BETWEEN INNOVATION AND ETHICS: PERSPECTIVES OF GRADUATE FACULTY ON THE USE OF GENERATIVE AI IN DESIGN EDUCATION

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***Abstract*—The rapid integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) into creative industries has introduced both unprecedented opportunities and ethical challenges for design education. This qualitative study explores how graduate faculty in media and design programs respond to the emergence of generative AI as a tool for creative thinking and problem-solving. Using a design thinking framework, the research draws on in-depth empathy interviews with five educators from Philippine universities to uncover their pedagogical strategies, ethical concerns, and institutional challenges. Thematic analysis revealed five major themes: the duality of AI as both enhancer and threat, divergent paths in pedagogical integration, the primacy of critical thinking, concerns over academic integrity, and the need for institutional support. While participants differed in their approach to integrating AI, all emphasized the enduring value of human-centric skills and ethical responsibility. The findings offer practical implications for curriculum development, assessment design, and policy formation as educational institutions adapt to a future increasingly shaped by human-AI collaboration.**

Keywords—generative AI, design education, graduate faculty, critical thinking, academic integrity, human-AI collaboration, curriculum development, media studies

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) represents a transformative moment across a wide range of industries, fundamentally reshaping how content is created, problems are solved, and creativity is expressed [1]. Recent studies in the Philippine context emphasize this transformative potential, noting significant shifts in behavioral intention and motivation toward AI adoption in fields ranging from language education to mental health support [2]. In creative disciplines, this technological shift is particularly significant. As AI tools capable of producing complex media from simple prompts become integrated into professional workflows, they bring both groundbreaking opportunities for innovation and serious ethical and pedagogical challenges [3, 4]. These developments are redefining the nature of careers in the multimedia arts and the expectations placed on creative professionals.

This study is situated within the broader context of graduate-level design education. Across universities and institutions, faculty members are at the forefront of preparing students for rapidly evolving creative industries. Their role extends beyond teaching technical skills and software; they are responsible for cultivating adaptive thinking, critical reflection, and ethical awareness among students who will soon navigate a professional environment increasingly shaped by human-machine collaboration [5, 6]. As academic leaders, these faculty members must maintain educational excellence while responding to the shifting demands of technology and society.

This research addresses a central issue: the inherent tension between the innovative potential of generative AI and the ethical dilemmas it raises [7]. While many educators recognize AI as a tool that can enhance creativity and streamline production processes, they also express concern about its impact on originality, academic integrity, and the enduring value of human creativity [8, 9, 10]. These tensions highlight the urgent need to understand how graduate faculty are responding to these challenges and adapting their pedagogical approaches to align with the future realities of design and multimedia work.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the professional experiences, teaching practices, and perspectives of graduate faculty engaged in design education as they navigate the integration of generative AI into their field. This aligns with existing research into how practicing teachers address new problems and challenges within education [11].

This study has the following research objectives:

- Examine the strategies faculty use to incorporate generative AI into their curriculum.

• Understand the pedagogical challenges and ethical concerns faculty faces regarding AI.

• Identify how educators are adapting their teaching to foster critical and ethical AI usage among students.

• Gather insights that can inform future curriculum development and strategic planning in media education.

This research will be guided by the following central question:

• How do professors in graduate media programs use and respond to generative AI as a tool for creative thinking and problem-solving in design education?

By focusing on the perspectives of leading educators, this study seeks to provide actionable insights for curriculum development and strategic planning in media education. The findings aim to ensure that students are taught to use AI not as a substitute for critical thinking, but as a tool to be wielded ethically and creatively, ultimately preparing them for the future of the creative industries.

This study focuses specifically on the experiences and perspectives of faculty members teaching at the graduate level within design and multimedia arts programs. The research will be limited to a specific set of participants from accredited institutions.

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design guided by a design thinking framework to explore the experiences and perspectives of graduate faculty in media and design programs. The methodology was specifically structured around the three core design thinking stages-Empathize, Define, and Ideate-to not only understand the phenomenon of AI integration but also to generate actionable strategies [12]. The adoption of the design thinking framework ensures that the research process mirrors the very creative and problem-solving approach central to the participants' professional expertise in design education, thereby providing methodological alignment for the investigation.

