

Subject: Weekly AI in Higher Education Report - June 26, 2026

Dear AL@pitt.edu,

Please find the weekly digest of AI in higher education news below, focusing on teaching and learning tools, research, and institutional policy developments.

Executive Summary

- **AI Grade Inflation Confirmed:** A massive UC Berkeley study of 500,000 grades found a 30% jump in 'A' grades in writing/coding-heavy courses since ChatGPT's launch, primarily driven by unsupervised homework assignments, suggesting AI is replacing student work rather than improving learning [1].
- **Shift to Socratic Teaching:** The Dean of UT Austin School of Law issued a memo urging faculty to emphasize Socratic teaching methods to combat AI reliance, noting the classroom is the "sole context" where supervised learning without AI can be guaranteed [2].
- **Strict AI Bans Emerge:** UC Berkeley School of Law enacted one of the strictest AI policies in higher education, banning generative AI for conceptualizing, outlining, drafting, and revising most graded work beginning Summer 2026 [3].
- **Bipartisan Guardrails in NC:** The North Carolina Senate unanimously advanced a bill to mandate AI literacy education and establish ethical guardrails for AI tools in public schools, alongside training for educators via NC State University [4].
- **Faculty AI Externships:** Universities like Ball State and UConn are expanding faculty-to-industry externship programs this summer to help professors bring emerging AI skills and workforce expectations back to their classrooms [5].
- **The "AI Detection Economy":** Educators warn of an illicit market where students purchase their essays' "AI-likelihood scores" from commercial detection tools to edit their work and artificially lower their scores before official submission [6].

Major News and Developments

AI Driving Significant Grade Inflation Without Skill Gains

A rigorous new study from UC Berkeley's Center for Studies in Higher Education analyzed over 500,000 grades across eight fall semesters at a large Texas research university. The study revealed that in courses with high shares of writing and coding assignments, the proportion of students earning 'A' grades jumped by 13 percentage points (roughly 30% above the 2022 baseline) following the release of ChatGPT [1]. Crucially, the grade increases were concentrated in courses where unsupervised homework carried a heavy weight. In contrast, grades for

proctored exams and oral presentations remained flat. Researchers concluded that the data points to AI replacing student work rather than driving broad learning gains [1].

The Emotional Toll of AI on Educators

A column in Inside Higher Ed highlighted the emotional impact of AI on faculty, noting feelings of anger, sadness, and despair as generative AI disrupts traditional educational models [7]. The piece argues that while AI can automate certain tasks, the true opportunity lies in re-emphasizing the “human” elements of teaching, such as embodied expertise and relational learning. The author advocates for alternative grading approaches that make student learning visible and center the educational experience on human agency [7].

The Rise of the “AI Detection Economy”

Academics at the City University of Hong Kong raised alarms about a new “AI detection economy.” Students are reportedly paying third-party vendors to run their drafts through proprietary academic integrity tools (like Turnitin) to check their “AI-likelihood scores” [6]. Students then use “AI humanizer” tools or manually edit their work to lower the score before officially submitting the assignment to their university. The authors argue this practice transforms the pedagogical value of revision into a mere exercise in score manipulation, and call on universities to rethink the use of AI detection tools [6].

Institutional Implementations

UC Berkeley Law Enacts Strict AI Ban

UC Berkeley School of Law has implemented a sweeping ban on generative AI for most graded student work, effective Summer 2026 [3]. The default policy prohibits AI assistance in conceptualizing, outlining, drafting, revising, translating, or editing assignments, as well as uploading course materials to AI systems. Instructors may only allow limited AI use in specially designed courses focused on AI fluency, requiring full disclosure [3].

UT Austin Law Pushes Socratic Method

In response to AI’s impact on learning essential skills, the Dean of the University of Texas at Austin School of Law issued a memo calling on faculty to emphasize Socratic teaching methods [2]. The memo argues that the classroom is the only environment where professors can ensure students are learning without AI assistance, and urges faculty to ensure students are not reliant on screens during class dialogue [2].

Faculty-to-Industry AI Externships

To bridge the gap between academic curricula and rapidly evolving workplace AI demands, institutions are sending faculty into the industry. Ball State University and the University of Connecticut (UConn) have expanded their summer faculty externship programs [5]. Professors spend time at companies like Pratt & Whitney and various tech firms to learn what AI competencies employers expect, with the goal of embedding these skills into their courses upon return [5].

Research and Studies

Student Experience and Perspectives on GenAI

A large-scale survey of over 8,000 students across four Australian universities examined the frequency and purpose of GenAI usage [8]. The study found that over 80% of students have used GenAI for study-related tasks, primarily for editing, summarizing, and idea generation. Interestingly, students adopt GenAI pragmatically: they exhibit low trust in its factual accuracy but high confidence in their own ability to manage it as a support tool [8]. The research also highlighted equity gaps, noting proportionately lower engagement among women, non-binary students, and neurodivergent students [8].

