Albert P' Rayan

The The use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has recently sparked widespread discussion and debate about its impact on student learning. AI tools are now commonly used by students at both the secondary and tertiary levels for several academic purposes. While many educators view this development positively, others express concerns that it may lead to plagiarism, hinder creativity, and reduce originality.

Recently, when speaking at a conference on AI at a Chennai college, I opened my presentation on "Does AI kill creativity?" with a series of brainstorming questions designed to assess familiarity with AI tools and the benefits from using them. Nearly everyone in the audience responded that they use ChatGPT and a few other AI tools for various academic tasks.

How authentic?
It is true that AI cannot create in the same way humans can because it lacks intrinsic creativity. Humans possess immense creative potential that machines cannot match. For example, the music of renowned musicians and the writing style of creative authors are unique. In fantasy and sci-fi author Joanna Maciejewska's words "I want AI to do my laundry and dishes so that

I can do my art and writing…" No fan of JK Rowling expects her to use AI to write a novel, just as no fan of AR Rahman expects him to compose music with the help of AI. Artificial is synthetic, while natural is authentic. This statement should not be interpreted to mean that AI cannot be used for creative or productive purposes. The purposes for which creative artists use AI tools are quite different from those for which students and teachers use them.

Noam Chomsky provocatively described AI as "plagiarism software". While some critics argue that AI merely copies and modifies existing words and phrases, generative models do not simply reproduce content. Instead, they synthesise new combinations and generate novel outputs based on the data they are trained on. However, using AI-generated content uncritically reflects a lack of originality, creativity, and critical thinking. Those who view AI as a threat to academic integrity (honesty, fairness, and responsibility) often fail to see its educational potential. This raises the question of whether AI tools should be banned, restricted, or promoted in educational institutions.

New York City public schools, which had previously restricted access to ChatGPT on school computers and networks, have recently lifted the ban. Rather than thinking of banning AI tools, schools

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

To AI or not to AI?

AI tools, by themselves, do not have the power to enhance or diminish our originality and creativity. It all depends on how we use them.

should teach students how to use them appropriately. This proactive approach can enhance students' understanding of the technology and could prove to be a valuable workplace skill. It is crucial for education boards to implement thoughtful and reasonable AI policies.

Good or bad mentor
In a discussion on the role of AI in education, one teacher remarked that AI acts as a mentor for students. I asked whether he

considered it a good or bad one. The reality is that AI can be either, depending on how we choose to use it. The prompts we provide reflect our intentions, and AI responds accordingly.

AI, as a good mentor or an educational tool, can instil confidence in learners, arouse their curiosity, empower them to critically evaluate generated content, spark creativity, synthesize information, edit or translate content into any language, help them improve their lan-

guage skills, organize study materials, develop learner autonomy, and enhance personalized learning by making it more effective and enjoyable.

On the other hand, as a bad mentor, AI can do everything for the student: generate ideas for homework, complete assignments, prepare presentation slides, and even give the impression that the user is the original author of essays, presentations, and reports it has created.

AI has empowered

many academics, researchers, and students who now feel that language should no longer be a barrier to expressing their novel ideas and research findings, as AI tools assist with language-related tasks. In other words, thanks to AI, academia has become more productive, if not more innovative and creative.

With the ubiquitous smartphone and other gadgets and 24/7 Internet, anyone can learn anytime and anywhere in the 21st century. If individuals be-

come AI literate and learn to use AI tools effectively, they can become self-directed learners with minimal assistance from teachers. Therefore, educators should teach students how AI works, its strengths, and its limitations, so that students understand when and how to use it effectively. This can promote more strategic use of AI and reduce over-reliance on it. They should also address ethical issues, such as plagiarism and emphasise the importance of adhering to AI policies.

