

Widener University

Student AI Use and Literacy Survey

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AAC&U Institute on AI, Pedagogy, and Curriculum Working Group

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AI Disclosure: ChatGPT was used in a variety of ways in the creation of this document. Where it has been used, it is explicitly acknowledged.

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1 Executive Summary

The preliminary report on student AI use and literacy reveals key insights into how students perceive the way in which generative AI is currently being integrated into educational settings and highlights associated training needs and concerns.

Student Use of Generative AI Tools
Students are actively using generative AI tools for various purposes. The most common uses include idea generation (22%), proofreading (17%), and outlining (14%). AI tools are also used for summarization, personalized tutoring, and verifying answers, demonstrating their utility in enhancing both writing and learning processes. However, there are notable differences in comfort levels depending on how AI is applied; students feel most comfortable using AI for summarizing readings (33%) and individualized learning accommodations (29%).

Training Needs
There is a significant demand for more training on AI tools, with 66% of respondents agreeing that they would benefit from additional training. Preferred training formats include online videos (48%), Zoom sessions (25%), and in-person training (20%), reflecting diverse preferences. Topics of interest include practical applications of AI in academic work, ethical considerations, and effective prompt writing, suggesting a need for balanced training that addresses both the technical and ethical aspects of AI use.

Concerns About AI Use
Concerns regarding AI use primarily focus on academic integrity, flawed outputs, and ethical issues such as bias. Approximately 19% of respondents cited academic integrity as a major barrier to adopting AI tools, while others expressed worry about the unreliability of AI-generated outputs. Ethical concerns, including data security and environmental impacts, were also prominent. There is a mixed sentiment about AI's impact on learning, with some respondents viewing it as a beneficial tool that can enhance educational outcomes, while others fear it undermines critical thinking and academic rigor.

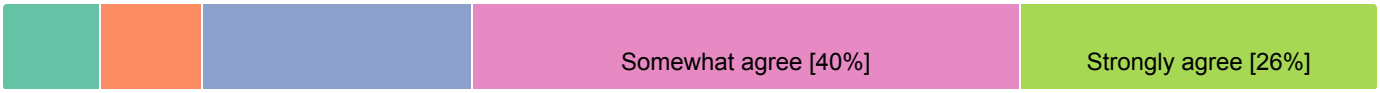
Summary
The findings indicate a nuanced perspective on generative AI use in higher education. While many students see AI as a tool that can support personalized learning and improve efficiency, there are significant concerns about fairness, academic integrity, and the potential for misuse. The report underscores the need for comprehensive training programs and clear guidelines to foster responsible AI use, while also addressing ethical concerns to balance innovation with educational standards.

2 Preferred Training Formats and Topics for Generative AI

Q: I could benefit from additional training on generative AI.

66% of respondents agree that they would benefit from additional training.

602 Responses



Preferred Training Formats:

The responses indicate a strong preference for **online and flexible training formats**—with nearly half of the participants indicating that **online videos** are ideal for learning about AI tools. **Zoom** and **in-person training** also received significant mentions, reflecting a diverse range of preferences.

Training topics of interest include **practical uses** of AI, such as how to effectively apply AI to support academic work, **ethical considerations**, and **prompt writing** skills. These preferences suggest a need for a **balanced training program** that covers both technical and ethical aspects of AI use.

Quantification of Themes:

- **Training Format Preferences**:
  - **Online Videos**: 48% of respondents indicated a preference for online video tutorials.
  - **Zoom Sessions**: 25% mentioned Zoom as a preferred format.
  - **In-Person Training**: 20% requested in-person sessions.

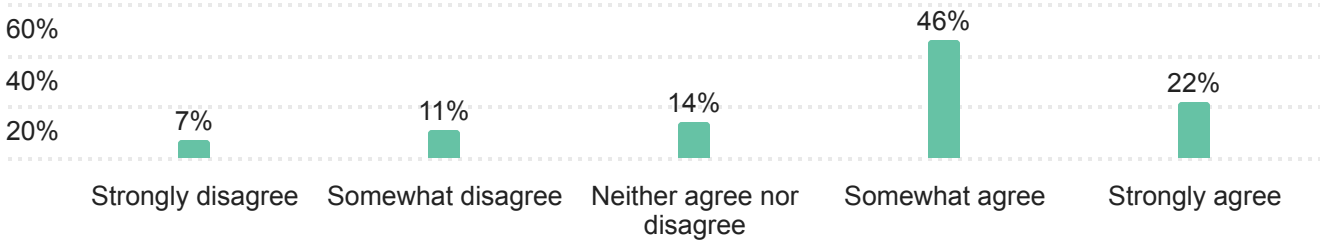
- **Training Topics**:
  - **Prompt Writing**: Mentioned by 8% of respondents.
  - **Ethical Concerns**: Addressed by 10%.
  - **Practical AI Usage**: 15% discussed specific practical applications.

