

WE DON'T NEED

NO

EDUCATION

Cheating with Artificial Intelligence is now rampant at universities. Is it the death knell for higher education?

Story and pictures by Ros Thomas



Picture this: it's final exam week at Macquarie University in Sydney and Hayden, 24, is less than a month away from graduating with a bachelor's degree in social sciences. It has cost him more than \$45,000 and this is

his final push to the finish line; his assessments are all conducted online, with students given 48 hours to turn in their answers.

It's 7.40am, 20 minutes before the exam is due to begin, and Hayden is still asleep. Has he slept through his alarm, exhausted from late-night cramming? Nope. The only work he's done for this exam is researching which AI tool will cheat him the best marks.

In a minute or two, Hayden will roll out of bed, slap some water on his face and fire up his laptop. At 8am he'll feed his exam paper into ChatGPT. By 8.06am it will have gifted him 30 correct answers. Hayden knows a perfect score might trip the university's AI detectors, so he'll deliberately mangle a couple of responses to get him 94 per cent. Then he'll wait three hours to mimic a genuine exam effort, before firing his A-plus paper back to his examiner.

Welcome to the death of higher education.

Hayden has now graduated with a High Distinction. How much of his final year studies did he outsource to AI? "All of it," he says with-

out skipping a beat. "It's completely insane. In my smaller units, AI was covering 100 per cent of my coursework and 100 per cent of my exams. And that's not me outing myself, that's me outing everyone. You've got like, five per cent of students still putting in hours and hours of effort, and 95 per cent of us who are crawling out of bed ten minutes before exams and winging it with AI.

"In my whole degree, I never had an in-person exam. That's why ChatGPT has gone rampant. It's just so easy to cheat. There are hundreds of AI sites for us to use and dozens of ways to mix them up to make sure you don't get busted. In first year, we were all too scared to use AI, but in the past 18 months it's gone crazy. Now you can get ChatGPT to do your entire degree. In fact, you'd be stupid not to use AI if you want to do well."

In November 2022, the end of Hayden's first year of university, he finished with a narrow pass of 55 per cent just as OpenAI launched its Artificial Generative Intelligence juggernaut ChatGPT onto the market. By the end of third year, his marks had rocketed to 85-95 per cent.

"I went from being a bare pass C average to being an A-plus student in 18 months. All I was doing was feeding my essay and assignment prompts into ChatGPT and watching it spit out perfect structure, perfect content, perfect grammar, in three minutes flat. It was ridiculously easy. Then I'd ask a bunch of other AI apps to keep improving it to look more like a human wrote it. I scrambled the uni's detection software into thinking it was all written by me and my lecturers couldn't prove it wasn't."

Bemused, I ask, "Did you feel guilty?"

"Oh, yeah. Definitely at the start. I was very worried about getting into trouble, but the more I heard that everyone was using it, the quicker it swept away the shame because no one was paying the price for cheating. Everyone was getting through, so the guilt just vanished. It's a free-for-all. Me and my friends can't believe how blatant the cheating is. We know some random person walking down the street will know more about our degrees than we do."

Hayden is struck by another recollection and laughs: "You know, one semester a lecturer decided he was gonna make everyone turn up in person for the exam. There was complete panic because we all knew we couldn't cheat and our marks would be a disaster. It scared us for weeks – so much so, the head lecturer was flooded with written excuses: 'Sorry, but I can't

be at uni that day' or 'Sorry, I have family commitments' or transport issues or some other random reason they couldn't show up. Eventually he rolled over and announced, 'OK, so we're going to have to make that exam online.' It was the biggest relief of my life."

I've been interviewing students across the country about the rates of AI abuse in universities – and from undergrads to Honours and Masters students, their confessions of cheating are breathtaking. And not just for their brazenness, but for something more disturbing: an almost universal sense of satisfaction at having



Venerable: the University of Melbourne; opposite, Miles

"beaten" the system. Many smugly describe how easy it is to escape accountability. Over and over I've heard the same defence: "It's not cheating if everyone's doing it."

Young Australians are now cheating their way through university at a rate that's making a mockery of our sandstone institutions. No longer is the accumulation of knowledge a rewarding process of brainwork, error and painstaking self-correction. AI is giving students top grades for zero intellectual work.