AI tools, by themselves, do not have the power to enhance or diminish our originality and creativity—it all depends on how we use them. When applied thoughtfully, rather than as a crutch, they can assist with idea generation, help overcome mental blocks, and refine texts, thereby expanding creative capabilities. However, over-reliance on AI can develop cognitive laziness or mental inertia, weaken problem-solving abilities, reduce independent thinking, and lead us to bypass imaginative processes. Since AI-generated content often reflects patterns from its training data, excessive dependence on it can further restrict originality. Will we make AI our creative assistant or allow it to become a crutch? The ball is in our court. Let's make the right play.

The writer is an ELT resource person and education columnist.
rayanal@yahoo.co.uk

Manage your time

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am in Class 12 (Commerce with Informatics Practice). Can I do a B.Com without Maths? Arna

Dear Arna,
Most universities and colleges in India allow students from Commerce stream to apply for B.Com programmes. But check the specific eligibility criteria and admission process of the institutions you are interested in, as the mandates can vary. Some colleges also have entrance exams for admission into their B.Com programmes that typically assess general knowledge, reasoning ability, and aptitude. You can also choose from various specialisations that align with your specific career interests and goals such as General B.com, B.Com (Honours), B.Com in Accounting, B.Com in Finance, B.Com in Marketing, and B.Com in Computer Applications.

I am currently doing a BBA for my graduation. I want to do an MBA in IIM. How can I prepare for that? Kishore

Dear Kishore,
You have to take the Common Admission Test (CAT). Familiarise yourself with the exam format, syllabus, and eligibility criteria. The CAT exam consists of Quantitative Ability, Data Interpretation and Logical Reasoning, and English Verbal Ability and Reading Comprehension. The exam scores, academic performance, work experience (if any), and performance in the Personal Interview (PI) will help you make the cut.
Invest in good preparation material or use online platforms, coaching websites and institutes that offer CAT-specific courses.

Create a study plan and work on a timetable to dedicate specific hours daily for each section based on your strengths and weaknesses. Work on old question papers and mock tests to improve your time management skills. Work on your communication for the PI and WAT. Participate in a variety of extracurricular activities, and clubs, or volunteer and work to demonstrate your leadership capabilities and teamwork experience. Finally, keep up with current affairs, business news, and economic trends by reading newspapers and economic magazines.

My son is in Class 11 (CBSE) with Business Studies, Accountancy, Economics and Mass Media. Now he wants to drop Accountancy and Business Studies and take up Sociology and Legal Studies. We are not sure if he is truly interested in these subjects. How can we identify what he is interested in? Also what are the career options if he does make the switch? Ramya

Dear Ramya,
Help him identify his true interests and passion, as he navigates his academic path. A career assessment with a professional will greatly help him discover and discern his choices. What made him drop these subjects? Was it lack of interest, understanding or teaching methodology? He is moving towards Humanities from Commerce. Ask him to reflect on the subjects he enjoys the most and the ones he finds challenging or boring. He could engage in short online courses in Sociology or Legal Studies to help understand them better. Also, encourage him to engage with professionals in the field so that they can give him a reality check in terms of what to expect as a career path. With Sociology he could become a social researcher, community organiser, policy analyst, social worker, and human

resources manager. With Legal Studies, careers in Law as a legal or para-legal assistant, corporate counsel, or in consultation or mediation are possible. Combining both, he could explore criminal justice, public policy, or with non-profits to work on social justice, legal rights, advocacy work, and community development.

I am in the third year of graduation (Arts stream). I am preparing for the State Public Service Commission exams. But people tell me I have started preparing too late and that I should have begun much earlier. What should I do now? Sachin

Dear Sachin,
While early preparation can be beneficial, it is possible to succeed with a focused, strategic study plan. Identify if you feel confident to do this on your own or if joining a coaching class will help. Study and understand the exam pattern and syllabus including types of questions, and marking scheme. Work out the previous year's question papers so that you identify the areas you need to work on. This will also help you manage your time effectively. Create a realistic study plan and break down the syllabus into manageable sections. Allocate sufficient time to cover all subjects in a balanced manner. Focus on current affairs, and study Indian Polity, Geography, History, and General Studies. Schedule weekly revisions and create smart notes and mind maps for reference. Connect with peers preparing for this exam to seek and provide motivation, support, and the opportunity to discuss, clarify, and share information. Stay motivated and maintain a positive mindset. Look after your physical and mental health. Ensure good sleep, balanced food and workout every day.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Transforming lives and communities