3 Student Familiarity with Generative AI Tools

Q: I have a strong understanding of and familiarity with generative artificial intelligence.

A significant portion of respondents (68%) somewhat or strongly agree that they have a strong understanding of generative AI.

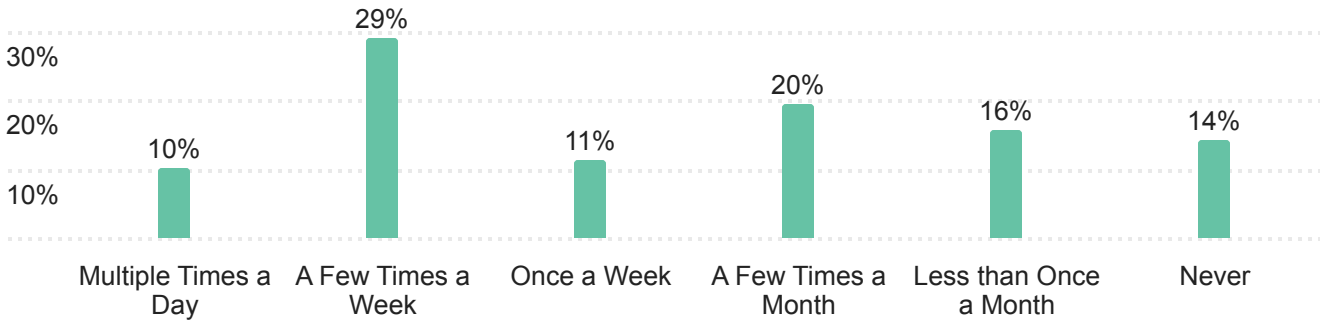
603 Responses



Q: How often do you use generative AI tools (personally or professionally)?

39% of respondents use generative AI tools at least a few times a week.

602 Responses



Where Do Students Learn about Generative AI Tools?

The survey reveals that **social media** platforms such as **TikTok**, **Instagram**, and **Twitter** are the most popular sources for learning about generative AI tools, accounting for nearly 38% of responses. This suggests that the informal and engaging nature of social media is crucial for initial awareness.

Internet search engines, like Google, and video platforms like YouTube are also significant, highlighting the reliance on easily accessible resources. **Personal connections**, such as friends, family, and classmates, play a notable role, especially in spreading information informally.

Formal education and **self-experimentation** are less common but provide deeper insights or practical

experience. Structured learning is appreciated but is less prevalent compared to other informal means.

Quantification of Themes:

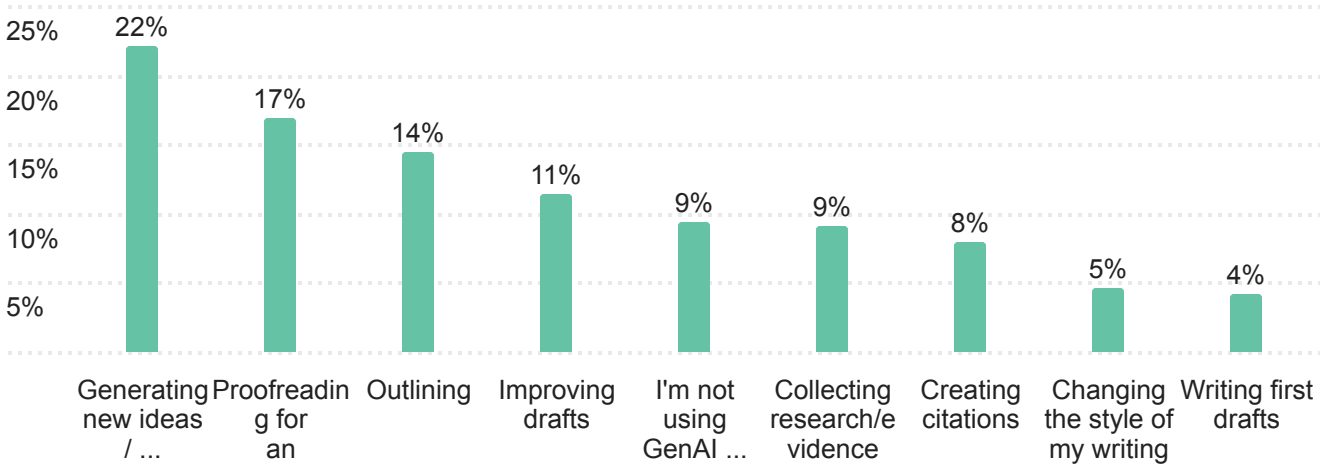
1. **Social Media Platforms**: Approximately 38% of respondents mentioned learning about AI through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, or Twitter.
2. **Internet and Online Resources**: 35% indicated using search engines like Google or video platforms like YouTube.
3. **Personal Connections**: 15% of respondents cited learning from friends, family, or classmates.
4. **Formal Education and Training**: Around 7% mentioned university classes, workshops, or training sessions.
5. **Self-Learning**: 5% described experimenting with AI tools directly.

