



AI, Accreditation, and Research Integrity: Governance, Policy, Process

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Project overview

In May 2026, the Department of Education’s Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization Committee reached consensus on proposed regulatory changes related to postsecondary accreditation, regulations that could be in effect as early as July 2027. These regulations include language that would require accreditors to develop new standards that would mandate institutions to demonstrate that they have established “policies regarding the integrity of scholarly activity and research and practices designed to prevent, detect, and address fabrication, material misrepresentation or falsification, plagiarism, and other forms of research misconduct as well as mechanisms for timely investigation, corrective actions, and, as appropriate, public disclosure.”

The possibility that research integrity policies may soon be requirements for accreditation raises the stakes for institutions to develop clear governance mechanisms for managing the transformations that AI is making on how researchers conduct and present their research. In a context in which attention and resources devoted to AI have been overwhelmingly focused on academic integrity, institutional readiness for handling it as a research integrity issue has lagged significantly. Many institutions—including large research institutions—have at present offered little formal skeletal guidance to their faculty about the ethical use of AI in research. Among those that have, it often consists primarily in recommending they follow the policies of their funders or researchers, placing high burdens on researchers to learn and comply with external rules and creating ample opportunities for confusion.¹

¹ Amrita Ganguly, Aditya Johri, Areej Ali, and Nora McDonald, “Generative Artificial Intelligence for Academic Research: Evidence from Guidance Issued for Researchers by Higher Education Institutions in the United States,” *AI and Ethics* 5 (2025): 3917-3933, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s43681-025-00688-7#Sec16>; Shannon Smith et al, “A University Framework for the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research,” *arxiv*, April 30, 2024, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.19244>; Yunjo An, Ji Hyun Yu, and Shadarra James, “Investigating the Higher Education Institutions’ Guidelines and Policies Regarding the Use of Generative AI in Teaching, Learning, Research, and Administration,” *International Journal of Education Technology in Higher Education* 22, no. 10 (2025), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s41239-025-00507-3>; Jenay Robert and Mark McCormack, “2025 EDUCAUSE AI Landscape Study: Into the Digital AI

To support institutional readiness for potential accreditation requirements related to the ethical conduct and presentation of research in the era of AI, Ithaka S+R is organizing a cohort of 12-15 research universities for a research and implementation project that will promote better understanding of how AI is being used to conduct and present research across the disciplines, identify and prioritize governance, policy, and resource needs, and improve coordination and collaboration among stakeholders and relevant university units.

Participating institutions will designate a team of 3-4 individuals to serve as the project team. We recommend that the team include representatives from multiple units such as the research office, library, faculty senate, and academic or faculty affairs offices. Each team should also include an executive sponsor who can provide oversight and strategic guidance to the project team and serve as a conduit for institutional communication.

All cohort meetings will be held virtually. The project will begin in fall 2026 and conclude in fall 2027.

Cohort structure

Phase One: Mapping National and Institutional Landscapes (4 months)

The cohort will begin with a kick-off meeting designed to establish a shared understanding of the project's goals, clarify expectations, and build trust among participating campuses. The kickoff meeting will be followed by two working sessions: one focused on reviewing current literature on risk profiling and management related to the use of AI in the conduct of research, and the second on risk profiling and management related to the use of AI in the presentation of research.

During phase one, participants will use an instrument developed by Ithaka S+R to complete an institutional audit of existing AI-related policies, guidance documents, and task force outputs, programming and resources provided by libraries, research offices, IRBs, and other relevant units on their campus. The audit will also identify existing governance bodies, committees, offices, or similar internal stakeholders who will need to be involved to create, implement, and legitimize future policy and governance mechanisms. The goal is not to create an exhaustive institutional inventory, but to develop a practical working map to reveal where guidance does or does not exist, surface existing networks from which to build, and identify opportunities to improve coordinated oversight of the use of AI in research contexts.

Ithaka S+R will use the audit instrument to conduct landscape research on a large sample of R1 and R2 universities in the United States and share findings with the cohort. These

Divide," *EDUCAUSE*, February 17, 2025, <https://www.educause.edu/content/2025/2025-educause-ai-landscape-study/policies-and-guidelines>.

data will allow benchmarking of institutional readiness against peer institutions. Ithaka S+R will subsequently publish its findings and the audit instrument, making them available to the larger higher ed community.

Campus Deliverables:

- AI in research policy and governance audit
- Network map of institutional stakeholders and resources
- Initial analysis of institutional risk profile

Phase Two: Faculty Use Cases and Needs (4 months)

Using a semi-structured interview guide developed by Ithaka S+R, each participating institution will conduct interviews with 10-15 researchers regarding their use of AI in research and perceptions of existing institutional guidance. Ithaka S+R will provide training and support for the institutional teams throughout this process. Participants will share de-identified interview transcripts with Ithaka S+R, who will use the resulting data to establish cross-cohort findings.

Campus Deliverables:

- Faculty interviews
- Campus findings memo

Phase Three: Institutional Resources and Needs (4 months)

The cohort will reconvene for a workshop focused on evaluating existing models for institutional AI policies and governance related to the use and conduct of research. At two subsequent workshops, participants will convene to develop draft policy wireframes and governance workflows.

During this phase, each participating institution will develop and pilot one faculty-facing support prototype. The prototype should involve cross-unit collaboration to directly address needs and risks identified during the project's first two phases, and should be scoped to be feasible within the project timeline. The primary goal of the prototype is to build capacity for cross-unit collaboration in a real-world setting and create the foundation for future scaling of support services related to research integrity.

Campus Deliverables:

- Draft policy wireframe
- Draft governance workflows
- Faculty-facing support prototype

Phase Four: Reflection and Next Steps (1 month)

Participants will convene for a cross-campus showcase, at which campuses will share their models, prototypes, and reflect on lessons learned. Ithaka S+R will share cross-cohort findings from the project interviews and recommendations with the cohort as its contribution to the showcase. At this convening, participants will articulate concrete next steps for full implementation and scaling.

Following the completion of the project, Ithaka S+R will publish findings from the project interviews and discussions as a research report.

Participation requirements

Each project team will contribute a total of approximately 3-4 weeks FTE over the course of the project, to be distributed at the discretion of the team. This includes time spent at virtual workshops and convening, recruiting and conducting project interviews and other research activities described above, and other project-related activities.

To defray the costs of organizing and coordinating the cohort, creating shared research instruments, conducting data collection and analysis, and other project-related activities, each institution will make a cost-sharing contribution of \$25,000. Institutions will also need to allocate resources to transcribe project interviews.

How do I find out more?

This cohort will launch in the fall of 2026. If your institution is interested in participating, send an expression of interest to Dr. Dylan Ruediger (dylan.ruediger@ithaka.org).