

Weekly AI in Higher Education Report - May 29, 2026

Executive Summary

- **Federal Policy Shift:** The White House released its National Policy Framework for AI, recommending that Congress preempt state-level AI laws to create a single federal standard, while heavily emphasizing the integration of AI into existing education and workforce programs [1].
- **Emerging Admissions Guidelines:** A new framework by the National Student Legal Defense Network offers 10 "Dos and Don'ts" for deploying AI in college admissions, stressing the need for human oversight and transparency [2].
- **Shift from Integrity to Identity:** Recent research suggests that course-level generative AI governance is moving beyond mere academic integrity to shaping graduate students' scholarly subject formation, highlighting the need for discipline-sensitive expectations [3].
- **The "Efficiency-Understanding Trade-off":** A new study found that while AI support increases efficiency, it significantly reduces conceptual integration and transfer, confirming an "efficiency-understanding trade-off" mediated by cognitive outsourcing [4].
- **Rapid Student Adoption:** Longitudinal research shows a substantial increase in first-year undergraduate engagement with generative AI, with growing familiarization and confidence, indicating a rapid shift in student attitudes [5].
- **Focus on Actual Intelligence:** Educators are advocating for a focus on "ACTUAL intelligence"—agency, connection, trust, uniqueness, adaptability, and lifelong learning—to ensure AI enhances rather than replaces human judgment [6].
- **The National AI Equity Lab:** A new initiative aims to address inequities in AI development and implementation, ensuring that the proliferation of AI does not exacerbate the digital divide [7].

Major News and Developments

The White House National AI Policy Framework

The White House has released a comprehensive National Policy Framework for Artificial Intelligence, which places a significant emphasis on education and workforce training [1]. Crucially, the framework calls for embedding AI training into existing programs rather than creating standalone initiatives. It also recommends that Congress mandate child protections on AI platforms, including age-verification and parental oversight [1]. Perhaps most significantly for the education sector, the framework proposes preempting state-level AI laws to prevent a "50-state patchwork" of conflicting rules, potentially consolidating federal authority over AI education policy [1].

Guidelines for AI in College Admissions

As more institutions turn to AI to assist in application reviews, the National Student Legal Defense Network has published a framework titled "Dos and Don'ts of AI in

College Application Evaluation" [2]. The guidelines emphasize the necessity of transparency, human oversight, and clear articulation of expectations regarding applicant AI use. The framework warns that while AI can improve efficiency, it can also amplify bias and erode trust if not implemented carefully [2].

Launch of the National AI Equity Lab

Dr. Shaun Harper has announced the creation of the National AI Equity Lab, which will launch in summer 2026 [7]. The lab aims to address inequities in the development and implementation of AI technologies, focusing on under-resourced K-12 schools, HBCUs, and community colleges. The initiative will develop equity-focused rubrics to assess AI use in educational institutions and create partnerships to upskill students in emerging AI technologies [7].

Institutional Implementations

Boston Public Schools Mandates AI Literacy

Boston has become the first major U.S. school district to make AI fluency a graduation requirement for all high schoolers, starting in September 2026 [1]. Backed by a \$1 million grant, the program will train teachers using a curriculum developed by UMass Boston, focusing on ethics and critical engagement rather than passive tool use [1].

New York City Department of Education Releases Preliminary AI Guidance

The NYC Department of Education has released foundational guidance for AI use across its 1.1 million-student system [1]. The framework allows teachers to use AI for lesson planning and communication but strictly prohibits its use for assigning grades or making disciplinary decisions. Every AI tool must undergo a rigorous vetting process before deployment [1].

University of Florida Leads K-12 AI Task Force

The University of Florida is chairing the Florida K-12 AI Education Task Force, a statewide body uniting 250 members to develop coordinated guidance for teaching and learning with AI [1]. This initiative aims to create a community-driven approach to AI integration across the state's school districts [1].

Research and Studies

The Efficiency-Understanding Trade-off

A study published in *Computers in Human Behavior Reports* investigated the behavioral mechanisms of AI-assisted learning [4]. The research found that while AI support increased task efficiency, it significantly reduced conceptual integration and transfer. This "efficiency-understanding trade-off" is mediated by cognitive outsourcing. The study highlights that behavioral outcomes depend heavily on how learners regulate trust, effort, and autonomy when collaborating with AI [4].