4 How Students are Using Generative AI Tools

Q: Do you use generative AI tools in any of the following ways to help with writing? (Choose all that apply)

Students use generative AI primarily for generating ideas (22%), proofreading for grammar and spelling (17%), and outlining (14%). Only 9% reported not using generative AI tools.

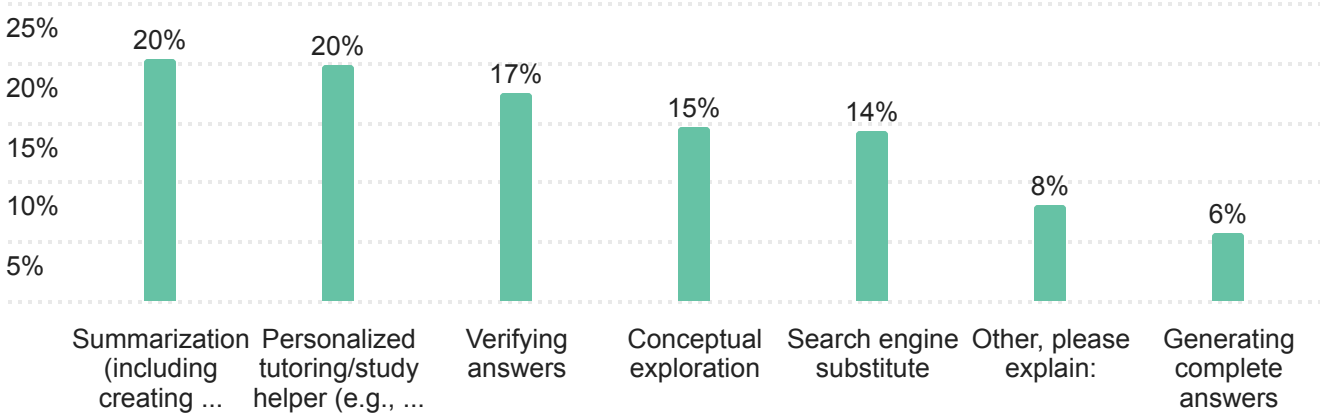
467 Responses



Q: Do you use GenAI tools in any of the following ways to help with learning? (Choose all that apply)

AI is most commonly used for summarization and personalized tutoring (20% each), followed by verifying answers (17%) and conceptual exploration (15%).

421 Responses



Written responses for "Other, please explain:"

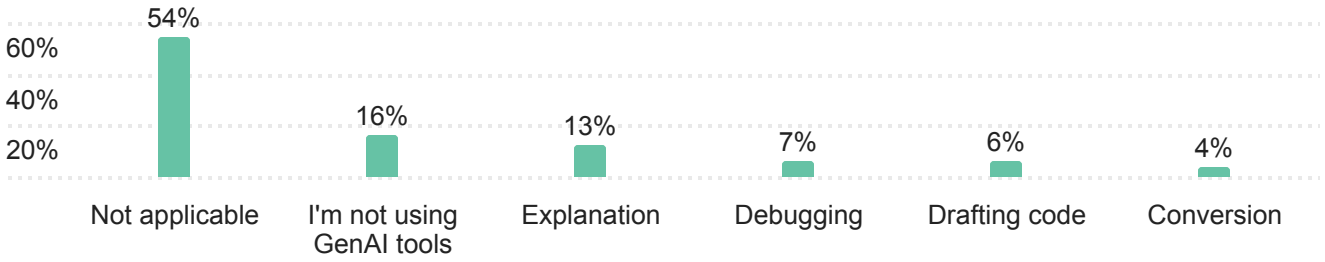
84 Responses

Other, please explain: - Text
It helps a lot but doesn’t do everything. Want to learn still
I do not use gen AI. AT ALL, personally or professionally.
None
Explain theories or other objectives
insight on presentation design (color scheme, suggested creative elements, etc.)
I have never used GenAI tools
Brain dump / note organization
None
I do not use AI
To show me how to do a math problem if I don't know how
I don't use it except to generate images
I dont use Gen AI tools
N/a
N/A
I don’t use ai
prefer not to say
Not Applicable
Deeper better understanding, and to further explain iddas
I mainly use AI to create structured study schedules.
Asking questions about the material

Q: Do you use generative AI tools in any of the following ways to help with coding? (Choose all that apply)

Most students (54%) indicated that using generative AI tools for coding is not applicable to them, while others use it mainly for explanation (16%) and debugging (13%).