I've interviewed six senior academics in three states, including heads of school in media and communications, physics, mathematics, statistics and chemistry. All but one put student fraud at more than 80 per cent. And yet each of

the students I spoke to for this story scoffed at that figure, saying the rate of "full-bore" cheating in their units is more like 95 per cent.

In just three years, ChatGPT and its Big Tech stablemates – Google's Gemini, Microsoft's Copilot, Anthropic's Claude, Perplexity, Elon Musk's Grok and others – have subverted tertiary education. Many academics believe our universities are in existential crisis. They say if ChatGPT can write assignments and ace exams, what exactly are universities selling? Why go to university at all if you're going to offload all your studies to a robot?

As Hayden says: "University is no longer a test of your intellect. It's a test of how well you can instruct ChatGPT."

Miles, 19, recently deferred his Bachelor of Business studies at Perth's Curtin University. From the inner-city café where he now works three days a week, he tells me that AI is writing practically every assignment and essay.

"Everyone just dumps them into ChatGPT and then hands in whatever it produces," he says matter-of-factly. "AI is brilliant. Why memorise facts or do equations or slog it out over an essay when ChatGPT or Gemini can do it in seconds? You get everything in the blink of an eye – any equation, any answer, any essay. It's all being hacked by AI and the sooner people accept that the better. Stop worrying about what's right and wrong, because everyone's using it and you'd be dumb not to."

Incredulous, I press him again: "Do you know anyone in your year who isn't outsourcing all their uni work to AI?"

"Nup," he replies. "Not a single person."

"Know anyone who's been caught?"

"Nup. I'm sure there are people stupid enough to get caught copying and pasting whole pages from AI searches, but you gotta tell your AI to 'humanise' your work – that dumbs it down to what a guy like me would write."

"Anyhow," he adds with a shrug, "Even the lecturers depend on it. They use AI to write the exam papers, we use AI to cheat the exam and then they use AI to grade our papers. It's nuts."

He cranes forward: "I'm sure every university secretly knows how much their students are using AI. But they should just forget about trying to control it. Just let it happen because it's the future."

AI evangelists will proclaim today's students are merely adapting to the only world they've

ever known. After all, Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, have grown up with smartphones, laptops and the internet. And kids have always cut corners to gain advantage, right? How is this different to scribbling notes on your arm, keeping palm cards in your pocket or paying someone to write your paper for you?

AI devotees resort to the standard Silicon Valley defence on ethics: *Remember the furore over calculators? That amounted to nothing, right? Calculators didn't destroy maths. Calculators did the grunt work and freed up students to do more complex thinking. Same with using Google search – that was once considered tantamount to cheating, but is now embraced as the internet's gift of information.*

These are glib analogies, because ChatGPT doesn't extend cognition. It's a parasite that attaches itself to a vulnerable learning ecosystem like a university then starves the host, usurping academics, teaching and learning.

Among faculty staff, the overriding mood is dismay. Lecturers and tutors stare at essays bloated with mechanical phrasing and facile logic that reads nothing like typical student rhetoric. Take this AI slop from a ChatGPT-generated first-year marketing student essay: "The media is an ever-shifting self-referential constellation of platforms, intermediaries and narratives that, while ostensibly tasked with transmitting information from events to audiences, simultaneously curates, amplifies, aes-



"No way would I trust a bridge built by engineers who'd outsourced their degree to AI"

Dr Jonathan Albright

theticises, distorts and monetises reality itself."

Or this word-soup submitted by a third-year business student: "A profit-and-loss statement is a formally organised yet interpretively slippery financial summary that, across a nominally defined time horizon, attempts to compress the subjective recognition of revenues, the selectively timed acknowledgment of costs, and the debatably reasoned allocation of expenses into a single net outcome that gestures towards economic performance while demanding extensive contextual explanation to reveal what actually transpired..."

An art history tutor came across this "analysis" in an assessment from a first-year student who admitted to relying entirely on ChatGPT: "The Virgin Mary giving water to a dog in her shoe is a metaphor for mercy."

Teaching has now devolved into absurdism: academics are well aware they're grading chatbots, not humans, while students tell me they openly swap tips on how to make their AI-generated "work" sound less like AI.