Rapidly Changing Student Attitudes

Research published in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* examined the attitudes of first-year undergraduate students towards generative AI over a 12-month period [5]. The study revealed a substantial increase in student engagement, familiarization, and confidence in using AI tools. This rapid evolution underscores the urgent need for higher education institutions to adapt their policies and support frameworks to align with student competencies [5].

Course-Level Generative AI Governance

A study in *Frontiers in Education* shifted the focus of AI governance from academic integrity to scholarly subject formation [3]. Analyzing graduate course syllabi and student interviews, the research identified four governance regimes and found that students interpret AI use through questions of authorship, scholarly independence, and linguistic legitimacy. The findings suggest a need for more coherent, discipline-sensitive guidance and protections for multilingual writers [3].

Policy and Guidelines Updates

The SafeAI Framework

Institutions are increasingly adopting structured frameworks to evaluate AI tools. The SafeAI framework, adapted from Charles Sturt University's S.E.C.U.R.E. framework, guides educators in assessing the security and ethical implications of using specific AI tools in their teaching [8]. The framework prompts users to consider data protection, intellectual property, and the potential for unethical activities before adopting a tool [8].

From Policy to Practice in Australian Classrooms

Research exploring the integration of GenAI in Australian postgraduate ICT units highlights a growing gap between institutional policy and classroom practice [9]. The study found that making GenAI use explicit through structured templates and embedding it into learning activities helped students move from passive use to critical evaluation. The findings emphasize that students need structure, not just permission, to use AI effectively [9].

Emerging Trends

Centering "ACTUAL" Intelligence

Amidst the rapid adoption of AI, there is a growing movement among educators to center "ACTUAL intelligence"—agency, connection, trust, uniqueness, adaptability, and lifelong learning [6]. This approach argues that while AI can improve efficiency, it must not replace human judgment, relationships, and the fundamental human capacity to reason and connect [6].

AI and the Threat to Critical Thinking

Concerns persist about AI's impact on critical thinking. An article in the AAUP's *Academe Magazine* warns that generative AI is enabling students to bypass the "friction

of learning"—the struggle to synthesize and articulate ideas [10]. The author argues that AI accelerates the neoliberal logic of the university, transforming education into a frictionless credentialing process rather than a site for intellectual development [10].

Source Links

- [1] Pursuit.us: "AI News in Education Industry that Matter the Most | Jan-Mar' 26" - <https://www.pursuit.us/news/ai-news-in-education-industry-that-matter-the-most>
- [2] Inside Higher Ed: "Before Deploying AI in Admissions, Ask Why" - <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/tech-innovation/artificial-intelligence/2026/05/27/deploying-ai-admissions-ask-why>
- [3] Frontiers in Education: "From Integrity to Identity: Course-Level Generative AI Governance and Scholarly Subject Formation in Graduate Education" - <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/education/articles/10.3389/feduc.2026.1827251/full>
- [4] ScienceDirect: "When learning meets the machine: How AI-assisted tools reshape deep and surface learning in higher education" - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2451958826001314>
- [5] Taylor & Francis Online: "Rapidly changing attitudes of university students on the use of generative artificial intelligence" - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2026.2634035>
- [6] EDUCAUSE Review: "ACTUAL Intelligence: Practitioner Perspectives on Centering the Human in the Age of AI" - <https://er.educause.edu/articles/2026/5/actual-intelligence-practitioner-perspectives-on-centering-the-human-in-the-age-of-ai>
- [7] Inside Higher Ed: "Why I Created the National AI Equity Lab" - <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/columns/resident-scholar/2026/05/29/why-i-created-national-ai-equity-lab>
- [8] Times Higher Education: "How to choose the right AI tools for teaching" - <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/how-choose-right-ai-tools-teaching>
- [9] EduResearch Matters: "From policy to practice: what does GenAI use in classrooms actually look like?" - <https://blog.aare.edu.au/from-policy-to-practice-what-does-genai-use-in-classrooms-actually-look-like/>
- [10] AAUP Academe Magazine: "AI and Critical Thinking" - <https://www.aaup.org/issue/spring-2026/ai-and-critical-thinking>