465 Responses

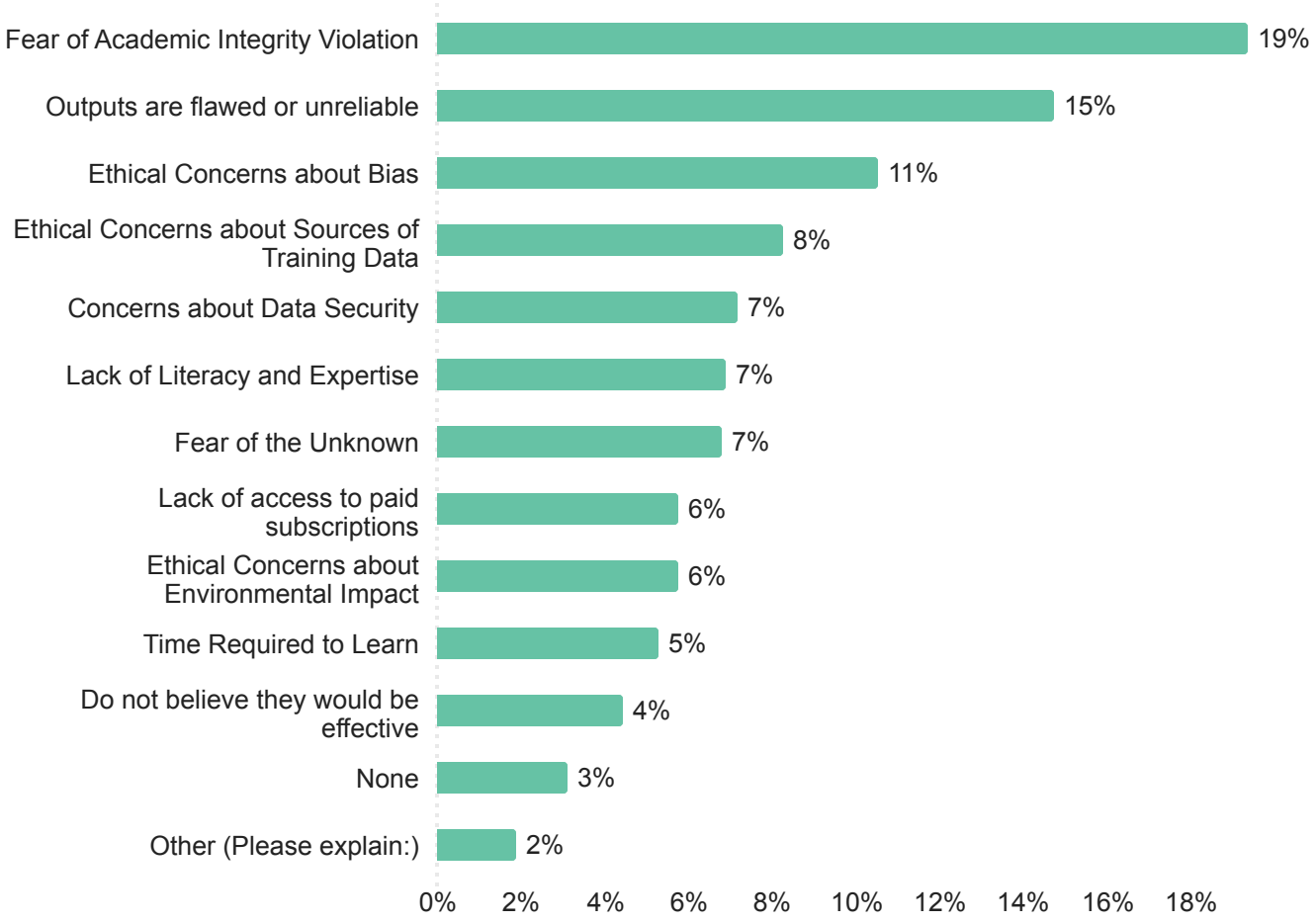


5 Barriers to Adoption of Generative AI Tools

Q: What are the most significant barriers to your adoption of AI tools and technologies in your work? (You may select more than one.)

The primary barriers include concerns about academic integrity (19%), flawed or unreliable outputs (15%), and ethical concerns about bias (11%). Data security and lack of literacy are also notable concerns.