Established by a group of IIT alumni in 2009, Pan IIT Alumni Reach For India Foundation (PARFI) aims to uplift the youth through a combination of education and self-employment opportunities

Archana Subramanian
archana.subramanian@thehindu.co.in

The aim was two-fold: to bridge the skilled labour gap in India and to uplift underprivileged communities. This is what led to the establishment of Pan IIT Alumni Reach For India Foundation (PARFI) in 2009. The founders were a group of IIT alumni who aimed to transform lives through a combination of education, self-employment opportunities and wealth creation at the grassroots level.

Stable sectors
To ensure that the programme addresses market requirements and aspirations of the trainees, the organisation ensures that its programmes align with industry needs and selects individuals from marginalised communities using poverty indices, aptitude tests, and government documentation. Students are then offered training in sectors that are stable and long-term when it comes to careers. The ability to co-finance their education through subsidised skill loans fosters accountability and ties

Beyond the training, PARFI also ensures help in placements by forging partnerships with employers and leveraging its extensive IIT alumni network. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

their financial success to job retention.

For example, in the healthcare sector, the programme runs a vocational nursing education system to address critical shortages in maternal and child healthcare as well as the broader demand-supply gap in healthcare professionals. In the traditionally male-dominated field of smartphone assembly, PARFI helps girl students break barriers. The initiative works to skill youth in critical infrastructure roles in construction, electrical and plumbing trades to meet the

growing demand for trained workers in urban and rural development projects. It also creates opportunities in the rapidly expanding hospitality sector and equips trainees with skills for high-demand roles. These choices stem from detailed labour market analyses, prioritising sectors with significant skills gaps, and potential for economic upliftment.

Beyond the training, PARFI also ensures help in placements by forging partnerships with employers and leveraging its extensive IIT alumni network. Beyond placements, in-

dustry stalwarts also help them design their curricula, assess candidates and provide the on-the-job training (OJT) that helps student apply their theoretical learning in a practical situation. Dedicated retention teams conduct follow-ups through site visits, helplines, and mentorship programmes to address workplace challenges, ensuring that the trainees remain engaged and productive in their roles.

PARFI was first launched in Jharkhand given the high rate of poverty in the state. The initial successful outcomes led to a partnership with the state government and the conversion of unused government infrastructure into state-of-the-art training centres in all 24 districts.

By 2028, PARFI aims to train 50,000 beneficiaries annually, addressing not only vocational education but also entrepreneurship and to foster public-private partnerships, creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for disadvantaged sections of society. By 2030, the goal is to impact over one million beneficiaries, transforming lives and communities nationwide.

CAREER CUES
Richa Dwivedi Saklani

With deadlines looming and students and parents working frantically on the application, here are some very specific admission guidelines for certain colleges that students should keep in mind.

India
Ashoka University: On-the-spot essays

Apart from a strong academic profile, Ashoka evaluates applicants through on-the-spot essays, an aptitude test, and an in-depth interview. The essay tends to be very topical, so be aware of ongoing events across the world. The topic is usually controversial and your approach counts for a lot. The interview is also a critical aspect, as they sometimes try to confuse you and put you on the spot with their questions but again your response and how you handle yourself in a pressure situation is important.