Dr Jonathan Albright, a digital forensics specialist and senior lecturer in social sciences, media and communication at the University of Western Australia, believes most universities are not prepared for the scale of AI's takeover of education. Over four hours of interviews, Albright is alarmingly blunt. "AI is gunning for academics' jobs," he says. "If universities don't confront the threat of AI, you will walk onto a campus in ten years' time and they'll be deserted. Even now, I have tutorials where only one student shows up. In courses without strict participation policies, I'm seeing lecture attendance drop to seven per cent. So what are the other 93 per cent doing? My lectures are not 6pm on a Friday night. They're 10am on a Tuesday. Why aren't they in class? I'll tell you why. You don't need to show up if AI is doing your assessments for you. Watch this space: it's going to get ugly."

Albright recently conducted an experiment, running 40 student assignments through an advanced AI detection software system that he paid for himself. "It was an absolute bloodbath," he says. "The software flagged 80 per cent of those submissions as having a high probability they were AI-generated. The patterns were unmistakable. I've kept the spreadsheet because I was so shocked and so disappointed. I voiced my concerns through the appropriate channels.

"The response was sympathetic but clear: the university has not installed any AI detection software on campus. Turnitin [the submissions portal for students' online work] has an excellent AI checker, but to date UWA has not activated it. The reality is that detection and enforcement falls to individual teaching staff."

This is confirmed by a UWA spokesperson, who states: "The University has made a conscious decision not to use specific AI detection software. Teaching staff are encouraged to gather evidence from a range of sources if misconduct is suspected, such as comparing the student's previous submitted work, as well as the ability to require the student to provide an oral defence of the assessment if required."

I ask Albright if he thinks UWA's response to mass cheating among its 25,000 students has been essentially to "look the other way". He sighs. "Look, universities are trying to live with the threat of AI, but it's going to eat them alive. AI's goal is to replace the human brain, to replace the cognitive participation that active learning requires. Once it's culturally acceptable to outsource learning to a chatbot, we'll have graduates who can produce content but can't validate a claim or formulate an argument, who won't ever experience failure or have to learn how to rewrite or revise or reflect.

"Some disciplines are more vulnerable than others. The social sciences and humanities will be hit hard by this disruption. They need to be first to push back and adapt because humanities degrees will be devalued to the point that students will opt out of them completely. And engineering will have its own crisis, because AI will anaesthetise students' ability to think critically and test equations. No way would I trust a bridge built by engineers who outsourced their degree to AI."

Albright shows me a selection of essays written by his third-year students and shakes his head: "The more we delegate mental strain to machines, the more we lose the capacity to think at all. Look at these papers: they're tech-



Calling it out: Edward; opposite, Dr Jonathan Albright

nically almost perfect and that's so unusual with undergrads. But every paper reads the same. There's no deep or original thinking, no deductions, no rhetorical posturing. They turn in work that's intellectually vacant. I'd rather see honest mistakes, because that means a student is trying. But you never see mistakes anymore. And these chatbot-written papers show up as one per cent 'detected plagiarism' because students are now expert at cheating.

"Undergrads are very, very savvy about how to leverage AI systems to avoid detection. And most academics know that few of the papers they're grading have been started and completed by a human. I struggle not to give them all a D but I'll begrudgingly give them a C-plus or a B-minus, because to flag a student for suspected improper AI use is exhausting – the paperwork, the meetings, the formal hearings.

"Most academics can spot machine-generated work in a second, but we grade it anyway because what's the alternative? We'd need to formally challenge submissions that we can never definitively prove are machine-generated." And in any case, he adds, "students don't care if they get a C because there was little to no effort involved".

Other academics are equally demoralised. "I

am no longer an educator," says Beth, a senior lecturer at Notre Dame University in Fremantle. "I'm just a human detector of plagiarism. The university as we know it is fast approaching oblivion. Covid nearly killed it, and Artificial Intelligence will be its death blow."

This is a scandal not of ignorance but of indifference. Every university Dean across the country knows exactly what's happening on their campuses.

Helen, 61, a postgraduate nursing lecturer at a prominent South Australian university, is refusing to surrender to ChatGPT. "The students I flag for full-blown cheating come in kicking and screaming, furious at being caught," she says. "No shame. No guilt. At least two-thirds of them will continue to vehemently deny their cheating even when we can see their work is 100 per cent faked. And let's not forget we're talking about Honours and Masters students – the cream of the crop. They've worked out that if they squeal loudly enough, the university will shy away from failing them. The executive doesn't want stoushes causing nasty publicity".