456 Responses

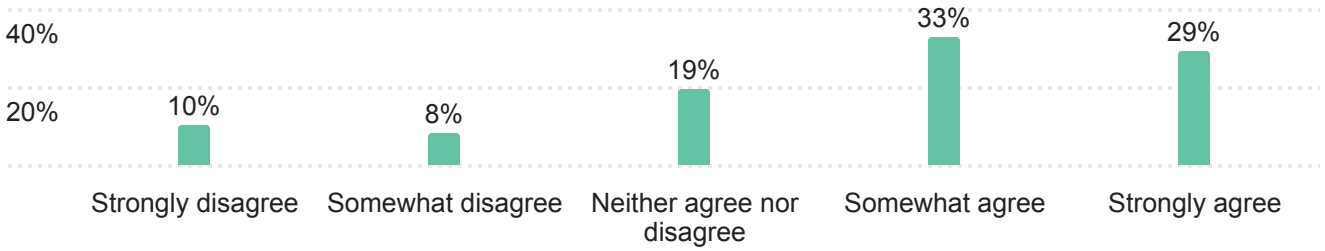


6 Student Sentiment Toward Uses of AI Tools

Q: Generative AI tools improve my ability to learn.

A majority (62%) agree that generative AI tools improve their learning ability.

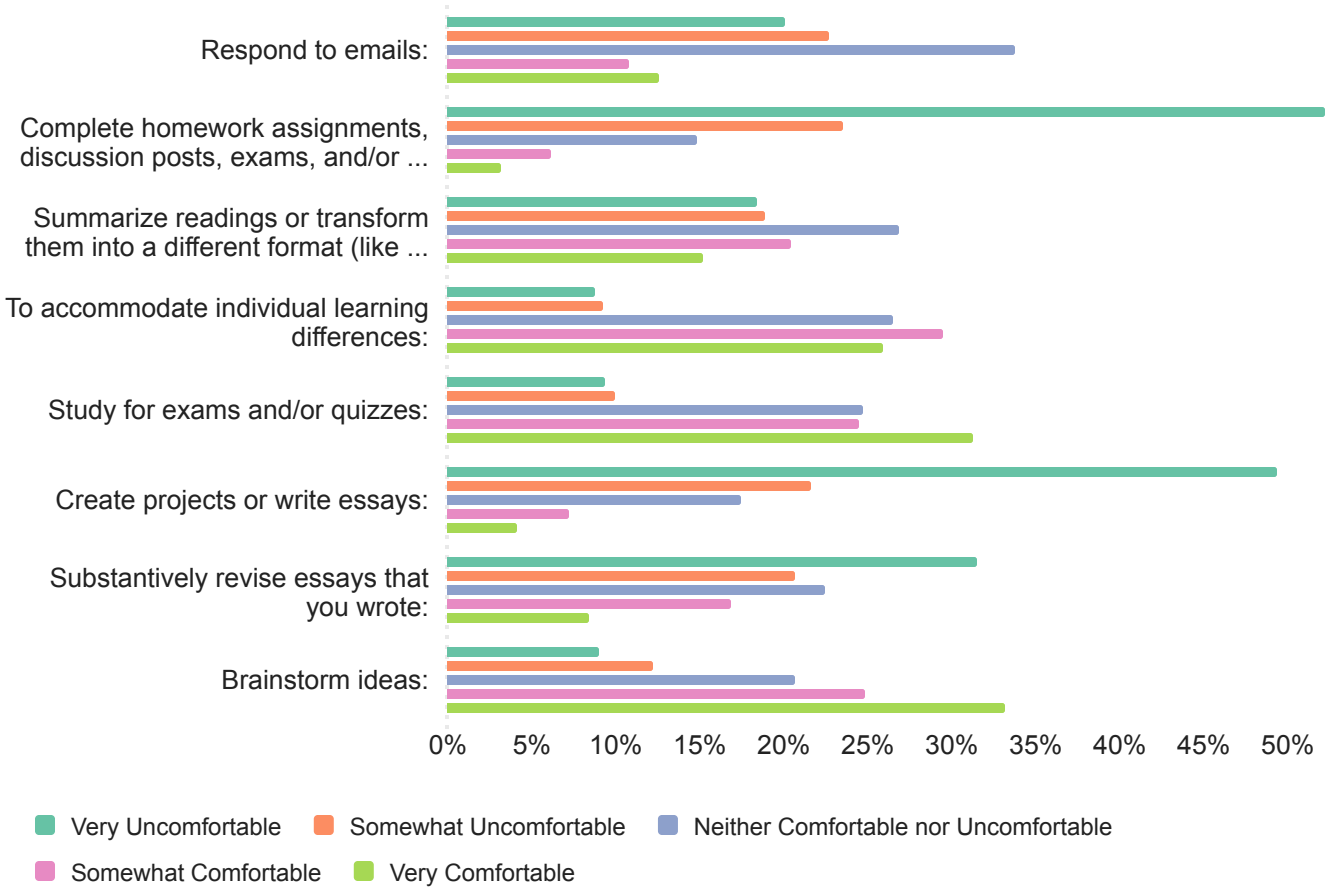
602 Responses



Q: How would you feel if one of your instructors/professors learned that YOU were using generative AI tools in the following ways:

Students feel most comfortable using AI for summarizing readings (33%) and accommodating individual learning differences (29%).

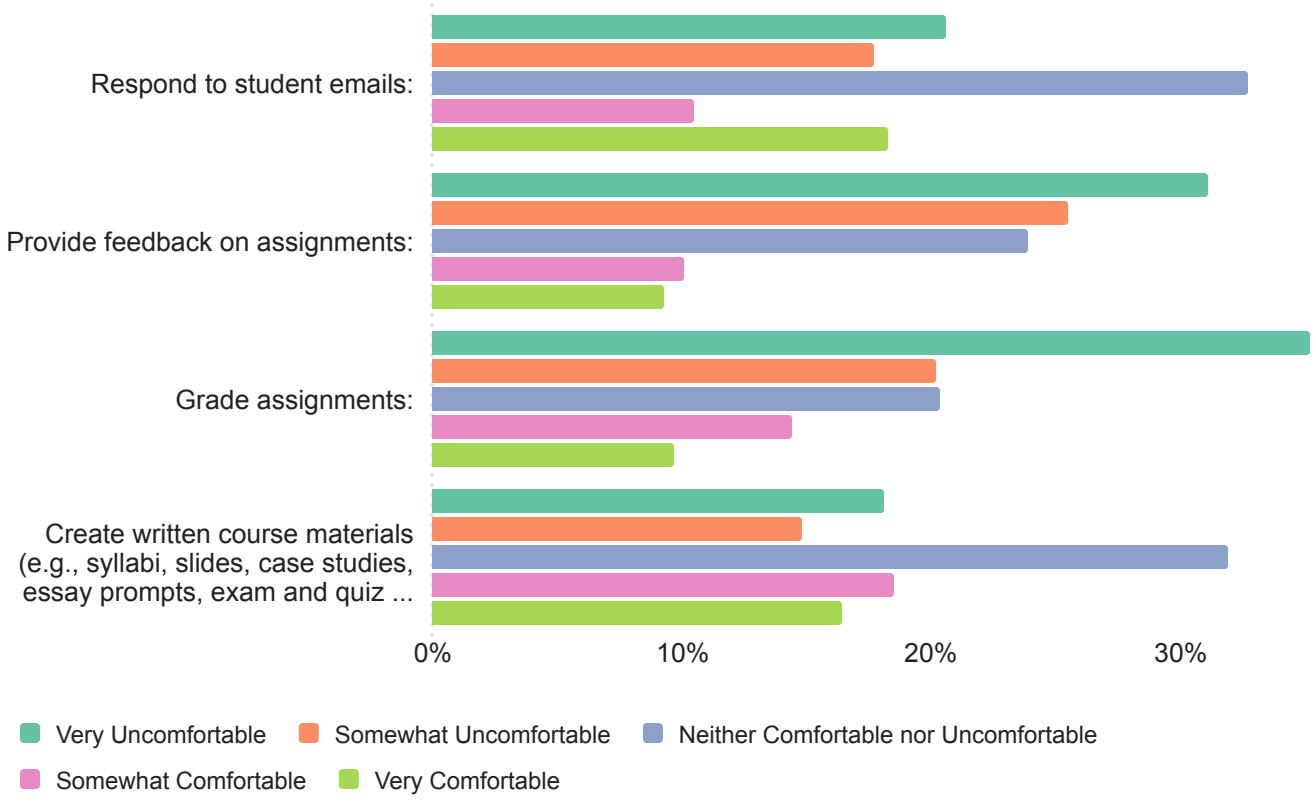
498 Responses



Q: How would you feel if you learned that YOUR INSTRUCTORS/PROFESSORS were using generative AI tools in the following ways:

