

# OP-ED

## Can Accreditation Stay Human in an AI-Driven Future?

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When an institution of higher education uses an AI dashboard to flag students at risk or a language model to summarize a peer-review report, the boundary between human judgment and machine learning begins to blur. The rapid adoption of AI invites not hesitation, but reflection on how to ensure that technology strengthens, rather than substitutes for, the human side of education.

Artificial intelligence brings efficiency and new insight, but it also tests how we define quality. The challenge before us is not to resist innovation, but to make sure it advances learning, equity, and institutional mission.

AI can certainly help. Automated systems compile data, track performance, and highlight patterns that once took months to detect. Yet **(1) data are not decisions.** Accreditation has always relied on context and professional judgment. Machines can gather information, but they cannot replace the deliberation that turns evidence into understanding.

**(2) Peer review remains the foundation of accreditation.** It is a dialogue among professionals who interpret evidence and context through the lens of mission and experience. As AI tools become more capable, they should support, not replace, the thoughtful human exchange that defines peer review.

**(3) AI is transforming teaching and assessment.** Adaptive platforms personalize instruction, and generative tools expand access to learning. But they also blur the meaning of assessment. When an AI tutor helps a

student write an essay, whose learning are we measuring? Innovation must be paired with transparency so that assessment remains credible and fair.

**(4) Ethics and governance must guide adoption.** AI introduces new risks such as bias, privacy breaches, and unclear decisions, and many institutions are adopting tools faster than they are defining principles. Efficiency alone cannot be our measure of quality. Institutional mission must remain the compass.

CHEA has outlined these expectations in its [Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in Accreditation and Recognition](#), emphasizing human oversight, ethical use, and transparency as essential safeguards as technology becomes more pervasive.

**(5) Accrediting bodies share responsibility for direction.** They can welcome innovation while asking essential questions: How is AI used? Who oversees it? How does it advance learning and uphold mission? These questions build trust, not bureaucracy.

Technology will continue to evolve, but **(6) trust evolves slowly.** Accreditation's purpose is to keep them in balance. My hope is that colleges, universities, and accreditors will use AI not to accelerate routine compliance, but to deepen our collective understanding of learning, quality, and student success.

AI will not define the future of higher education; our choices about how to use it will. We can let technology reduce accreditation to a checklist, or we can use it to strengthen what has always mattered most: the human intelligence, dialogue, and integrity that make education worthy of public trust.

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