

# AI as the Great Equalizer or Great Divider:

Preventing AI from Becoming the Next Hidden Curriculum

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# We Know AI — And We've All Formed an Opinion

By now we all know what generative and agentic AI is. Regardless of where you are in your own journey of adoption and exploration, you've formed some kind of view on it.

## Curious

I've heard about it. I've maybe tried it once. I'm watching to see what happens.

## Exploring

I'm experimenting with tools but don't yet have a consistent approach.

## Integrating

I'm actively using AI in my work and thinking about how it fits into my practice.

## Leading

I'm helping others adopt AI and shaping how my institution thinks about it.

# We've All Heard of the Tools...

And many of us have used at least one of them at some point.

## Language & Writing

ChatGPT (OpenAI)  
Gemini (Google)  
Claude (Anthropic)  
Microsoft CoPilot

## Research & Analysis

Perplexity AI  
Consensus  
NotebookLM  
Elicit

## Creative

Midjourney (images)  
KlingAI (video)  
DALL-E (images)  
ElevenLabs (voice)

# 66%

of employers say they will not hire someone  
without AI skills

*Source: Microsoft Work Trend Index 2024*

## Why This Matters Now

- AI proficiency is rapidly shifting from “nice to have” to a baseline hiring requirement
- Employers are re-evaluating candidates based on AI fluency across every sector
- The students we serve today are entering a workforce that is being reorganized around AI
- What we teach, and what we don’t, has long-term economic consequences for our students

# Our Students & What Brings Them Here

When we consider who our students are, the stakes of the AI conversation become much clearer.

## The Demographics

- Many of our students are first-generation college attendees
- A significant portion are Pell Grant recipients
- Large proportions identify as students of color, including Black and Latinx students
- Many balance school with work, caregiving, and community obligations

*Source: NYC, 2024*

## Their Goals

- Higher education is a deliberate investment often made at significant sacrifice
- Most are pursuing credentials that lead directly to employment
- They are highly motivated but may lack access to professional networks and tech resources
- AI literacy could be a major equalizer, or another barrier, depending on how we respond

# The Gap We Can't Ignore

Student AI adoption is outpacing training and the gap has real consequences.

## Students Using AI

**80%**

report using AI tools regularly for academic tasks

*Source: Chegg Global Student Survey 2025*

## Preparation

**93%** believe AI training should be included in degree programs

**14%** state their schools are preparing students to use AI

*Source: Coursera Microcredentials Impact Report 2025 & Arizona State University 2026*

# 53%

of students report that their schools discourage or prohibit the use of AI entirely

*Source: Lumina Foundation-Gallup 2026 State of Higher Education*

## When Schools Say No

- Blanket AI bans don't stop students from using AI, they just do it discreetly
- Without educator guidance, students use AI ineffectively
- Schools that restrict AI entirely remove the one environment where exploration can be supervised
- The classroom is the place to learn, fail safely, and build real skills including AI literacy.

# AI and Equity

## Patterns

Of AI use across demographic groups are beginning to emerge

## Basic Tasks

is where that use is concentrated:  
brainstorming, drafting, summarizing, finding  
quick answers

## Without Guidance

most are navigating AI without critical evaluation

High rates of AI use without AI literacy is ineffective. Students are generating outputs they cannot critically evaluate.

- STEM and advantaged students are using AI for more complex, higher-value tasks
- Male students are more likely to use AI than female students - consistent with broader gender and tech adoption gaps
- This has direct implications for DEI in the workforce

# AI USE

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# AI LITERACY

*Using AI frequently does not mean using it critically, ethically, or effectively.*

# What Is AI Literacy?

## DEFINITION

*“A set of competencies that enables individuals to critically evaluate AI technologies, communicate and collaborate effectively with AI, and use AI as a tool online, at home, and in the workplace.”*

— Long & Magerko, 2020

## AI Literacy IS...

- Understanding how AI systems work and their limitations
- Knowing how to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs
- Applying AI tools purposefully to real tasks
- Recognizing bias, ethical implications, and equity concerns
- Having the confidence and self-awareness to grow with AI

## AI Literacy IS NOT...

- Just knowing the names of popular AI tools
- Knowing how to write a prompt
- Using ChatGPT regularly or frequently
- Having a strong opinion about AI
- Being comfortable with technology in general

# Measuring AI Literacy: Two Frameworks

For this presentation, we draw on two validated instruments to define what AI literacy looks like in practice — and how to assess it.

