

Thinking More by Doing Less: A Day at UZH in 2040

In 2040, my day at the University of Zurich begins with work that genuinely requires attention. As a researcher at UZH, I am no longer surrounded by administrative tasks disguised as academic necessity. Routine processes such as course administration, ethics documentation, reporting, and data standardisation are handled by reliable AI systems in the background. Their function is not to decide, but to remove noise.

My work spans research, teaching, and academic coordination. I analyse data, supervise students, teach seminars, and contribute to initiatives across the university. AI tools support this work by accelerating preparation and exploration. They scan and summarize possibly interesting literature from the tremendous amount of new publications, help test alternative analytical pipelines, simulate experimental designs, generate high-quality visualisations. Importantly, they do not define what questions matter. Research direction, theory building, and interpretation remain my responsibilities, because they require human judgement. This division of labour reshapes research culture at UZH. AI systems continuously document analysis steps, flag statistical weaknesses, spot bugs in code, and suggest robustness checks. Productivity is immensely boosted, but also transparency increases.

Teaching evolves in parallel, but not only within the classroom. Contact time at UZH is focused on discussions and group work. AI handles much of the repetitive groundwork, allowing students to arrive better prepared. More importantly, it radically expands what students can do independently. AI-supported learning environments offer adaptive problem sets, simulated experiments, personalised feedback on essays, code, or analyses, and guided extensions of course material far beyond what can be covered in lectures. Students can deepen methods, explore advanced applications, or pursue individual questions at their own pace, without requiring constant supervision.

As a lecturer, my role shifts accordingly. I spend less time just providing information to students and much more time helping them decide what to trust, what to question, and how to use AI tools for their own learning success. However, AI does not replace learning. It accelerates learning by allowing motivated students to independently go further and faster, while preserving the classroom as a space for reflection. AI dramatically increases the availability of information, but the formation of judgement continues to be a human task.

By 2040, UZH is central to my life not only as my workplace, but as an institution that actively shapes digital responsibility. AI is treated as infrastructure, not authority. The university protects slow thinking, disagreement, and intellectual risk-taking in a society optimised for performance measured by quantitative output and speed.

Productivity, in this future, is not about doing more tasks. It is about removing tasks where human intelligence, focus, and working hours were not required in the first place. AI does not replace creativity at UZH. It finally creates the conditions for it.

Declaration of AI use:

This essay was written with the support of generative AI (GPT-5.2) for language refinement. All conceptual content and final decisions were made by the author.