

The Rise of the AI-Enabled University: How Institutions Are Putting AI Into Practice

Universities are moving beyond simply providing access to AI tools. The next phase is integrating AI into curricula, assessment, research, and institutional strategy.

Artificial intelligence is entering a new phase in higher education.

The first response from many universities was largely defensive: Should students be allowed to use ChatGPT? How can AI-generated assignments be detected? What does generative AI mean for academic integrity?

The conversation is now changing.

Universities are increasingly moving from **AI experimentation to institutional implementation**. Instead of treating AI as an optional technology that individual students or faculty members can explore independently, institutions are beginning to provide AI infrastructure, redesign curricula and assessment, establish university-wide policies, and integrate AI into research.

The question is no longer simply whether universities should use AI.

It is becoming:

What should a university look like when AI is embedded across its academic ecosystem?

From Access to Integration

One of the clearest examples is the **National University of Singapore (NUS)**.

Beginning 31 August 2026, NUS will provide ChatGPT Edu access to students, faculty, and staff through a university-managed environment. But access to the technology is only one part of the strategy.

NUS is also introducing a compulsory first-year module on applied generative AI and plans to integrate AI competencies throughout students' studies. The university is explicitly targeting AI fluency—not simply the ability to use an AI tool, but the ability to apply AI critically and appropriately within a discipline.

NUS is also applying AI to research discovery. Its AI Sense Maker platform draws on more than 150,000 digitised library resources, allowing researchers and students to explore topics using conversational queries, semantic search, references, and knowledge graphs.

This represents a significant shift.

AI is no longer being treated as a standalone application. It is becoming part of the **educational and research infrastructure of the university**.

The University-Wide AI Experiment

The **University of Colorado** provides another important example.

Across the CU system, ChatGPT Edu is being made available to students, faculty, and staff through a system-wide agreement with OpenAI. Student access began in August 2026, following the earlier rollout to faculty and staff.

Importantly, the university has paired access with required training covering responsible and effective AI use in an academic environment.

This model illustrates a challenge that many institutions will face.

Providing access to AI is relatively straightforward.

Teaching an entire university how to use it responsibly is much harder.

Once students and employees have access to institutional AI tools, universities must address questions around privacy, academic integrity, appropriate use, data protection, training, and the educational value of AI-assisted work.

The implementation of AI therefore becomes as much a **governance challenge** as a technology project.

Assessment Is Being Redesigned

Perhaps the most consequential change is happening in assessment.

The University of Manchester's new AI in Teaching and Learning Policy takes effect on **1 September 2026**. Rather than applying a single rule to all assessments, the university has established four categories:

- **AI Prohibited**
- **AI Minimal**
- **AI Permitted**
- **AI-Integrated**

The approach recognizes that the appropriate use of AI can differ substantially between disciplines and assessments.

In some situations, students may need to demonstrate independent work without AI. In others, limited AI assistance may be appropriate. Some assessments may explicitly incorporate AI as part of the learning process.

This is an important development because it moves the discussion away from the simplistic question of whether AI should be "allowed."

The more useful question is:

What role should AI play in demonstrating learning?

That distinction could fundamentally change how universities design assignments, examinations, projects, and other forms of assessment.

AI Governance Is Becoming an Academic Function

Universities are also beginning to recognize that AI cannot be managed solely by IT departments.

Emory University recently established an **Academic AI Task Force** to develop a university-wide academic direction for AI. Its remit covers teaching and assessment, curriculum and AI literacy, academic integrity, research methods and ethics, interdisciplinary scholarship, infrastructure, and scholarly communication.

This is significant because it treats AI as an issue affecting the **academic mission of the university**, rather than simply its technology infrastructure.

Its research pillar will address responsible AI use in research, including methodological issues, ethical considerations, disclosure norms, training needs, transparency, and reproducibility.

This reflects an emerging reality: universities will increasingly need AI expertise not only in computer science departments, but across their academic and administrative structures.

From AI Users to AI-Enabled Institutions

Taken together, these developments point toward a broader transformation.

The first phase of university AI adoption was largely about **access—giving students and faculty institutional access to AI tools**.

The second phase is about **integration**.

AI is being incorporated into:

- curricula and graduate competencies;
- teaching and learning;
- assessment;
- research discovery;
- faculty development;
- academic policies;
- libraries and scholarly infrastructure.

The third phase may be **institutional transformation**.

In this model, AI becomes part of how the university operates—not simply another tool available to its community.

That could eventually affect everything from how students learn and researchers discover literature to how universities evaluate work, support faculty, manage knowledge, and interact with employers.

The Question of Human Intelligence

None of this means that universities are becoming less human.

In fact, the opposite may be true.

The more capable AI becomes, the more important uniquely human capabilities may become: critical thinking, judgment, creativity, ethical reasoning, curiosity, communication, and the ability to evaluate evidence.

The challenge for universities is therefore not to produce graduates who can simply operate AI tools.

It is to produce graduates who can **work intelligently with AI without surrendering their own intellectual judgment.**

That distinction will become increasingly important as AI moves deeper into academic life.

What Comes Next?

The universities currently experimenting with institution-wide AI are effectively becoming laboratories for the future of higher education.

Their experiences will reveal which approaches actually improve learning and research—and which simply add another layer of technology.

The next few years will likely produce a much more sophisticated understanding of institutional AI adoption. Universities will learn where AI creates genuine value, where human involvement remains essential, and where technological convenience may come at the expense of learning or academic integrity.

The defining question will therefore not be:

"Does your university use AI?"

Increasingly, every university will.

The more important question will be:

"How thoughtfully has your university integrated AI into its academic mission?"

The AI-enabled university is no longer a theoretical idea. It is beginning to take shape—and the institutions making these decisions today will help define what higher education looks like tomorrow.

Further Reading

- **National University of Singapore (NUS)** — *NUS Powers Education, Research and Administration to New Heights with AI Through a Strategic Collaboration with OpenAI* [Read the NUS announcement](#)
- **University of Colorado** — *ChatGPT Edu Now Available to Students; New Training Courses Are Live* [Read the University of Colorado announcement](#)
- **University of Manchester** — *AI in Teaching and Learning Policy Approved* [Read the University of Manchester policy update](#)
- **Emory University** — *New Academic AI Task Force Pursues Collective Vision for Emory's Future* [Read the Emory announcement](#)