



GenAI and the Future of Higher Education: A Conference Overview

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Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has become one of the most widely discussed topics in higher education in recent years. With the rapid development of tools such as ChatGPT, new challenges and opportunities have arisen for teaching, research, and maintaining academic integrity. The development of new technologies is bringing about a broad change in education, and the old methods are being rethought. Qian (2025) states that such tools are changing higher education; they give students more independence and help them develop new ways of working with digital systems. At the same time, Qian cautions that heavy dependence on these tools may undermine students' ability to think critically and manage complex cognitive processes independently. The conference *GenAI in Higher Education: New Perspectives for Research and Teaching*, held at the University of Warsaw, provided a space for international reflection on these issues.

The *GenAI in Higher Education: New Perspectives for Research and Teaching* conference was held on 29–30 May 2025 at the University of Warsaw. The DELab (Digital Economy Lab) organised the conference with the support of the University of Warsaw and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The conference's primary focus was the application of generative artificial intelligence in research and education.

Prof. Katarzyna Śledziewska, the Director of DELab UW, Prof. Zygmunt Lalak, University of Warsaw Vice-Rector for Research, and Izabela Najda-Jędrzejewska, the representative of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, opened the conference. All of them greeted the conference attendees and talked about how new technologies are shaping our everyday lives, science, and research.

A keynote speech by Prof. Neil Selwyn followed the opening remarks. The title of the keynote speech was “GenAI in Higher Education – Some Things We Need to Talk About”. Prof. Selwyn stressed that we should continue to maintain a critical approach towards AI, as we are still in the “wow effect” phase. He also discussed four different approaches to considering the use of AI: (1) Thinking optimistically: the use cases of GenAI are impressive and universities are now in a phase of adopting and adapting GenAI as an asset; (2) Thinking critically: some AI outputs are of mediocre quality, which sometimes makes more work for teachers; the AI technology might not always be available or free; (3) Thinking practically: we should acknowledge the limited nature of GenAI as we are not yet entirely sure of any benefits of AI for education; (4) Moving forward: we as individuals, but also the universities should recognise the appeal/allure of GenAI (Why are we attracted to AI?); universities should be critical about AI, as it benefits them, but it



also benefits us all to be personally responsible around AI. The keynote speech closed with the thought that we should focus on both “actually existing” GenAI and also other forms of AI, not only GenAI. Selwyn’s framework helps us see how universities are responding to GenAI. While enthusiasm for GenAI is leading to numerous rapid experiments, universities do not yet have robust methods to measure its actual impact on teaching and learning.

The debate “The Fix or the Break? GenAI in Higher Education” followed the keynote speech. The debate’s host was Renata Włoch, and the guests were Neil Selwyn, Zbigniew Lalek, and Peter Kahn. The main findings of the debate were that progress should be implemented at universities and that open communication with students is essential. It was also stressed that proving that a student used AI is challenging. This session concluded with the remark that using AI is not cheating and that everyone should utilise it to their best advantage. This issue highlights a growing ethical dilemma in higher education: how to strike a balance between trust and control in an AI-mediated learning environment. The difficulty of detection suggests a need to shift from punitive approaches to transparent policy-making and initiatives promoting AI literacy.

The afternoon segment of the conference consisted of three parallel sessions. The first session consisted of two tracks: (1) the UW community track, with the debate conducted in Polish, and (2) the Scientific track (international), which had two sub-sessions: Session II A: Ethical Aspects of AI in Higher Education and Session II B: Generative AI and Educational Shift. Presenters noted that students use AI, which challenges traditional

teaching methods. AI was described as a tool with enormous potential in developing how we teach and conduct research.

The second parallel session again consisted of two parallel tracks. The first was conducted only in Polish (the UW community track, another debate), and the second was international. The international track introduced two parallel sessions: Session III A (Institutional Strategies and AI Policy in Higher Education) and Session III B (AI Literacy, Research and Academic Integrity). Session III B presentations explored how PhD candidates engage with AI: as a tool, time-saver, writing assistant, or even a colleague; how ChatGPT supports brainstorming, and how educators might design AI-focused lectures for students, addressing topics such as AI in the media, its underlying mechanisms, ethical considerations, and institutional policies. AI has been implemented in many aspects of academic work, which raises concerns about who the real author is, what constitutes an original text, and how the role of the researcher is changing. Gretzky and Dishon (2025) noted that distinguishing human work from machine-generated content is becoming increasingly complex, and that this is altering traditional research practices. They call this trend algorithmic authorship.

The third and final session of the day consisted of only one track, conducted in Polish only (the UW community track). During the sessions conducted in Polish, no simultaneous translations were provided.

The second and final day of the conference featured three scientific tracks. The first one consisted of three parallel sessions: Session IV A (AI in Higher Education), Session IV B (Ethical Implications of AI), and



Session IV C (The Impact of Generative AI on Student Learning). This part of the conference featured presentations of various research studies, for example, on how students at Utrecht University use GenAI and what their perspectives are; how students in the GENIAL project at the London School of Economics use AI for coding; how students reflect on the use of AI in academic work, and what their ethical dilemmas are (originality of thought, environmental concerns, and data safety).

The next session introduced more examples of interesting research: Session V-A (Policy and Institutional Perspectives on AI) and Session V-B (Social Research with AI). For example, what do different social groups think about AI? How have MOOC courses changed education? Is AI the first significant change? What do psychology students use AI for? Do those who use AI have more positive attitudes towards it?

The last track of the day consisted of two parallel sessions: Session VI A (Philosophical Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence) and Session VI B (Leveraging AI Tools for Personalised Learning). In this session, there was a demonstration of how AI can facilitate personalised learning through the use case of

“Basia”, an AI system designed to enhance student learning. This system is not only about learning but also helps promote brain health with various cognitive training activities, cognitive enhancement, and healthy habits.

The two-day conference provided a genuinely inspiring glimpse into how AI is shaping higher education and how various universities are incorporating AI tools into their teaching and institutional practices. AI is no longer a brand-new technology but is evolving quickly and constantly reshaping how we think about learning. As educators, it is easy to worry that students might cheat using AI, but instead of focusing on that fear, we should ask how we can use AI to support both teaching and learning. The goal should not be to punish someone for using AI, but to create a space where everyone uses AI fairly and transparently, and where AI benefits everyone. The conference demonstrated how GenAI is being implemented and how it is changing university teaching. The talks suggested that institutions need to go beyond quick fixes and think more deeply about the teaching and ethical issues involved. Future research should investigate how universities can develop strategies that promote responsible and inclusive use of AI.

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