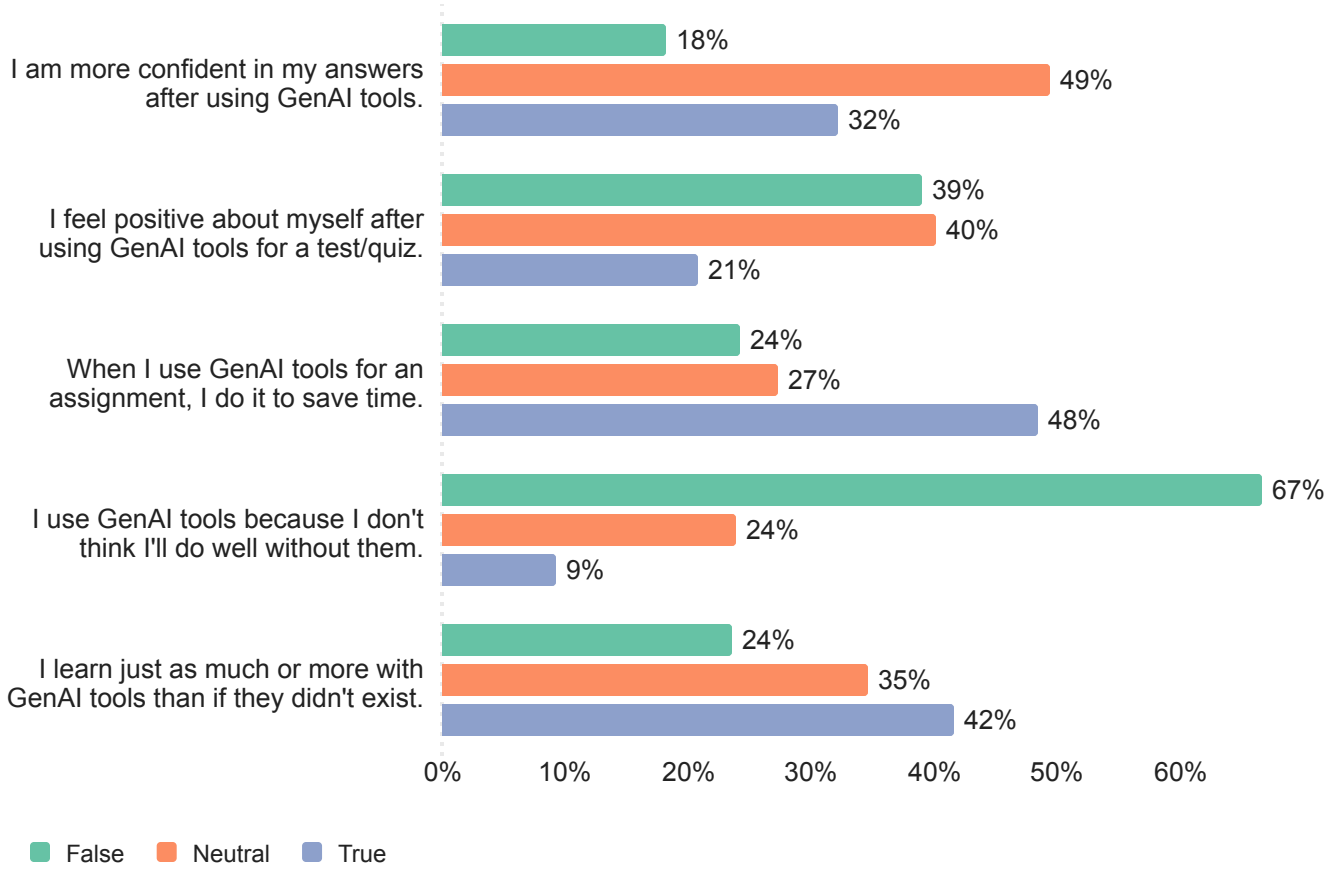
Students are generally comfortable with faculty using AI tools for email responses (47%) and providing feedback on assignments (45%). However, using AI for grading was less favored (28%).

485 Responses



Q: Please mark whether you feel these statements about you are true or false.