Rethinking Critical Thinking Instruction

A viewpoint article in Inside Higher Ed argued that the rise of AI exposes a long-standing failure in higher education: the assumption that critical thinking is a natural by-product of rigorous coursework [9]. Citing a survey where 90% of faculty fear AI will diminish critical thinking, the authors advocate for shifting to a “focus model” where critical thinking and argument mapping are taught explicitly as standalone skills, rather than relying on the friction of traditional research and drafting, which AI now easily bypasses [9].

Policy and Guidelines Updates

North Carolina Advances AI Education Legislation

The North Carolina Senate unanimously passed House Bill 301, which mandates AI literacy education and sets ethical guardrails for AI use in K-12 public schools [4]. The bill requires the Department of Public Instruction to develop a model policy addressing data privacy, academic integrity, and AI tool evaluation. It also partners with NC State University’s Friday Institute to provide comprehensive online training modules for educators on the responsible instructional use of AI [4].

Reforming Honor Codes in the AI Age

As AI blurs the lines of academic misconduct, universities are reconsidering traditional honor codes. With 85% of students reporting some use of generative AI for coursework, the social norms that once governed honor codes are losing influence when students work alone with AI [10]. Institutions like Stanford and Princeton have recently moved to reinstate proctored exams, shifting enforcement from students back to faculty, as educators debate whether honor codes can survive when the definition of cheating varies widely by professor and assignment [10].

Emerging Trends

- **Curriculum Alignment via AI Analytics:** Community colleges are increasingly using AI and data analytics to process labor market intelligence (LMI) and align their academic programs with regional workforce needs [11].
- **Combating Deepfakes on Campus:** Higher education IT departments are ramping up defenses against AI-generated deepfakes and voice clones, which are being used to impersonate university leaders for financial fraud and to create fake student identities [12].
- **Specialized AI Degrees:** Universities are launching dedicated AI programs, such as the Kahlert School of Computing's new AI major at the University of Utah and Menlo College's AI & Analytics business degree in California.
- **AI Fluency as a Core Competency:** Institutions like Strayer University are integrating AI fluency throughout their academic programs from day one, preparing students to be informed practitioners who can responsibly shape AI adoption in their respective industries [13].

Source Links

[1] Tech Times. "AI Grade Inflation Documented in 500,000 Grades: Homework Rises, Skills Do Not." <https://www.techtimes.com/articles/318817/20260622/ai-grade-inflation-documented-500000-grades-homework-rises-skills-do-not.htm> [2] Inside Higher Ed. "Texas Law Dean Pushes Socratic Teaching Amid Rise of AI." <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2026/06/26/u-texas-law-dean-calls-socratic-teaching-combat-ai> [3] Dallas Express. "UC Berkeley Law Bans AI For Student Work — Why Texas Students Should Pay Attention." <https://dallasexpress.com/education/uc-berkeley-law-bans-ai-for-student-work-why-texas-students-should-pay-attention/> [4] Carolina Public Press. "Putting guardrails on AI in education. Bipartisan support for NC legislation." <https://carolinapublicpress.org/75963/artificial-intelligence-education-nc-guardrails-bipartisan-support-ai-dpi-legislation/> [5] Inside Higher Ed. "Meet the Externs: How Faculty Use Workplace Experience to Help Students." <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty/career-development/2026/06/25/how-faculty-use->

[workplace-experience-help-students](#) [6] Times Higher Education. “Universities must help shut down the illicit AI detection economy.”
<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/opinion/universities-must-help-shut-down-illicit-ai-detection-economy> [7] Inside Higher Ed. “The Emotional Toll of AI in Education.”
<https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/columns/just-visiting/2026/06/22/ai-drains-spirit-out-teaching-we-can-get-it-back> [8] Computers and Education Open. “The use and usefulness of GenAI in higher education: Student experience and perspectives.”
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666557326000182> [9] Inside Higher Ed. “We Have Never Taught Critical Thinking.”
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<https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2026/06/how-community-colleges-can-use-data-align-curriculum-workforce-needs> [12] EdTech Magazine. “Higher Ed Institutions Ramp Up Defenses Against Deepfakes.” <https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2026/06/higher-ed-institutions-ramp-defenses-against-deepfakes> [13] Higher Ed Dive. “Meeting the modern student where they are: How Strayer is advancing creative and technology innovation.”
<https://www.highereddive.com/spons/meeting-the-modern-student-where-they-are-how-strayer-is-advancing-creativ/822862/>