Fig.1 Design Thinking Framework

A. Participants and Sampling

The participants for this study will be selected using a purposive sampling strategy, where researchers deliberately choose participants based on their specific expertise. The primary criterion for inclusion is that participants must be current or experienced faculty members teaching at the graduate level in programs related to multimedia arts, design, or creative technology. This ensures all participants possess the requisite experience in graduate-level pedagogy and are actively navigating the integration of generative AI. The study aims to recruit approximately 5-8 participants from a diverse range of institutions (e.g., public, private, media-focused, preferably, University X) to capture a breadth of perspectives. This sample size is intended to be large enough to identify recurring patterns while remaining small enough for in-depth analysis. Recruitment will begin with outreach to faculty at media schools, with snowball sampling employed as needed, wherein participants recommend colleagues. The goal is to continue recruitment until data saturation is reached, the point at which new interviews no longer yield significant new themes.

B. Data Collection (Empathize Stage)

The primary method for data collection will be semi-structured empathy interviews, designed to build a deep, empathetic understanding of the participants' professional worlds, motivations, and pain points regarding generative AI. Each interview is expected to last 40 - 60 minutes and will be conducted remotely via video conferencing or face-to-face, depending on what the participants are comfortable with. The open-ended interview questions will be designed to cover several key areas. The conversations will explore each participant's pedagogical philosophy and their general approach to teaching creative skills. They will also delve into their personal and professional engagement with generative AI tools, discussing the specific ways they have integrated, or chosen not to integrate, AI into their courses. Furthermore, the interviews will probe their perceptions of the ethical challenges, such as academic integrity and originality, alongside the innovative opportunities presented by AI. Finally, the questions will address the strategies they employ to foster critical and ethical AI literacy among their students. Two additional data sources may be used to supplement the interviews. Where feasible and with permission, the researcher will take observational notes of relevant settings, such as online class discussions or curriculum planning meetings, to contextualize the interview data. Before any data collection, participants will receive an informed consent form detailing the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality measures. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed with verbatim with permission.

C. Data Analysis (Define Stage)

The data analysis process will focus on synthesizing the collected data to define key themes, aligning with the Define stage of design thinking. The primary method will be thematic analysis, a systematic approach to identifying and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis will proceed through several interconnected phases. Initially, the process will involve a familiarization phase, where the researcher repeatedly reads transcripts and reviews notes to become deeply immersed in the data. Following this, the 3 researchers will begin initial coding by meticulously reviewing transcripts to assign descriptive codes to meaningful segments of text. The next phase, theme development and synthesis, will involve collating these codes into potential themes; empathy maps may be used at this stage as a tool to visually synthesize each participant's perspective by mapping what they say, think, do, and feel. Subsequently, these potential themes will be reviewed and refined against the entire dataset to ensure they are coherent, distinct, and accurately represent the participants' perspectives. The final phase will consist of defining and

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Participant ID	Participant Demographics		
	Institution	***Program/Department***	***Teaching Experience***
P1	A	Master of Multimedia Arts	Experienced faculty with a history of teaching graduate level courses
P2	A	School of Media Studies	Professor at University's School of Media Studies
P3	A	School of Media Studies	Full-time faculty with nearly two decades of experience teaching
P4	B	Master of Digital Media	Veteran educator with 30 years of college-level teaching experience
P5	A	School of Media Studies	Professor and current graduate student withing the School of Media Studies

naming the themes, which involves writing a detailed analysis that explains the scope and meaning of each one, supported by compelling quotes from the transcripts.

D. Ideation and Co-creation (Ideate Stage)

Following the data analysis, the research will move into the Ideate stage. The insights and defined themes from the analysis will serve as the foundation for brainstorming potential supports, pedagogical strategies, or solutions to the challenges identified by faculty. As part of this stage, small co-creation sessions may be conducted with a subset of the original participants, if possible. In these collaborative workshops, the researcher and faculty would work together to brainstorm and prototype new classroom activities, policy recommendations, or curriculum adjustments in response to the findings. This step aims to translate the research insights into tangible, actionable outcomes that can directly benefit the field of design education.

III. RESULTS

This section presents the findings from a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with five faculty members from graduate-level media and design programs. The data reveals five primary themes concerning the professional and pedagogical responses to the integration of generative AI in design education.

A. Participant Demographics and Data Saturation

The study involved five participants from two higher education institutions in the Philippines. To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned numerical identifiers. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' professional contexts. The analysis of the interviews indicated that data saturation was achieved, as the inclusion of the fifth participant confirmed the existing thematic structure without introducing significant new themes (See Table 2).