"So do you fail students for cheating?" I ask.

"I'm trying. I call the worst offenders into my office. They don't say sorry or ask for a second chance. They stare me down and say, 'How dare you accuse me of lying?' Some bring their parents with them to intimidate me, parents who demand I overturn the fail grade because 'we're footing the bill for this degree'. And I say, 'No. Your daughter is sitting an exam to see if she qualifies for this degree and she still has to earn it.'"

Edward, 19, a second-year commerce student at the University of Western Australia, says AI has spread through his uni like a plague. "It's completely out of control. All the lecture halls are empty. There were 500 of us in my marketing unit last year but less than 10 per cent turned up for lectures. No one's engaging. If you're farming your degree to AI, why

"ChatGPT can write a whole essay in three minutes that would take me three days"

Edward, 19, commerce student

show up?" Edward was initially a fan of ChatGPT, used as a research tool and to help him with his "disorganised ADHD brain". But he became uncomfortable when his classmates – *en masse* – began boasting they were using AI to offload their thinking altogether.

"Every assignment comes with a warning saying, 'No AI allowed'," he says. "We're repeatedly told we'll be punished with academic probation or kicked out of uni. And yet no one's the least bit worried. In one of my units we had a major assignment worth 45 per cent of our grade, and get this" – he snorts – "it was an essay about the threat of AI, and 95 per cent of my classmates got ChatGPT to write it for them."

The final straw was a group assignment where, three hours before deadline, Edward discovered a big problem. "Most of our group had used ChatGPT, which got it completely wrong – it had invented bogus references, hallucinated piles of incorrect data and created links that went to weird places. I panicked. I couldn't get hold of the guys, so one mate and I stayed up until midnight redoing the entire assignment because I knew we were all at huge risk of being blown for cheating.

"That's a massive part of the problem – when you look at what AI's writing, you're fooled into thinking it's better than anything you could ever produce yourself. You get, like, intoxicated by its magic. It can write a whole essay in three minutes that would take me three days. So where's the incentive to do the hard slog? AI is destroying everyone's morals."

Edward believes the way forward is to go back to supervised exams and oral assessments. "The only way to police AI is to ban it completely, and I mean this wholeheartedly – I would 100 per cent support a complete ban on AI in university. And this is from me, someone who's used it a lot."

ChatGPT's owner OpenAI claims it now has 800 million weekly users. At last count, Google's Gemini is said to have 650 million monthly users. A Goldman Sachs report last December said capital spending by Google, Meta, Microsoft and Amazon will rise to \$US527 billion this year, up from \$US465 billion in 2025. Yet the speed with which young people have embraced AI means huge numbers of students will emerge from university to begin employment essentially illiterate.

Dependence on AI has created students who can't think, can't write, can't create. Some in

academia believe Gen Z are in danger of becoming post-literate. They report students sitting in lectures submitting ChatGPT responses even to prompts like: "Introduce yourself to the class in 500 words or fewer."

I interview Julia, a business school lecturer who has spent 22 years in academia at five universities across two states, from Swinburne University to Monash, Curtin to UWA. She speaks in frank, decisive bursts: "Undergrads



continues to churn out worthless degrees."

Julia believes that what's at stake here is not just specialised academic skills or even refined habits of mind, but the most basic forms of cognitive fluency. "Last semester I had a group of third-year economics students working on a profit-and-loss curve with some simple fractions: one of them was 12/12. Half of them got out their calculators. 'You're not serious,' I said. Some laughed. Some looked embarrassed. Some are about to graduate and don't know the difference between an x and a y axis. I'm horrified. Absolutely horrified.

"For a long time I've questioned how they could get to third year knowing so little, and now I know – they're AI junkies. And these are going to be the accountants unable to do our tax returns, the financial advisors losing our money because they have no clue what they're doing. And why is that? Because they've been

"They've been lobotomised by AI. They don't even think they're cheating"

Julia, business school lecturer

lobotomised by AI. They don't even think they're cheating. They're delusional."

