

AI and Academic Integrity

Martin Martinez, August 2026

Chancy.AI

A mass shooting triggered many changes at Brown University. For nearly two decades, Professor Roberto Serrano supervised midterms in the classroom. But the December 2025 shooting of 11 people left many of Serrano's students too anxious to attend his exam. So, for the first time ever, the economics professor sent his students home to take the exam unsupervised.

In nearly twenty years of teaching ECON 1170, midterm averages often hovered in the mid-60s. Reviewing the take-home test results, Serrano was shocked to find the average had risen to 96, with almost half of the class scoring a perfect 100. The professor did not need a PhD to figure out the problem with those numbers.

Serrano told his students he suspected mass cheating and returned to in-classroom administration for the final exam. 18 of 86 students dropped the course. The remaining students saw their scores fall roughly 50 percent, back to the normal range observed in previous years.

Brown University launched an investigation after the story spread across American media. "If we no longer defend truth and decency and honesty," Serrano told the press, "then what kind of credibility are we going to have as academics?"

The Washington Post framed the scandal as something more than an isolated incident. The paper reported the advance of AI is so rapid that colleges across the country are struggling to find ways to test whether or not their students are actually learning. Dorothy Leidner, a professor of business and AI ethics at the University of Virginia, called this a "transition period" and said AI cheating should be expected.

Since 1893, Princeton University allowed students to take exams without a proctor in the room. Students signed a pledge not to cheat and agreed to report anyone who did. That honor system prevailed for 133 years.

A 2025 survey of Princeton's graduating seniors found that 29.9 percent admitted to cheating at least once. 28 percent reported using ChatGPT on assignments where it was specifically prohibited. Of the 44.6 percent of students who had personally witnessed

cheating, only 0.4 percent had reported it. The honor system was given a dishonorable discharge.

Princeton's faculty voted nearly unanimously to require in-person proctors for all exams. The students themselves had pushed for the change, refusing to police their peers who surreptitiously scanned banned websites on their laptops or peeked at phones beneath their desks in search of perfect answers from an AI chatbot.

Duke University had already reached a similar conclusion. In 2024, Duke eliminated numerical scoring for admissions essays, acknowledging that AI had fundamentally undermined the authenticity of student-submitted writing.

In Great Britain, nearly 7,000 university students were formally caught using AI to cheat in the 2023-24 academic year. That number equals 0.5% of the entire United Kingdom and was triple the rate from the previous year. 59 percent of UK undergraduates said education has changed "a lot" because of generative AI. 58 percent believe their institutions are not prepared for the changes that are coming.

UC Berkeley, in collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney and Cornell, surveyed more than 95,000 students at twenty research-intensive public universities. About two-thirds of those surveyed reported using AI. At least 9 percent of those who used AI admitted to cheating with it. Researchers noted that the actual number was almost certainly higher. Yet, faculty instincts to ban AI entirely were tempered by the notion that prohibiting AI tools could harm students entering industries that expect AI proficiency.

Despite AI bans recently imposed on students in Georgia and elsewhere, the future of education is becoming self-evident. Pew Research reports that 54 percent of American teenagers between 13 and 17 already use AI chatbots for schoolwork. 10 percent of those children use AI for all or most of their homework. That generation is only 2 to 5 years from college enrollment. Institutions will soon be populated by a majority of students for whom AI has always been their go-to guru.

At Alcorn State University in Mississippi, history professor Jason Gibson was tired of reading student essays that all sounded the same. They were too polished, too smooth, and too mechanical. "It robs you of experiencing that student's personality in their writing," he said. "It just sounds really robotic." So, he devised a trap. His midterm asked students to compare technological advancements during the Industrial Revolution with those seen today. Gibson added a line of white text to the exam, invisible to the human eye, but

completely visible to an AI. The hidden instruction told the AI to include information about Madagascar.

32 of 35 students submitted papers that included nonsensical references to Madagascar woven into their essays. They had copied the prompt into ChatGPT, received the AI's response complete with the hidden instruction, and pasted it into their papers without bothering to read the content. The TikTok video Gibson posted revealing the results went viral. His intent, he said, wasn't punishment. "I get no gratification out of seeing students fail. In an effort to let my students know, 'Hey, y'all, I see this. I notice it.' That was my only intent behind this."

Some professors have moved past detection and into declaration. One faculty member's position went viral under the headline: "Professor Will Fail Any Student Who Uses AI." No traps, no forensic analysis of sentence structure. Just a warning.

But that hardline stance against AI raises the question that troubled Berkeley faculty: if banning AI may harm students entering AI-dependent industries, then perhaps "cheating" with AI is the new normal? Should higher education now pivot to allow unfettered use of AI in the classroom? Today's generation of students are caught in the crossfire of this confounding conundrum.

At Dartmouth, Professor Jeff Sharlet notes a deeper divide. The dynamic he describes is not rebellion against academic standards but collapse in the face of them. His students are not choosing between integrity and convenience. Students who see classmates cheat without consequence, in a world where AI is expected to reshape or eliminate their unfulfilled careers, are choosing between failing to keep up with classmates who use AI, versus gaming a system that fails to keep up with the future.

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