The U.S.
UChicago and Brown University: Video introduction

Many universities have started incorporating video components into their application processes to gain a broader understanding of applicants. Brown University and the University of Chicago are among those that have an optional video element. Brown allows students to submit a two-minute video introduction for a glimpse into their personality. The University of Chicago offers an optional two-minute video introduction, giving students a platform to cover anything they haven't been able to in their application. These video submissions allow the admissions committee to view your application in a more holistic way. Also, with students using AI to write essays, video responses are gaining more popularity.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT): Maker culture

MIT values "makers" who have shown a hands-on approach to solving problems, building projects, or conducting experiments. The Maker Portfolio is an optional but impactful component of the application, allowing students to showcase engineering, crafting, or coding projects of their own design and making that are substantial, original, and technically creative. Examples include designing and building robots for competitions, creating solar-powered devices, or developing innovative engineering solutions, developing mobile apps, websites, or software tools that solve specific issues or enhance user experiences and engaging in team-based projects, such as hackathons or community service initiatives that involve technical skills. MIT values teamwork and it would help to tailor your application to showcase those skills.

The U.K.
University of Oxford: Academic intensity and interviews

The admissions process requires top grades along with a strong emphasis on subject-specific expertise. Applicants must give entrance exams such as the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) or Biomedical Admissions Test (BMAT), depending on their chosen course. The interview process is designed to assess critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deep understanding of the subject. Prepare for a tough, intellectually rigorous interview where you could be asked academic or subject-specific questions or philosophical or creative questions.

Singapore
National University of Singapore (NUS): Aptitude-based

NUS' Discretionary Admissions scheme evaluates students on their academic scores and aptitude and interests. This allows students with exceptional talent in areas such as sports, arts, or entrepreneurship to highlight their unique strengths through portfolios and personal statements. Under the current Discretionary Admissions (DA) scheme, NUS can admit up to 15% of its annual intake based on factors beyond general academic grades. Each college considers different factors for its assessment.

France
Sciences Po: Global perspective

Sciences Po looks for students with a keen interest in global issues and Social Sciences. Its admissions process two pieces on the following subjects: Your motivations for applying and your project for Sciences Po and an essay on a subject chosen from five proposed themes. Be ready to contribute some time to making a compelling application for Sciences Po.

While the common thread is strong academic grades, each university has different factors it considers important. So check the specific college application tips for the university you are applying for and try to align your application accordingly.

With inputs from Kritika Malhotra, Lead Counsellor, Inomi Learning

The writer is the founder and CEO, Inomi Learning, a Gurugram-based career and college guidance firm. info@inomi.in

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Showcase yourself

Some institutions have certain unique admission criteria that focus on the student's personality. Featuring some of the more popular ones

---

From classroom to courtroom

Strategies to transition from legal education to legal practice

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Koneru Lakshman Havish

Transitioning from legal education to legal practice is a significant step for aspiring lawyers. While law school provides theoretical knowledge, legal practice demands practical skills, adaptability, and resilience. Many new lawyers find this transition challenging, as they face the complexities of managing cases, interacting with clients, and adjusting to the fast-paced legal environment. Here are some effective strategies for a successful transition.

Embrace your beginner status: Working alongside seasoned lawyers can feel daunting but, remember, every experienced lawyer started as a beginner. Accepting your novice status allows you to focus on learning and growth. Embrace your role as a learner, ask questions, and seek guidance. By maintaining a mindset of curiosity and humility, you'll gradually build confidence and develop into a competent practitioner.

Seek help and collaborate: Legal work is complex and attempting to figure everything out on your own can hinder your progress. Don't hesitate to ask for help or advice from colleagues. Seeking guidance is not a sign of weakness but of professionalism. Collaboration is key and not only will you build your knowledge but also establish a supportive professional network.

Balance work and life: New lawyers often feel the pressure to dedicate themselves entirely to work to prove their commitment. However, overworking can quickly lead to burnout. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for long-term success in the legal profession. Make time for hobbies, family, and self-care.

Sharpen time management skills: Legal practice involves managing heavy workloads and tight deadlines. In law school, you would have developed study routines and schedules, which can be adapted to your professional life. Establish a system to prioritise tasks, meet deadlines, and handle multiple cases efficiently.

Learn from every outcome: Not every case will result in a favourable outcome, but each experience provides a valuable learning opportunity. Reflect on successes and setbacks. Analyse the strategies that worked and those that didn't. The courtroom is a place of continuous learning and, by staying reflective and adaptable, you'll refine your skills over time.

