

ASCILITE 2025

Future-Focused:

Educating in an Era of Continuous Change

Do you want your digital twin delivering your lectures? Join us for an emotionally charged debate into the future of lecturing

Lucy Andrew, Lydia Richards

University of South Australia

A digital twin avatar (synthetic self, personalised virtual avatar, AI clone) is created and controlled by the person it represents, aiming to be an ethical use of deepfake technology (Altuncu et al., 2024). In higher education (HE), these avatars can be used to deliver asynchronous video lectures, raising issues around ownership and representation. There are currently no HE policies in Australia that govern the use and control of digital twin lecturers who look and sound like real academics. While digital twins offer benefits such as low-cost and multilingual educational content, deepfakes pose risks including cyberbullying, reputational harm, and academic dishonesty (Roe et al., 2024). The panel will rely on audience input (bring your device) to discuss the pros and cons around the emotionally charged topic of replacing real lecturers with their AI generated digital twins. Draft guidelines for using digital twin lecturers in HE will be presented.

Keywords: generative AI, video, lecture, deepfake, digital twin, avatar, governance, ethics, policy, digitally embodied content

Background

Generative AI has revolutionised the creation of digital content, enabling the production of deepfake videos that replicate the likeness of a person's appearance and voice. A digital twin is generated and controlled by the person it represents and is considered an ethical use of deepfake technology (Altuncu et al., 2024), while a synthetic avatar appears human, but does not represent a specific individual. Roe et al. (2025) conducted an email survey of higher education staff and found that hedonic motivation was the strongest predictor of their intention to adopt deepfake technology in teaching. Although efficiency was noted as a potential benefit, concerns were raised about its impact on professional identity and the equitable access of resources.

Our research has identified benefits and issues of using digital twins to create video lectures and aims to use the findings to develop guidelines for using digital twins in HE. Five focus groups (n = 40) were conducted to explore the benefits and challenges of using digital twin lecturers and interactive teaching agents in HE. Focus group participants were recruited from the University of South Australia and included teaching academic staff from all disciplines, professional staff who develop courses as well as staff from corporate units. The discussions were highly engaging, revealing a wide range of perspectives on the use of these technologies.

The following benefits were identified:

- Efficient – high quality video lectures can be produced without video production resources (studios, cameras, lighting, editing etc)
- Fast – video lectures can be quickly and easily edited to update content allowing the lecturer to respond to current events without having to re-record
- Greater reach – multilingual presentation allows delivery to world-wide audience
- Engaging delivery – human appearance improves engagement and connection with students.

The following issues were identified:

- Misrepresentation (not authentic) – digital twin lecturer can present in languages they cannot speak and deliver content they do not know.
- Portraying perfectionism – digital enhancement through airbrushing the appearance, editing scripts (e.g. removing 'um' and 'ah'), improving delivery (e.g. more enthusiastic).
- Racial and cultural white-washing – generative AI bias towards Western dominant types (e.g.

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removing or adjusting the accents of lecturers where English is not their first language).

- Ownership and control – universities own intellectual property, does this extend to a digital twin? Who controls the script/content of your digital twin?
- Legacy – when an academic leaves the university, is their digital twin replaced with a new twin who did not write the lecture?

Panel

Moderators/Researchers

Lucy Andrew and Lydia Richards will moderate the session by introducing the topic, engaging the audience, posing questions and incorporating research findings into the discussion.

Panel Members

Through focus group participation we have identified a sub-group of panel members who are passionate and bring different perspectives on using generated digital twin lecturers. Panel members represent diverse teaching experience including on-campus lecturers, online video lecturers, content creators and academic pedagogical researchers.

Format

Themes for discussion include:

Ownership

Digital twins are a type of teaching material and university IP policies state that all teaching materials are owned by the university, but should the university own your digital twin? What happens when you retire?

Control

Who is responsible for what your digital twin says? Who can edit the script of a digital twin lecturer? What happens if your twin is hacked?

Authenticity

Should your digital twin be younger and better looking? Should students be able to select what their digital lecturer looks like?

Recommendations

Draft recommendations addressing ownership, control, authenticity, and disclosure of digital twins, will be presented and we will introduce the concept of “digital retirement”. Audience members will have a say in the recommendations and rate their level of agreement.

References

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