overview of AI

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

- **What is AI?:** AI refers to systems capable of performing tasks that traditionally require human intelligence, such as recognizing patterns, processing natural language, or solving problems. AI 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 AI-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 AI Concepts for Journalists

Journalists should familiarize themselves with the following key AI concepts:

- **Algorithms:** At its core, AI relies on algorithms, which are sets of rules or procedures for solving problems. Journalists should understand that AI 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:** AI models are trained using large datasets. If these datasets are incomplete or biased, the resulting AI 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.

## AI Bias and Limitations

AI 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 AI 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 AI decisions or understand their rationale.
- **Data Privacy and Ethics:** AI 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 AI Applications in Higher Education

AI is used across various areas in higher education:

- **AI in Admissions:** Universities increasingly rely on AI-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.
- **AI in Teaching and Learning:** AI-powered platforms personalize education by adjusting content and pacing to meet individual student needs. Virtual assistants and AI tutors provide real-time feedback in large online courses.

- **AI in Grading and Evaluation:** AI 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.
- **AI in Research and Academic Publishing:** AI tools enhance research by analyzing large datasets and helping researchers identify trends. AI can also assist in academic publishing, streamlining processes such as literature reviews or recommending reviewers for papers.

## Journalists' Role in Covering AI Technologies

Journalists should be equipped to cover the development and deployment of AI 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 AI 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. AI Applications in Higher Education

### AI in Admissions

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

- **Automating Admissions Decisions:** AI 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:** AI 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.

### AI in Teaching and Learning

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

- **Adaptive Learning Platforms:** AI-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.
- **AI Tutors and Virtual Assistants:** AI 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 AI and the loss of personal interaction between students and instructors should be considered.

- **Automated Grading Systems:** AI 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 AI grading tools are being tested for fairness and accuracy.

## AI in Student Monitoring and Engagement

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

- **Predicting Student Success:** AI 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:** AI 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:** AI 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.

## AI in Research and Academic Publishing

AI is revolutionizing how research is conducted and published:

- **AI-Driven Research Tools:** AI tools can analyze large datasets much faster than humans, enabling researchers to identify trends and develop hypotheses more quickly. AI 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 AI 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.

- **AI in Academic Publishing:** AI 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 AI 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 AI Systems:** AI 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 AI Algorithms

AI 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 AI systems used in higher education:

- **Bias in Admissions Algorithms:** AI 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:** AI 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 AI 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

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

- **Data Collection and Consent:** AI 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 AI

AI tools in education raise new questions about academic integrity:

- **AI-Driven Cheating:** AI tools can be used by students to cheat, such as using AI-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 AI-enabled cheating.
- **AI in Plagiarism Detection:** Many universities use AI tools to detect plagiarism. While these systems can be effective, they may also flag legitimate work as plagiarized. Journalists should investigate whether AI 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.

## AI and Ethical Decision-Making

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

- **Automated Decision-Making:** AI 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 AI 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 AI

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 AI. Their reporting can push institutions to adopt more ethical AI practices and increase transparency in how AI systems are used.



## 6. AI and the Future of the Academic Workforce

### Job Automation and Task Restructuring

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

- **Automation of Administrative Tasks:** AI 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.
- **AI-Driven Teaching Tools:** AI 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 AI 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.

### AI as a Teaching Aid vs. Replacement

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

- **Blended Learning Models:** AI can be used to create blended learning environments, where virtual assistants or AI tutors support traditional teaching methods. While AI can help with scalability and personalized learning, concerns arise over the loss of human interaction in learning environments.
- **AI's Impact on Faculty Roles:** As AI 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:** AI 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 AI-driven future:

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

## Key Competency: Reporting on AI'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 AI 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 AI 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 AI Adoption:** Journalists should examine whether AI adoption is impacting certain demographic groups more than others, particularly adjunct faculty, part-time workers, or underrepresented employees. Reporting on equity in AI use ensures that the story captures the full impact of AI on the academic workforce.

## 7. Policy and Regulation of AI in Academia

### Regulatory Frameworks Governing AI in Higher Education

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

- **Data Privacy Laws and Regulations:** AI 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 AI

Universities often establish their own policies to govern AI 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.
- **AI Accountability and Auditing:** AI systems should be audited regularly to ensure fairness, transparency, and accuracy. Journalists should investigate whether universities are conducting independent audits of their AI tools and whether these audits are transparent and publicly accessible. When AI 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 AI Vendors and Technology Providers:** Universities often work with third-party vendors to provide AI systems. Journalists should explore whether AI vendors are subject to government regulations and whether universities vet these vendors thoroughly before adopting their technologies.

## Public Advocacy for Ethical AI

Public pressure can drive universities to adopt ethical AI 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 AI 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 AI 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 AI. Reporting on how universities are handling audits, transparency, and bias mitigation helps ensure that institutions use AI responsibly.

## 8. AI in Higher Education Access and Equity

### AI as an Equalizer or Barrier

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

- **Bridging Gaps in Access:** AI can enhance educational access by providing personalized learning experiences to students from diverse backgrounds. AI-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.

### AI and the Digital Divide

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

- **Access to Technology:** AI 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 AI-driven platforms, widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Journalists should explore how universities are addressing this divide.
- **Supporting Underserved Communities:** AI 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 AI is truly supporting underserved communities or if it is unintentionally creating new barriers.

### AI Bias and Its Impact on Equity

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

- **Bias in AI Systems:** AI 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 AI 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.

## AI's Impact on Academic Opportunities

AI has the potential to reshape academic opportunities for students:

- **Personalized Learning:** AI 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 AI is improving educational outcomes for these groups.
- **Widening or Narrowing the Opportunity Gap:** AI has the potential to either widen or narrow the opportunity gap in education. Journalists should explore whether AI 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 AI'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 AI 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 AI Systems:** Journalists should look for evidence of bias in AI systems and investigate whether universities are taking steps to mitigate these risks. Reporting on how AI 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 AI

Data journalism plays a crucial role in uncovering the effects of AI 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 AI Algorithms:** Journalists should investigate how AI algorithms are developed and trained. Many AI systems function as “black boxes,” with decision-making processes that are difficult to understand. Investigating whether AI 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 AI Use:** Many universities deploy AI systems without clearly disclosing how they work. Journalists should expose cases where institutions fail to inform students and faculty about how AI 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 AI Adoption

Financial considerations play a key role in AI 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 AI 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:** AI regulations and legal frameworks are constantly evolving. Journalists should track new policies and court cases related to AI 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 AI Topics for General Audiences

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

- **Making AI Concepts Accessible:** Journalists need to break down AI 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 AI'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 AI

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

- **Focusing on Individual Impact:** AI systems influence students, faculty, and staff in significant ways. Journalists should focus on how AI-driven decisions affect individual lives, whether it's an admissions decision or a grade determined by an AI tool. Personal stories help humanize the broader implications of AI.
- **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 AI-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

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

- **Connecting AI to Broader Social Issues:** AI 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:** AI 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:** AI stories should always be framed within the broader ethical issues they raise. Journalists should explore the societal implications of AI, such as how it affects equity, privacy, and fairness in education.