What's unfolding in our universities is now far more than dishonesty, it's the dismantling of our understanding of what education is for. AI isn't democratising learning. It's automating it.

As universities closed down for the summer holidays, I spoke with two postgrads determined to keep the AI scourge at bay.

Anna, 22, is studying for her Masters in history at UWA, and is increasingly worried that the value of her "brain-generated" High Distinctions are being devalued by machine-faked grades. "It makes me sad, because for all of my degree I was that girl who was reading every page of her textbooks and slaving over every essay because I get such satisfaction from wrestling with ideas. Now my classmates look at me like a fool for not cheating. I'm no longer competing on a level playing ground. I'm being absolutely disadvantaged – punished even – because my A-pluses are worth less and less

now that everyone can get an A-plus with Gemini or ChatGPT."

Listening in to our interview, Anna's sister Isabelle, 18, a first-year medical student, pipes up with an understatement: "Who wants a doctor who's palmed off their training to a chatbot?"

Taken aback, I ask her: "Surely med students would be the last to cheat?"

She scoffs. "Some of my classmates use it a lot for reflection essays. It's just laziness. But if you get caught you get sent before the board of the medical school. So I just can't understand why half my cohort would risk it."

"Half?"

Isabelle nods vigorously. "It's very dangerous but they think they can edit their work enough so it's not detectable."

Anya Sills, 21, from Perth's Gooseberry Hill, has just finished an arts degree and is starting a Masters in curatorial studies. She says it's galling that classmates consider their AI-abetted degrees equal to hers. "I'm already \$40k in debt for my degree. That's a pointless investment if I haven't used those four years to educate myself to the highest level. I want those skills. I want that knowledge. Why pay for a degree you learn nothing from?"

When I ask Anya whether she still has faith in higher education, she says this: "There was no AI when I started. I saw it boom at the end of 2023 when everyone was testing the waters to see if they'd get caught, and then it went into hyperdrive. It got so good so fast. Now it's scary to have all these people who don't have the skills they claim to have. I had a few friends at Curtin University who said some of their professors were actively encouraging students to use AI. 'What the hell?' I said. 'That's insane.'"

Anya says fellow students tell her an AI-abetted degree is a victimless crime. "I know people who pay big subscriptions for the premium AI to get them the best grades with the most accurate answers. They have no ambition, no desire to beat the machines. I'm sure these students could do amazing, creative things, but they're settling for mediocrity. There's absolutely no pride in creating good work. There's some real misguided rebellion here. There's lots of things wrong with higher education, but using AI to do your work isn't beating the system, it's cheating yourself out of an education."

At Murdoch University in Perth's south, at least one faculty head has launched an insurgency against AI. "Education is about rewiring

the brain, so we have to reintroduce mental effort somehow,' says Professor Bruce Gardiner. As head of mathematics, statistics, chemistry and physics, Gardiner says his school is tackling AI abuse head on, pulling the fangs from the viper with face-to-face final exams, verbal assessments, more hands-on assignments, and shifting all courses to require attendance.

"Yes, it's more expensive," he admits. "It takes more staff resources and it's a challenge for larger classes, but at least this way we can tell that people are doing original work. My staff certainly feel better about having some confidence in their students. We're adapting. It's not perfect yet, but we're getting there. If I can't trust any written work produced on a computer to be human in origin, then I will turn to other methods of evaluating my students.

"I want to give some reassurance to industry that they're going to be hiring someone who has used their brains."

Gardiner says AI has been a looming disruptor for ten years or more, so the university sector should not have been caught by surprise. "When the tide goes out you find out who's not wearing swimmers," he says with a smile. "Universities are quick to paint themselves as socially progressive, but actually they're risk-averse and conservative. What academia needs now is real leadership, and mostly what I've seen is inertia, denial and utter helplessness."

Universities Australia, the national voice for the country's 40-odd universities, said in a statement that it has no AI policy. Instead, "Universities [themselves] are responsible for setting their own academic integrity policies, assessment practices and approaches to managing emerging technologies."

Perhaps the question we should be asking ourselves is this: If it's so easy to use these systems to cheat, why aren't we using them to learn? For hundreds of years education has been a decidedly linear process: memorise the content, write the assignment, take the test, rinse and repeat. In 2026, only the hardest, most ambitious students will pit their own brains against a chatbot with all the answers. But the students who will triumph in tomorrow's universities will be the ones who can write not like machines, but like human beings.