Set boundaries: In the early stages, it may be tempting to accept every opportunity that comes your way. However, taking on too much can compromise the quality of your work and lead to burnout. Learning to say no when necessary is not a weakness but a way to ensure you can focus on delivering high-quality work.

Find a mentor: Whether it's a senior lawyer in your firm or a former professor, a mentor provides guidance and feedback, shares insights, and helps you set and achieve career goals. Building a strong mentor relationship can help you grow and thrive.

Keep networking: Attend legal conferences, join professional associations, and engage with local bar organisations. Networking not only opens doors to new opportunities but also helps you stay informed about industry trends. Connections made through networking can lead to client referrals, potential collaborations, and long-term professional relationships.

The transition from law school to legal practice marks the beginning of a rewarding journey filled with challenges and opportunities. With the right strategies, you'll not only survive but thrive, in a profession where you have the opportunity to advocate for justice, make an impact, and build a lasting legacy.

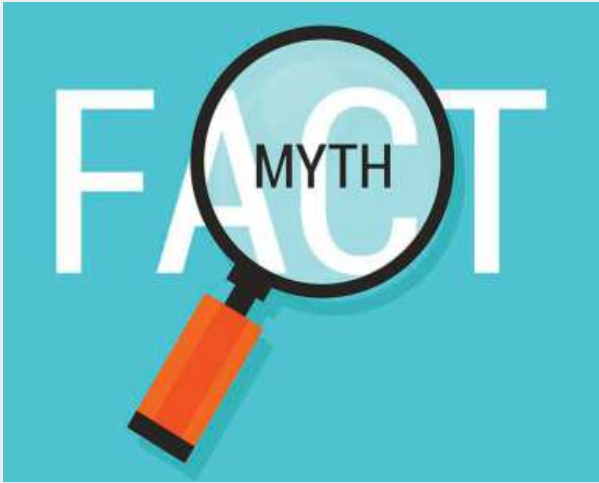*The writer is Vice President, KL Deemed-to-be University.*

Donna Swinford

With an MBA being a sought-after course, there are many beliefs surrounding the application process and what a perfect application should be like. This article clears some of the misconceptions.

Application essays should be strictly professional: While professionalism is an important aspect, it should also reflect who you are as a person. Feel free to share your hobbies and personal interests; give an understanding of your passions and priorities outside of your academic and professional pursuits. How detailed your essay will be is entirely up to you; so use this opportunity to showcase your personality.

Your GPA and GMAT/GRE score hold the most weight: Applications are reviewed holistically and academic scores are just one of the many factors that are reviewed. If a low-test score or GPA is a concern, highlight other areas of strength.

Draft a compelling resume that showcases your skills and experiences. Work on well-structured essays that reflect your personal goals and motivations, and how you intend to utilise your MBA.

MBA interviews are intense and difficult: Look at your interview more as a conversation, approach it calmly, and be well prepared. The interviewer wants to learn about you, your aspirations and readiness for the programme. Demonstrate confidence in your abilities and clarity of purpose on how you're going to be a part of and contribute to your academic community.

Your resume must be dense: The resume's quality is more important than having a stacked one. Keep your resume precise, relevant, simple and scannable. Your accomplishments should speak for themselves.

LoRs should be from high-ranking colleagues: Select recommenders who can attest to your work ethic and skills, and with whom you have worked directly. While it may appear impressive to have recommendations from senior people, the effectiveness relies on someone's first-hand knowledge of your contributions and accomplishments. One letter ideally should come from your current supervisor or, if not possible, from a previous one. A second could be from a former colleague.

Personal career path must be defined: While it helps to know how you intend to spend your time during your MBA, it is not vital to the integrity of the application; these goals may change during the course.

Applicants need a business background: Students from a wide variety of "non-traditional" backgrounds succeed both during their MBA and well beyond graduation. A mix of students creates a well-rounded classroom environment where individuals can learn from a plethora of perspectives and robust conversations.

