

# When AI Enters Academic Assessment: A Governance Question

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## **Executive Summary**

Generative AI is often framed as a **detection problem**. Institutions are encouraged to adopt tools capable of identifying AI-generated text in student work.

Yet the underlying challenge is different. When generative systems can produce original and coherent text, the central question is no longer whether a piece of writing was copied or generated. The real issue becomes institutional: **how universities can continue to demonstrate that their assessment processes provide reliable evidence of student competence.**

This brief explores why the "detection paradigm" addresses the wrong question and outlines several governance directions for institutional consideration.

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## The Limits of the Detection Paradigm

**Plagiarism was a legal question** For decades, academic integrity systems addressed a relatively clear problem: demonstrating that a student had copied existing material. Similarity detection tools provided evidence that a text reproduced content from identifiable sources. In this context, the issue was essentially legal and evidential: was the work original, or was it copied?.

**AI produces original text** Generative AI systems change the nature of the situation. The texts they produce are often original in a strict textual sense. They do not necessarily reproduce identifiable sources, and similarity detection may reveal little. Yet originality alone does not guarantee that a text reflects the reasoning or competence of the student. This is where the detection paradigm fails.

**The wrong question** If AI can produce original and coherent writing, the central issue is no longer simply whether a text was copied or generated. The question becomes more fundamental: **Does the submitted work still provide reliable evidence of the student's competence?**. When this question becomes central, the challenge is no longer primarily technical. It becomes **institutional**.

## From Detection to Institutional Accountability

**Evidence of competence** Academic assessment serves a singular purpose: demonstrating that a student has acquired specific knowledge and competencies. Degrees and certifications derive their legitimacy from the reliability of this demonstration. When AI produces sophisticated outputs, the link between the submitted text and the student's competence becomes less direct. The text alone may no longer constitute sufficient evidence.

**Traceability of reasoning** Academic work is a process, not just a document: defining a question, choosing methods, and articulating arguments. Because AI can intervene at any stage, the final text reveals little about the intellectual path taken. Universities must now solve a critical issue: **how to ensure the traceability of academic reasoning**.

**Institutional accountability** These questions are vital in contexts where institutions must demonstrate the robustness of their processes to external bodies. International accreditation agencies (AACSB, EQUIS, AMBA) and national authorities regularly examine the reliability of assessment systems. The issue is not just pedagogical; it concerns the institutional capacity to demonstrate that academic evaluation remains **valid, reliable, and defensible**.

## Governance Directions Worth Exploring

**Shift assessment toward the process** When the final text is partially generated, the assessment must capture the intellectual steps leading to it. Institutions should consider evaluating research framing, methodological decisions, and intermediate drafts. This places the final product within a broader evidential context.

**Document methodological decisions** Academic reasoning becomes visible through structuring decisions: why a method was chosen or how a dataset was interpreted. Encouraging students to document these choices makes their reasoning transparent. This provides evaluators with richer evidence than the final text alone.

**Incorporate intermediate evidence of reasoning** Assessment systems benefit from intermediate checkpoints: research proposals, methodological notes, or progress reviews. These steps allow for the observation of reasoning development over time and reduce the disproportionate weight placed on a single final document.

**Reconsider the role of oral defense** In the era of generative AI, the oral defense regains its status as a critical moment where reasoning, understanding, and authorship can be examined directly. Rather than a formality, the defense becomes a vital component of the evidential structure of assessment.

## From Analysis to Practice

The governance directions outlined here are not prospective; they are being operationalized today. Emerging approaches share a common logic: **shifting the evidential weight from the final text to the reasoning process that produced it.**

Institutions that engage with these questions early are not simply responding to a technological disruption. They are strengthening the foundations on which the credibility of their degrees rests.

This note was written based on work conducted with several institutions currently navigating these challenges. If these issues are relevant to your context, I would be glad to discuss them directly.