In December, I speak with one retired scholar who says AI cheating is rife because something is rotten in the university system itself. Dr Michael Barkl was a specialist Hon-



Viewpoints: Anya Sills; below, 13-year-old Cameron; opposite, UWA history student Anna

"University assessments have become a bunch of boring, cheatable exam papers"

Dr Michael Barkl

ours, Masters and PhD examiner for 30 years. The 67-year-old from Melbourne tells me he has nothing but sympathy for students who view their coursework as dull and mechanical and turn to ChatGPT to expedite the process.

"Don't blame the students," he says. "Blame academia. It has lost its way. It has turned education from a God's gift into a commodity. The university sector is corrupt. Instead of testing a



student's actual capacity, it has relegated assessment to a bunch of boring, cheatable exam papers and assignments."

Barkl says students exploiting AI are only taking advantage of a system that no longer prizes them as individuals but as a commodity to be milked with outrageous fees, prolonged debts and poor job outcomes, leaving too many alumni unable to find meaningful work in their chosen field. He argues that even the Oxbridge essay – that pillar of a university education – is an elitist, outdated relic, with its tedious "hamburger" structure of introduction, evidence-based argument and conclusion. Barkl believes that most students loathe writing it because of how it's been taught, especially over the past 25 years.

"I see AI as a wonderful opportunity for the university to rebirth itself. We need to go back to internships, apprenticeships and competency-based training. Let's start asking engineering students to explain in person how that tunnel will withstand extreme force; let's hear that wannabe lawyer make his closing argument. Asking students to prove their acquired knowledge will weed out the cheaters every time, and if you know nothing, you're unemployable. This disruption will force us to build an entire new model of teaching."

And what about high schoolers? How is the next generation of digital natives embracing the ubiquitous gifts of AI? I speak to a bunch of Year 8 boys, and interview Cameron, 13, from Perth's Subiaco with his mum's permission. What he tells me doesn't bode well for the education prospects of today's teens.

Sitting at the family dining table, I ask: "In Year 8, how many kids in your class are using AI to do their schoolwork?"

"About 24 out of 25," Cameron replies. "Maybe one or two kids aren't using it."

"Why's that?"

"Because they wanna learn."

"So what about you?"

"Oh, I use it for everything. It makes school way easier. It does all your work in class and all your homework in like, two minutes flat. My teachers don't blink an eye if I get 100 per cent. I don't even bother to fake wrong answers anymore."

"Think you'll rely on it for the whole of high school?"

"Yeah." He gives me a giddy laugh. "Unless my teachers wake up." ●

CHARLOTTE REE
THE NEXT INSTALMENT

'She knows I'm crawling out of my skin without him'