Leadership experiences can come only from a management position: In your resume and throughout your application, talk about the different ways in which you have gained leadership skills and played a leader role, regardless of formal title. These do not have to be only in high-designation positions, but can include examples of where you demonstrated leadership and management skills in academics, volunteering, a team setting, project-based work, personal life, and other instances that you consider relevant.

Applying in specific rounds: Every application is given equal consideration no matter the round. Applying in Rounds 1, 2, or 3 does not indicate lower chances. Apply when you are confident in your application.

Admission from the waitlist is impossible: Waitlisted applicants should not lose confidence. Countless students have made it off the waitlist and had a fruitful MBA experience. Keep engaging with the admissions team, attend events, and even submit career updates to the admissions office.

If denied, don't reapply: If an application is denied, you can reapply in the following years. Utilise the time to gain more experience, work on updating your resume, essay, and test scores. Network with other MBA graduates, attend admission events, stay confident in your professional capabilities and craft genuine applications that tell your story.

The writer is Associate Dean for Student Recruitment and Admissions, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, the U.S.

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Gain the edge

Debunking some popular myths surrounding MBA admissions

Quality over quantity

With the changes in the UPSC Civil Services Exam, the focus is now on testing thinking skills and candidates need to prepare accordingly

Sriram Srirangam

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Exam, one of India's toughest exams, has changed over time with the focus now being on testing thinking skills rather than just memory. Candidates now need to think critically and understand the bigger picture of public service.

In 2011, a major change occurred when the Optional paper in the Preliminary Exam was replaced by the Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT), which focused on reasoning and problem-solving. This meant that candidates had to think more. In the Main Exam, the General Studies became more important, and a new Ethics paper was introduced to test candidates on their value systems and understanding of ethics. This pushed aspirants to think about real-world issues.

Over time, though the CSAT is still a qualifying paper, its growing difficulty has made it harder for candidates, especially those from non-technical backgrounds. The exam, of late, focuses more on understanding concepts. For instance, Indian Polity connects textbook knowledge with current events. Candidates must think about how what they learn applies to real-world issues, like recent court decisions or political discussions or how the Fundamental Rights available to the minorities are connected to the recent Supreme Court verdict on the Aligarh

SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Muslim University (AMU).

Current affairs are now a big part of the UPSC exam. Every subject, whether it be History or Economics, includes questions on recent events. Aspirants need to stay updated on the latest national and global news by reading newspapers, journals and online sources. Subjects like Macroeconomics require some knowledge in areas such as banking systems and bond prices, which were not part of the exam earlier.

The Ethics paper – one of the biggest changes in the UPSC exam – includes case studies based on real-life situations and test the candidate's ability to solve problems, such as managing resources in disaster; misogyny; corruption; reasons for aspiring for the Civil Services, and so on. Aspirants are asked to think about how they would handle practical challenges in public service such as the bottom-up pressures in resource distribution; convincing people about a cleanliness, vaccination, and so on.

Tips to remember
Keep up with trends: As with every exam, CSE also has an established trend. It changes periodically, but an intelligent aspirant tries to locate the new patterns as they change. Instead of spreading time across the syllabus, it is critical that the recurrent topics and the pattern of the questions be detected so that preparation can be firmed up.

Quality over quantity: The focus is shifting from breadth of knowledge to depth of understanding. Instead of rewarding superficial coverage of many topics, the exam now prioritises a thorough grasp of the core subjects. Understand the fundamentals of recurring topics such as GMOs, space, judiciary, inflation and so on. Rely on specific material such as interviews and policy papers that contain perspectives and core details instead of reading multiple sources.

Practice tests: Mock tests are the new norm. It will show you how well-prepared you are, and if you are going in the right direction. For the Preliminary exam, it is essential to be precise and, for the Main exam, the ability to present ideas coherently with optimum detail and depth is crucial.

The writer is Chief Mentor at SRIRAM's IAS.