## AICOS

*Markus et al., 2025*

AI Competency Objective Scale — an objective, performance-based assessment using multiple-choice questions

### Competency Dimensions:

- Know & Understand AI
- Use & Apply AI
- Detect AI
- Evaluate & Create AI
- AI Ethics

## MAILS

*Koch et al., 2023*

Meta AI Literacy Scale — a self-report instrument measuring both AI competencies and psychological readiness

### Competency Dimensions:

- Use & Apply AI
- Understand AI
- Detect AI
- Create AI
- AI Ethics
- AI Self-Efficacy
- AI Self-Competency

# AI Literacy for Educators: 7 Core Competencies

## FROM AICOS • Objective Competency Scale

### Know & Understand AI

**01** Foundational knowledge of how AI works, its principles, applications, and limitations

### Use & Apply AI

**02** The ability to practically deploy AI tools to accomplish real tasks

### Detect AI

**03** The ability to recognize when AI has been used to generate content or make decisions

### Evaluate & Create AI

**04** Critically assessing AI outputs for quality, bias, and accuracy; designing AI-driven content or systems

### AI Ethics

**05** Understanding the moral, social, and equity implications of AI use and development

## FROM MAILS • Meta AI Literacy Scale

### 06 AI Self-Efficacy

Confidence in one's ability to learn, adapt, and grow with AI. Approaching new tools with curiosity rather than avoidance. Not about current skill level, but belief in one's capacity to grow.

**Covers:** AI Problem-Solving • AI Learning Orientation

### 07 AI Self-Competency

Accurate self-awareness of where one's AI skills actually stand. Knowing what you know, what you don't, and being able to name your own growth edges without over- or under-estimating.

**Covers:** AI Persuasion Literacy • AI Emotion Regulation

# AI Literacy for Educators: Competencies in Practice

## 01 Know & Understand AI

- AI needs large datasets - the more data, the better the model
- Knows the diff between generative AI, agentic AI, and traditional automation
- Familiar with LLMs (ChatGPT, Gemini), image (Midjourney) and video (KlingAI) generators
- Understands AI can hallucinate. Always reads and checks AI output

## 02 Use & Apply AI

- Uses AI to generate prompts, rubrics, and quiz questions
- Leverages AI for admin tasks: drafting comms, summarizing docs, building templates
- Integrates AI into project-based learning as a structured workflow tool

## 03 Detect AI

- Recognizes stylistic patterns that may suggest AI-generated writing
- Designs tasks that are difficult to complete with AI alone (reflection, oral defense)
- Understands detection tool limitations - avoids weaponizing them against students

## 04 Evaluate & Create AI

- Reviews AI-generated lesson content for errors, bias, or oversimplification
- Creates custom GPT prompts or AI workflows for specific courses and students
- Selects AI tools based on accuracy, accessibility, and cost; not just popularity

## 05 AI Ethics

- Accounts for AI tool bias against non-native speakers, students of color, students with disabilities
- Audits tool choices for student data privacy implications
- Designs AI policies that are equitable across different levels of tool access

## 06 AI Self-Efficacy

- Tests new tools in low-stakes contexts before introducing to students
- Seeks peer communities and PD rather than waiting for confidence to arrive
- Reflects after AI-assisted lessons to build iterative competence

## 07 AI Self-Competency

- Completes structured AI literacy self-assessments to find gaps
- Distinguishes regular AI use from critical AI literacy - frequency  $\neq$  fluency
- Seeks targeted support in specific weak areas rather than treating literacy as all-or-nothing

# Embedding AI Literacy in Curriculum

5-Dimension AI Literacy Scale Nong et al., 2024

Five dimensions that translate AI literacy into sequenced, teachable units — building from foundational knowledge to confident self-directed practice.

## 01 Cognitive Ability

- Explain gen AI, agentic AI & traditional automation
- Identify AI systems in everyday tools
- Understand what training data is and why it matters
- Research a real AI hallucination case and its consequences

## 02 Application Ability

- Use an LLM to draft, then revise with personal voice
- Build a prompt library for course-specific tasks
- Complete tasks with and without AI and compare results
- Design an AI-assisted workflow for a real assignment

## 03 Critical Thinking

- Evaluate AI content for accuracy, bias, and missing context
- Analyze a real AI bias case: who was harmed?
- Debate: Should AI be used in [high-stakes context]?
- Stress-test an AI output by finding 3 errors or gaps

## 04 Morality

- Audit a tool for bias across names, dialects, and contexts
- Map who has vs. lacks AI access in your community
- Co-create a class AI agreement centered on equity
- Review an AI policy for what it protects — and who it misses

## 05 Self-Efficacy

- 30-day experiment: one new use case per week + reflection log
- Intentionally try an AI approach that fails and reflect on why
- Peer teach: share how you use one tool with a classmate
- After an AI-assisted task, identify what YOU contributed

# The Path Forward

*AI literacy will not build itself. It requires intentional educators.*

## Assess Your Own Literacy

Use MAILES and AICOS to understand where you stand across all 7 competencies before designing for students.

## Design With Intent

Develop curricula and assignments with the intent to build those AI literacy skills.

## Teach the Critique

Don't just allow AI. Teach students to evaluate, interrogate, and critically engage with every output.

## Center Equity

Ask: who in my classroom is most at risk from poor AI guidance? Design policy and practice around that student.

**Q&A**

# Thank you.

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