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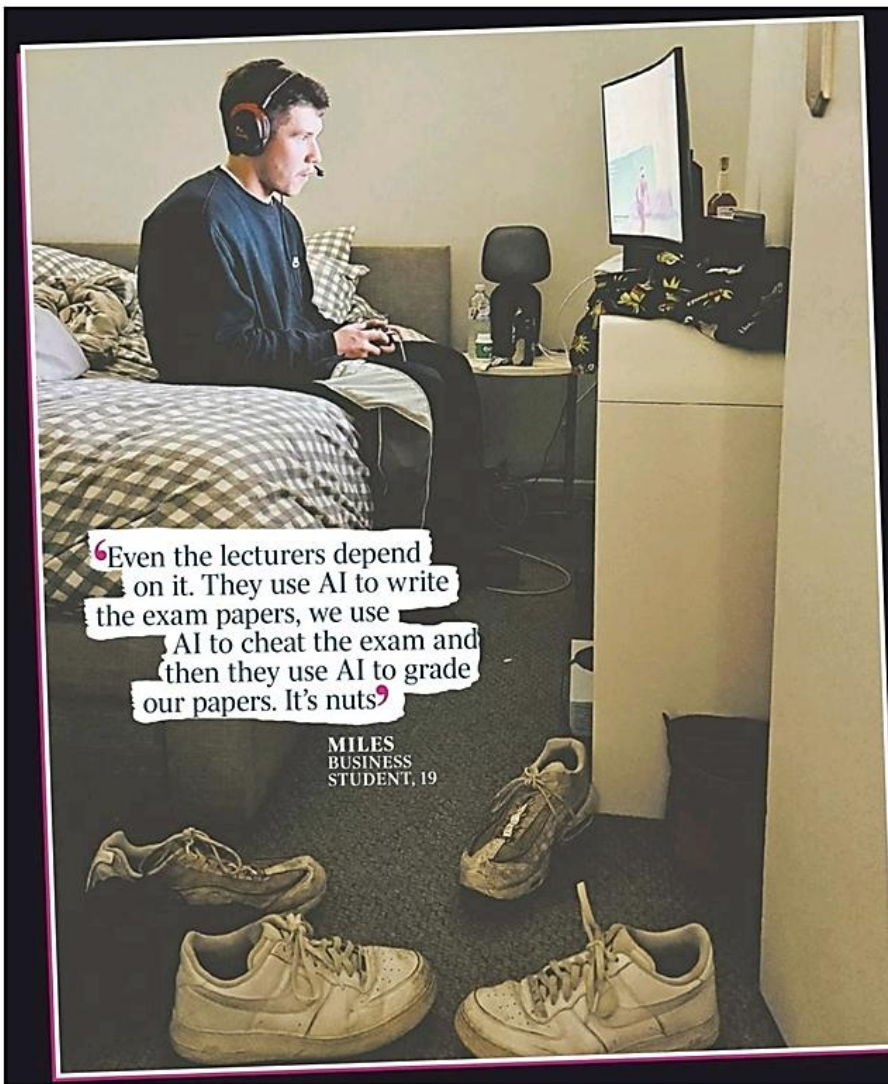
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Universities stand idly by as cheating students 'lobotomise' their brains with AI



'Even the lecturers depend on it. They use AI to write the exam papers, we use AI to cheat the exam and then they use AI to grade our papers. It's nuts'

MILES BUSINESS STUDENT, 19

AI EATING UNIVERSITIES ALIVE



'My A-pluses are worth less and less now that everyone can get an A-plus with Gemini or ChatGPT'

ANNA MASTERS STUDENT, 22

'They've been lobotomised by AI. They don't even think they're cheating'

JULIA BUSINESS SCHOOL LECTURER



'There's some real misguided rebellion here'

ANYA SILLS ARTS GRADUATE, 21

EXCLUSIVE

ROS THOMAS

Student cheating at universities is now at endemic levels, with AI tools such as ChatGPT completing a majority of assignments and coursework and producing worthless degrees, while software designed to identify AI is either under-used or not deployed at all.

A report published in The Australian Weekend Magazine features testimony from students and academics who say the widespread use of ChatGPT and its Big

Tech stablemates Google's Gemini and Microsoft's Copilot has subverted education at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Students have become expert at flouting strict academic rules against the use of chatbots by using additional technology to "humanise" their work, and academics say there is little will from university administrations to crack down on the practice.

"University is no longer a test of your intellect. It's a test of how well you can instruct ChatGPT," says 24-year-old Sydney student Hayden. "You'd be stupid not to use AI if you want to do well.

"I went from being a bare pass C average to being an A-plus student in 18 months. All I was doing was feeding my essay and assignment prompts into Chat GPT."

Academics said dependence on AI had created students who could not think, write or create; rendering them "lobotomised by AI". Most said at least 80 per cent of their students were using ChatGPT or similar programs to cheat the system. Students said the figure was far higher.

"For a long time I questioned how (students) could get to third year knowing so little, and now I know - they're AI junkies. And

these are going to be the accountants unable to do tax returns, the financial advisers losing our money because they have no clue what they're doing ... they don't even think they're cheating, they're delusional," said a business school lecturer named Julia.

Dr Jonathan Albright, a digital forensics specialist at the University of WA, fed the coursework of 40 of his students into AI detection software at his own expense and found 80 per cent cheated.

Dr Albright said he reported his findings through UWA's official channels, but it was not enough to convince the university to in-

roduce specific AI detection software as mandatory. "Universities are trying to live with the threat of AI, but it's going to eat them alive," he said. "No way would I trust a bridge built by engineers who've outsourced their degree to AI."

