

AI Position Statement

The following was drafted by an ad hoc committee of the Undergraduate Committee, composed of Rachel Azima, Amanda Gailey, Elizabeth Spiller, Stacey Waite, and Laura White; it has been approved by the Undergraduate Committee. It is meant as a statement of principle, for what is necessarily a provisional purpose and with the intent that the department revisit this document and the larger questions posed by AI on a yearly basis.

Imaginative reasoning is at the heart of our English Department—the ability to *imagine* the world other than it is, to engage the human mind in discovery and possibility. We believe that the ability to invent, create, imagine, and know are essential features of what it means to be human. We believe that language allows us to capture our own experiences and enter into those of others, which is foundational to our humanity and affects every aspect of social relations. We use language to construct and record our experiences, and we create knowledge as we read and write. We believe that the hard work of thinking through reading and writing strengthens our minds and enriches our experience of the world. We believe that among the highest goals of education is providing students with the tools necessary to think, create, and learn for their lifetimes, and among the most essential of those tools is language.

The work of writing and of engaging the writing of others can be difficult. But the difficulty pays dividends. Through this hard and fundamental intellectual work we can explore a long history of diverse human experience; we can incorporate the insight of others into our breadth of thought; we can expand our intellectual scaffolding; and we can develop inner reservoirs of concepts and methods that we can use to connect ourselves with others. Writing and reading help us create agency and community.

The English Department faculty provide leadership and conduct research on emerging technology, and many of our faculty engage meaningful strategies in working with technology in our classrooms and teaching our students to engage in critical digital literacy. We believe it is crucial for students to learn to think critically about language, whether that language is spoken, written, read aloud, or generated by AI.

ChatGPT and other generative AI language model programs function in ways that mimic human language use through reusing and reassembling text based on probabilities. They sever the production of language from the production of knowledge: they generate a language product without any of the concomitant benefits that thinking through writing offers the human mind. Generative AI is quickly becoming incorporated into every technological tool we use. This is unsurprising: some of the most powerful sectors of the economy have invested in its potential not simply to improve their services, but also to obviate skilled labor. We believe in the necessity of raising students' awareness about downsides of generative AI: AI's functioning as a kind of black box; its reliance on historical data which perpetuates all forms of bias; and its status as an inherently homogenizing tool.

English is a discipline well positioned to explore, investigate, and critique the ways in which technological tools interact with writing; we believe, however, that the *unexamined* use of generative AI in the writing process can be detrimental to learning, thinking, authenticity and honesty, and engagement with others. In short, we advocate for maintaining a focus on student learning and student engagement by providing students ample opportunities to harness their own original thinking and creativity and to learn what AI tools can—and can't—do.

Chat bots and other large language model AI tools must not be allowed to substitute for the human ability to engage in genuine critical thinking, to consider ethical consequences, to examine topics from multiple perspectives based on the many intersectional identities we inhabit. Therefore, we are committed to encouraging students to invest energy in developing the abilities they need to approach ideas and evidence from a specifically human, individual, embodied perspective—the abilities we need to communicate effectively across difference and better understand ourselves and our world.

Key Principles for the Classroom

- Different courses and/or departments may adopt their own practices regarding AI. It is important that faculty explain their AI policies in the syllabus, and also that faculty and students talk through the issue, including first principles, in the classroom. Because an instructor's AI policy may hold students accountable for serious violations of academic integrity, the policy should be made clear to them. We recommend reminding students of the AI policy when discussing assignments.
- Instructors must use caution in penalizing students for suspected AI use in violation of course policy. AI detection tools currently have a high failure rate and are known to flag the work of multilingual writers at higher rates than that of native speakers of English. A positive result from an AI detector cannot alone serve as proof of cheating. Instructors should also be aware that many plagiarism and AI detection tools feed any supplied writing back into the training set for AI.
- We recommend that no student or faculty member should be required to create an account on a generative AI platform; all disclosures of personal information of students and faculty should be “opt-in.” AI is strengthened through use: when we provide content to it, we are helping improve it. Furthermore, AI is arguably based on theft: it is replacing human writers because it has used innumerable texts created by human writers in a way the authors never imagined, much less consented to. Instructors need to weigh the pedagogical benefits of having students engage with generative AI tools against the potential costs built into interacting with these tools and the possible consequences of requiring students to help strengthen AI by interacting with it or giving it their intellectual product.
- It is our shared understanding that faculty members will hold themselves at least to the same standard with respect to AI and intellectual work products.
- The capabilities of AI will change over time. Staying aware of its capabilities will help instructors make informed decisions about what kind of work they assign. Ignoring the new reality carries its own risk of undermining the integrity of one's assignments and grades.