

GenAI & Student Writing: Insights from Spring 2025 Research

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What is GenAI?

- Content creation
 - Text, code, art, marketing materials
- High-level chatbots
 - Customer service, virtual assistants
- Large language models (LLMs)
 - Ex: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot
 - Trained using huge quantity of text from the internet to recognize and predict patterns
 - Generate 'human-like' writing
 - In development since the 1960s → OpenAI releases ChatGPT in Nov 2022

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UVM Response

- Academic Integrity
 - Minor changes to Code of Academic Integrity
 - Class policies at discretion of instructor
- Student Guides
 - Libraries
 - Undergraduate Writing Center
- Other UVM initiatives
 - AI Task Force
 - AI development research & courses in CEMS
 - "AI Fridays at the Libraries" workshop series
 - "Teaching & Writing in the Age of AI" faculty development at Writing in the Disciplines

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Impacts on Student Support Units?



Anticipating...

- Possible decline in appointments
- Implications for outreach
- Need for training & guidance for staff

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Shella Boland Chira
UWC Director

We need to know more about how students are using GenAI at UVM! Then we'll know how the UWC should respond.



Holly Painter
UWC Interim Director

How can we learn more?



How about turning the ENGL2795 Spring research project into a class investigation into GenAI and writing at UVM?



So instead of 25 individual research projects, we'll do a 25-person group project while you're on sabbatical? What could go wrong?

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Spring 2025 Research Project

Timeline: January-March

Five research groups

- GenAI in Undergraduate Education
- GenAI & Writing Centers
- Faculty & GenAI
- Students & GenAI
- Writing Tutors & GenAI



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Literature Review Research Groups

- GenAI in Undergraduate Education
 - GenAI developments, benefits, limitations, ethics, & impacts on students
 - Emphasis on writing courses & assignments
 - Synthesis of ≥8 peer-reviewed papers (2022-25)
- GenAI & Writing Centers
 - Ideas, guidance, & policies on GenAI coming out of writing centers
 - Synthesis of ≥8 practitioner sources (2022-25)
 - Review of ≥5 current writing center policies, guides, or statements on GenAI



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Qualitative Research Groups

- Faculty & GenAI
 - ≥8 interviews with current UVM faculty
 - Review of 76 Spring 2025 syllabi
- Students & GenAI
 - Two focus groups with UVM undergrads
- Writing Tutors & GenAI
 - ≥8 interviews with experienced UWC tutors
 - One focus group with experienced UWC tutors



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So what did we learn?

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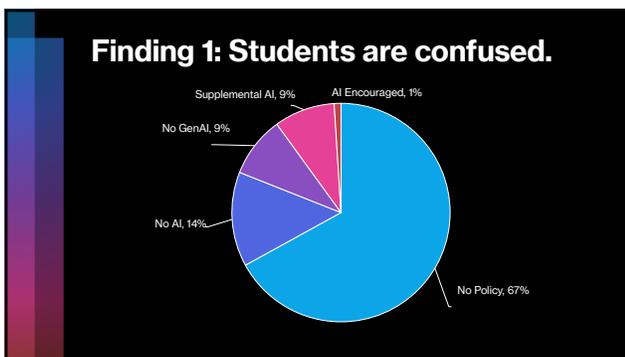
Finding 1: Students are confused.

Code of Academic Integrity does not mention AI at all.

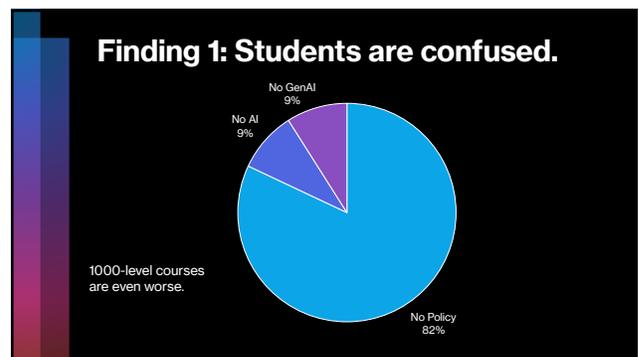
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Individual instructors must set their own AI policies.

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Finding 2: Faculty have a wide range of views about GenAI.

Points of agreement:

- GenAI is taking root in academia
- Students' overuse of GenAI may inhibit academic growth
- Need
 - GenAI discussion at university level
 - lessons on ethics of using GenAI
 - awareness about threat GenAI poses to learning

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Finding 2: Faculty have a wide range of views about GenAI.

Some faculty raised concerns about:

- GenAI as a long-term threat to academic institutions
- students' GenAI use increasing instructor workloads
- impacts on classroom dynamics & relationships with students
- insufficient faculty development & support from UVM when dealing with student use
- being confused themselves about UVM's GenAI policies or wanting stronger, clearer university-wide policy

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Finding 2: Faculty have a wide range of views about GenAI.

One faculty member had a different take:

- Students will get out of their education what they put in, and if they want to use GenAI, that's their choice
- Some writing skills may go obsolete, and that's okay

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Finding 3: Many students have concerns about GenAI, too.

The training software steals from creators. *It has huge environmental impacts.*

What's the point of even having a brain if you outsource the brain part?

It's just another form of academic dishonesty. *I don't trust the information it gives me.*

It's a waste of my education. *People get over-reliant on it.*

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Finding 3: Many students have concerns about GenAI, too.

I just have to hope that our contribution to this discussion will be heard by faculty and understand that we, as students, do not want a university and a world in which AI does everything for us.

- from a student's reflection on the project

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Finding 4: Students are bringing more GenAI writing to UWC.

-  Using GenAI for range of writing purposes
-  GenAI and Writing Center as complements
-  Wide variety of tutor experiences & attitudes but overall negative about AI in academia
-  Tutor concerns include ethics, stifled creativity & critical thinking, lack of engagement in writing process
-  Vague/non-existent instructor policies put tutors in awkward position

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Finding 5: Writing Centers are taking different approaches.

- Neutral approach: advising students on benefits & pitfalls
- Encouraging approach: tips for effective prompt writing, training tutors to help students use GenAI, pointing students to particular platforms
- More skeptical approach: philosophical critiques of GenAI use
- General push for AI literacy reflects consensus: this is happening

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Researchers' Recommendations

- AI literacy skill-building for students and faculty
- University-wide policies to eliminate confusion
- Prohibition on GenAI in WIL1 courses
- Faculty discussions & input on GenAI policy
- New forms of student assessment more resistant to GenAI use
- Reduced GenAI stigma & open conversations in the UWC
- Training for tutors around GenAI (but not on helping students use it)

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Questions?

If you would like to see the full report, email me at hpainter@uvm.edu.

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Where to next?

Chittenden Room: "Internships are great (except when they are not)"

Williams Room: "Proactive Accessibility in Student Advising"

Sessions begin at 11am.

In the meantime, take a feedback survey...



Or find out more about the Undergraduate Writing Center!



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