Retired PhD examiner Michael Barkl said students weren't to blame for using technology freely available to them. "Blame universities," he said. "Instead of testing a student's actual capacity, it has relegated assessment to boring, cheatable exam papers and assignments."

80PC OF STUDENTS USE HI-TECH HELP

'It's going to get ugly': AI cheat warning to unis

EXCLUSIVE

ROS THOMAS

Two of the nation's most respected former chancellors are urging universities to bring students back to campus for supervised exams and in-person assessments to counter an epidemic of students cheating using artificial intelligence.

The Australian Weekend Magazine revealed on Saturday that six senior academics in three states estimated 80 per cent of students are using ChatGPT or similar AI engines to cheat assignments, essays and exams, claiming university administrations are failing to crack down on the practice because of "denial, inertia and helplessness". Students interviewed put the rate of "full-bore cheating" in their courses at 90 per cent or more.

"University is no longer a test of your intellect. It's a test of how well you can instruct ChatGPT," 24-year-old Sydney student Hayden said.

Alan Finkel, Monash University chancellor for eight years until 2016, on Sunday said universities will suffer further reputational damage if the general public believes the only purpose of higher education is to take in fees and issue degrees, allowing AI cheating to become a free-for-all.

"Universities are facing more and criticism for not managing AI abuse in their institutions, and that's a very serious challenge to address," he told The Australian.

Dr Finkel said the higher education sector must invest in measures to reverse its reliance on online learning.

"Yes, there'll be a big cost factor, but the only way to eliminate AI cheating is to go back to in-person supervised exams, in-class presentations, oral assessments, practical lab assignments and defending of essays," he said.

"Yet the attitude of many universities at the moment is that 'AI is here and there's not much we



Finkel



Budge

can do about it, so now our job is to teach students how to use it effectively and responsibly'.

"That misses the stark reality that students don't need to be taught how to use AI, because they're already expert at leveraging ChatGPT to cheat and avoid detection."

AI cheating has become normalised to the extent that many students consider it a disadvantage not to employ AI tools to earn better grades and ace their online exams.

'University is no longer a test of your intellect. It's a test of how well you can instruct ChatGPT'

HAYDEN
SYDNEY STUDENT

Instead they congratulated themselves on "beating the system", even as the value of their expensive degrees evaporated and they entered the workforce unprepared and incapable.

"I'm seeing lecture attendance drop to 7 per cent. So what are the other 93 per cent doing?" University of Western Australia senior lecturer Dr Jonathan Albright said. "My lectures are not 6pm on a Friday night. They're 10am on a Tuesday. Why aren't they in class? I'll tell you why. You don't need to show up if AI is doing your assessments for you. Watch this space. It's going to get ugly."

Melbourne's Dr Michael Barkl, a retired specialist examiner of post-grads, was blunt: "Don't blame the students. Blame

academia. It's lost its way. It's turned education from a god's gift into a commodity. The university sector is corrupt. Instead of testing a student's actual capacity, it's relegated assessment to a bunch of boring, cheatable exam papers and assignments."

Dr Finkel said he has had discussions with several vice-chancellors about the "value" of investing in serious measures to get students back on campus, including a return to in-person assessments worth 70 per cent of final marks.

"In other words, you cannot pass your degree unless 70 per cent of your grades are in the form of invigilated exams and assessments," he said. "That way employers can be satisfied their graduates have accumulated the required knowledge for their degree."

Former Murdoch University chancellor Terry Budge agreed with Dr Finkel.

"We cannot allow a situation where online exams are cheatable with AI. The obvious first step is to get students back on campus for supervised exams," he said.

"And if students are cheating their online coursework, then there needs to be more focus on testing, and the way to do that is with teaching in person and, again, monitored assessments on campus."

Mr Budge, Murdoch chancellor from 2006-13, said he was surprised to learn the University of WA, a key member of the prestigious Group of Eight universities, had not engaged AI detection software to help deter student dishonesty and assist lecturers in flagging AI-generated work.

"Even back in 2013, Murdoch University had software that endeavoured to pick up plagiarism," he said. "The consequence of university students outsourcing their critical thinking skills to AI is enormous. Universities must restore any loss of faith in higher education. Controlling AI use is one of the most urgent challenges facing universities in decades."