Table I. Participant Demographics

Table II. Data Saturation Matrix

Theme	Data Saturation Matrix				
	P1	***P2***	***P3***	***P4***	***P5***
Duality of AI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pedagogical Integration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Primacy of Critical Thinking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Academic Integrity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Institutional Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

B. Theme 1: The Duality of AI as a Tool of Efficiency vs. a Threat to Critical Thought

A central theme was the perception of generative AI as a double-edged sword. Participants acknowledged its potential to streamline workflows yet expressed deep reservations about its impact on the development of essential graduate-level skills. This duality was articulated by Participant 1, who described himself as "50-50 on AI," recognizing that while it "makes students' lives easier," the "heavy reliance on technology" is a significant negative. This tension was echoed by other participants. Participant 3, a self-described "pro-AI educator," noted that for students who use it properly, AI can help them become "more creative and produce more diverse work." However, he also warned that for those who are "totally dependent on it, they become lazy." The most optimistic view came from Participant 4, who framed AI not as a threat but as a "collaborator" that can help designers "thrive," while still acknowledging the primary concern of "students becoming overly reliant on AI due to laziness."

C. Theme 2: Divergent Paths in Pedagogical Integration

The findings revealed a clear divergence in how faculty are integrating or resisting the integration of generative AI into their teaching. Participant 3 stands out for his proactive approach, stating he has been using AI "even before (his institution) officially encouraged it" and now actively integrates it into his syllabus. Similarly, Participant 4's institution has an official AI policy, and she actively teaches students how to use tools effectively, emphasizing that AI should be used "as part of the creative process," not to create the final output. In contrast, Participant 1 actively "discourages the use of AI, especially in research, to foster critical thinking," driven by the belief that it

can "destroy opportunities for creative people." Participant 2 occupies a middle ground; while she has "not yet incorporated AI-based tools into her classroom," she is "open to students using AI" as long as they are responsible.

D. Theme 3: The Primacy of Human-Centric Skills and Critical Thinking

Despite differing views on AI's role, there was unanimous agreement on the enduring importance of human-centric skills, particularly critical thinking. All participants emphasized that AI should not replace the fundamental ability of a student to generate, defend, and critically reflect upon their own ideas. Participant 1 was most forceful on his point, “the most significant loss from over-relying on AI is the ability to think critically and creatively... critical thinking is a uniquely human ability.” Even the AI proponents stressed this point. Participant 3 insisted that "the original idea must always come from the student," with AI used merely for refinement. Participant 4 argued that engaging with AI can "actually enhance a student's critical thinking," but only if the student actively critiques and verifies the AI's output.

E. Theme 4: Navigating the Ethical Minefield of Academic Integrity

The rise of generative AI has introduced significant challenges related to academic integrity. The primary issues identified were plagiarism, the difficulty in discerning original work, and the need for new standards of citation. The core ethical issue for educators like Participant 3 is "dishonesty when students do not declare their use of AI." He is "fine with AI-assisted work as long as the source is cited properly." To combat these issues, educators are adapting their assessment methods. Participant 4 relies on observing a student's "pattern of speaking, choice of words, and personal experiences shared in discussions" to discern originality. Participant 2 ensures students "state their references and remind them to use AI ethically." This highlights a shift from merely detecting AI use to fostering a culture of transparency and ethical accountability.

F. Theme 5: A Call for Institutional Support and Adaptive Assessment

A final, crucial theme was the expressed need for stronger institutional support and a fundamental rethinking of assessment in the age of AI. Participant 3 pointed to a "lack of clear, written institutional guidelines on AI use" as a significant challenge. In contrast, Participant 4 highlighted that her institution already has an "official AI policy that is embedded in every syllabus," suggesting a potential model. Furthermore, participants called for robust faculty development. Participant 4 was a strong advocate for "changing assessment methods, as traditional questions like 'compare and contrast' can easily be answered by AI." This collective call underscores the belief that for education to adapt successfully, both educators and institutions must evolve together. in design education

IV. Discussion

This study aimed to answer the question: How do professors in graduate media programs use and respond to generative AI as a tool for creative thinking and problem-solving in design education? The findings, broken down into five main themes, show that teachers are being careful, changing how they teach, and figuring out the right way to use AI. The faculty interviewed are not just accepting or rejecting the technology. Instead, they are seriously thinking about what it means for the future of creative work and the basic principles of graduate school. This section explains these findings, connects them to the bigger picture in education, and discusses what they mean for educators, schools, and future studies.

