



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

AI AND THE CHANGING SHAPE OF LEARNING

WORK MATTERS

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AI and the Changing Shape of Learning

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While mindlessly scrolling through social media, I came across a post about using AI to generate lesson plans. I couldn't help but think how much simpler that would have made my practicum experience. Imagine having a tool that could generate over a hundred interactive lesson plans and resources, how amazing would that have been? I caught myself saying, "This generation lucky, boy." But are they really?

There's no disputing that artificial intelligence is an incredible research tool and assistant. We're all guilty of using it, whether to compile a reference list, summarize an article for a presentation, or brainstorm ideas for an assignment. It saves time, simplifies tasks, and gives us a competitive edge by cutting down research hours. Still, I couldn't help but wonder how this realm of AI will affect the quality of education students receive, especially at the tertiary level. The perennial question every academic, facilitator, and educator now faces is this: is artificial intelligence inadvertently compromising the integrity of our degrees/qualifications?

We are all familiar with the old phrase, "reading for your degree." It's not just an expression, it's a philosophy. Back then, you read a lot, you spent hours in the library, flipping through books, chasing footnotes, and digging into academic journals. That process was never just about gathering information, it was mental training. It taught you to think critically, question sources, and connect ideas in ways that couldn't be rushed.

Research was like the gym for your brain. The more you engaged with it, the stronger your analytical muscles become. You learned how to separate credible information from fluff, weigh arguments, and build your own interpretations. And because you invested so much effort, that knowledge stuck with you long after exams were over.

AI changes that. Today, you can type a question into a chatbot and get a clean, structured answer in seconds. Need a literature review? Done. Want a summary of

ten articles? Delivered instantly. Need those pesty citations? Generated without you even opening the actual source. It's efficient, yes, but it also shortcuts the intellectual workout that "reading for your degree" was meant to provide.

It's like expecting to get fit without ever sweating. Yes, you might look the part on paper, but underneath, the core strength is missing. When AI does the connecting of ideas for you, you lose the chance to develop your own depth of understanding.

This becomes even more significant when we talk about graded assignments. In the past, these were your opportunities to prove you'd done the reading, engaged with the material, and could present a coherent, well-argued piece of work. Now, AI can produce a respectable draft in minutes. It can even suggest readings you haven't actually read, summarise complex theories, and phrase arguments so persuasively that the original work feels almost redundant.

The danger is that assignments may no longer be a true reflection of a student's own capabilities. If most of the heavy lifting is done by AI, then what exactly are we assessing? Is it the student's skill or the software's?

This is where academic integrity comes into play. Many institutions are already taking steps to adapt. One of the most significant shifts is the growing reliance on proctored exams whether in person or under secure online monitoring. In those conditions, it's just you, your brain, and the clock. No prompts, no summaries, no AI whispering in the background.

Proctored assessments aren't everyone's favourite, but they're becoming one of the few ways to ensure degrees still represent genuine knowledge and skill. They force students to recall, analyse, and apply information independently, exactly the kind of abilities that AI can't demonstrate for you. In a world where an algorithm can make anyone look like a research prodigy on paper, controlled exams may be the last line of defense for academic credibility.

And that brings us back to “reading for your degree.” That phrase was never just about consuming text, it was about building a habit of intellectual curiosity and discipline. AI can speed up the process, but if we let it replace the process entirely, we risk hollowing out what a degree truly represents.

The challenge now is balance. AI isn’t going away, and frankly, it shouldn’t. When used wisely, it can enhance learning by providing quick clarifications, organising complex information, or offering alternative explanations. But it should be a supplement, not a substitute. Students still need to engage deeply with material, wrestle with difficult concepts, and form their own interpretations.

Maybe the question isn’t whether this generation is “lucky” to have AI. Maybe the real question is whether we’ll use it in a way that strengthens education instead of weakening. The worth of a degree doesn’t come from the certificate, it comes from the mind that earned it.