The themes from the interviews show a profession that is in a period of change. The main theme, "the two-sided nature of Al as both a helpful tool and a threat to critical thinking," sums up the central conflict teachers are facing, reflecting a broader debate on whether AI is a "hero or heresy" [13]. This isn't just a simple case of being for or against AI. It shows a more detailed understanding that the same tool can encourage creativity or laziness, and it can make work easier while also weakening important skills. This aligns with findings by Cruz and Quinto [2025], who observed that while AI fosters enhanced learning efficiency and positive motivation among Filipino learners, it simultaneously creates challenges regarding skepticism of AI reliability and the need for human-like engagement. [14]. This conflict likely exists because graduate school is all about developing deep, critical, and independent thinking skills that teachers worry about, could be simply handed off to a computer program [15].

This main conflict directly leads to the different approaches to using AI in teaching. The fact that some teachers are eagerly using it (Participant 3 and 4) while others are carefully advising against it (Participant 1) isn't random. It seems to be a direct result of their personal teaching beliefs and their judgment of AI's risks versus its rewards. Those who use AI in their classes seem to believe they can lessen its dangers by teaching students to work with it as a partner. On the other hand, those who resist it are focused on protecting what they see as fundamental human skills.

Despite these different approaches, universal agreement on the importance of human skills and critical thinking is perhaps the most important finding. It's the one thing all participants agreed on. Even the strongest supporters of Al insisted that technology must remain a helper, used only to improve or explore ideas that come from the student first. This finding strongly shows that, in the eyes of these teachers, the purpose of design education is not just to create graduates with good technical skills, but to develop critical thinkers, a goal that aligns with foundational calls to rethink design education for the 21st century [16]. The tools may change, but the goal of education stays the same.

As a result, dealing with the tricky ethical problems of academic honesty becomes a top priority. The main concern is less about using the tool itself and more about the chance for students to be dishonest. The move from trying to detect AI to encouraging honesty and proper credit (as Participant 3 noted) is a key change. It suggests a shift away from simply banning AI and toward building a culture where students are responsible for their actions, which resonates with calls to rethink plagiarism itself in the AI era [17]. This acknowledges that AI is now a permanent part of the creative world.

The findings of this study have important real-world and academic takeaways. In a practical sense, the theme of a call for school support and new ways of grading is a direct suggestion for academic leaders. The difference between schools with clear AI policies and those without shows an urgent need. Universities must create clear, flexible rules for AI use, provide solid training for teachers, and lead the way in changing how they grade students [18]. The necessity for such systemic support is underscored by Bete and Quinto [2025], who identified that insufficient training and inadequate infrastructure remain primary barriers to the adoption of new technologies among Filipino educators [19]. As Participant 4 pointed out, traditional assignments may no longer be good ways to measure what students have learned. This requires a shift to grading methods that look at the student's process, their ability to think critically, and their skill in explaining and defending their creative decisions. Academically, this study adds to the current conversation about how humans and machines can work together in creative areas [20]. The teachers' view of AI as a "collaborator" instead of a replacement supports a future where people and AI create things together. However, their deep concerns also calm down the idea that technology will solve everything, reminding us that using these tools is full of teaching and ethical challenges that need to be handled carefully [21].

It is important to recognize the study's limitations. Because it is a qualitative study, it provides deep insights but is based on a small, specifically chosen group of five people from two schools in the Philippines. Therefore, the results can't be assumed to be true for all graduate design teachers. The views captured here apply mainly to this specific situation and might be different in other countries, at other types of schools, or in undergraduate programs. Finally, the field of generative AI is changing very quickly, so the tools and conversations about them may have already changed since this research was done.

Based on these findings and limitations, several ideas for future studies come up. A key next step would be to research graduate students' own experiences and views on AI, which would offer an important different perspective to this study's focus on teachers. To get a bigger picture, a survey with many more people could show if the themes found here, like the two-sided nature of AI and the need for school support, are common among a larger group of educators. Furthermore, studies that follow teachers and their teaching methods over a few years would give valuable insight into how views and practices change as technology does. Future studies could also benefit from comparing them with other academic subjects, like the humanities or sciences, to see how teachers in those fields are dealing with similar problems. This could reveal both shared and unique solutions. Finally, as teachers create new ways of grading that are resistant to AI, more research will be needed to see how effective they are at measuring student learning and critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, this study shows the complex and thoughtful ways that graduate design teachers are handling the arrival of generative AI. They aren't just accepting it without thinking, nor are they completely rejecting it. They are thoughtful professionals working to balance the possibilities of this powerful new tool with the long-lasting values of their field.

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The template will number citations consecutively within brackets [1]. The sentence punctuation follows the bracket [2]. Refer simply to the reference number, as in [3]—do not use “Ref. [3]” or “reference [3]” except at the beginning of a sentence: “Reference [3] was the first ...”

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