418 Responses

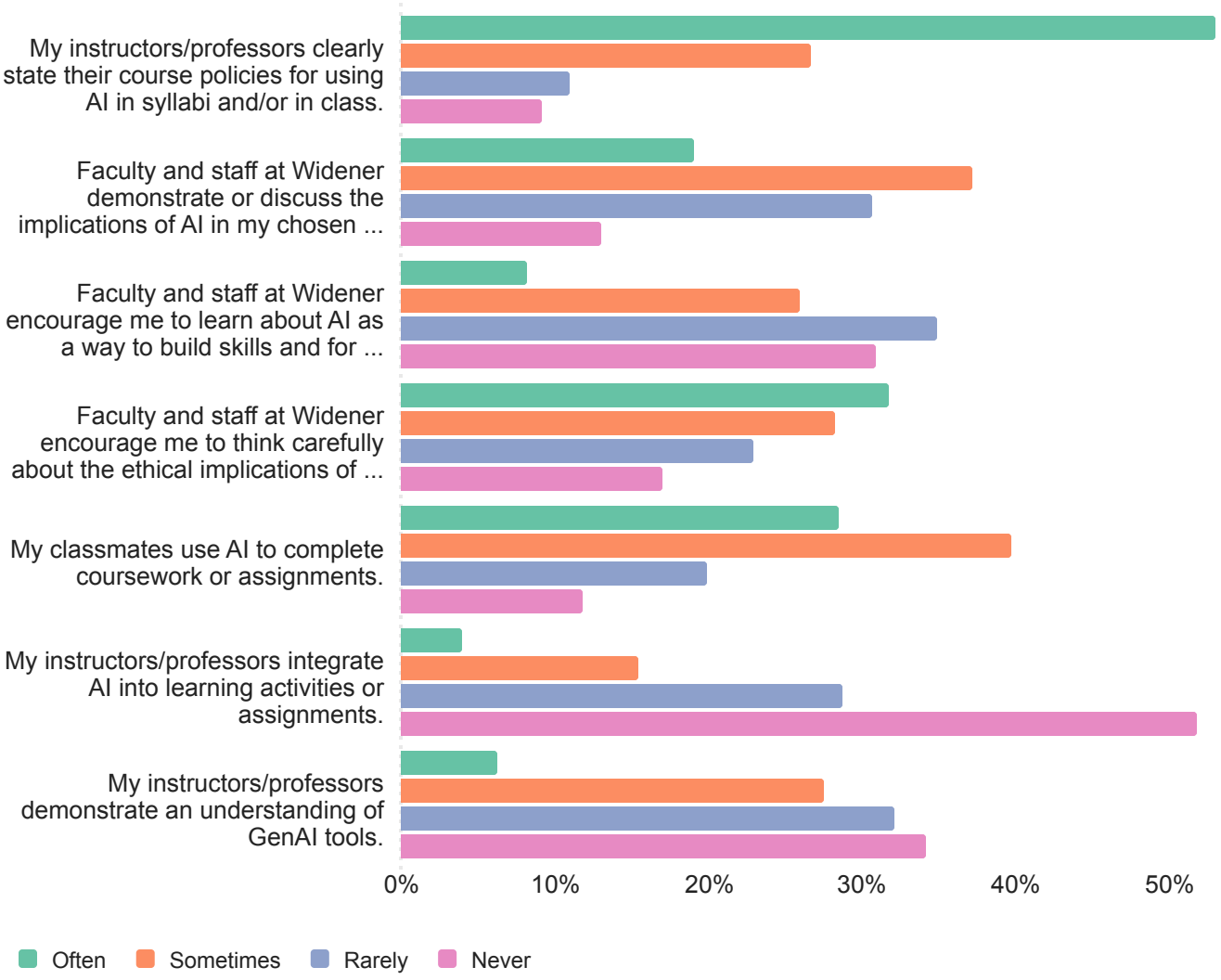


6 Perspective on AI Adoption and Understanding at Widener

Q: Please select the statement that best describes your perspective on generative AI at Widener.

Opinions on faculty engagement with AI tools and encouragement to learn about AI varied, with notable emphasis on policy clarity.

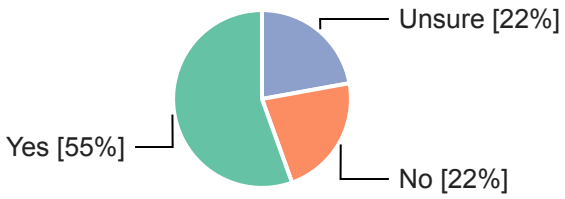
498 Responses



7 Perspective on Widener's Academic Integrity Policy

Q: Are you familiar with Widener's Academic Integrity Policy as it relates to GenAI?

483 Responses



Q: Do you have any thoughts to share about Widener's current genAI policy or how it might be improved?

182 Responses

Do you have any thoughts to share about Widener's current genAI policy or how it might be improved?
AI is definitely the future and here now. Worried how it will impact my career as a therapist as much as I support this. I've used it myself and in many ways I see it can replace me and is better than me. Even if it's not human. It will only get better. An interesting time to be alive
Yes
I believe that AI guidelines are blurred. In some cases when using AI, you put an essay that you worte on your own in there and ask AI did the software write it and it would say yes. That shows how It cant be oh you do this thats wrong. Cause AI often is wrong.
There's been no discussion at all about AI in any course or in the intro course to the online program. I don't even know if there is an AI policy at widener.
I believe that incorporating some aspects of AI into coursework may help alleviate some of the unnecessary stresses when it comes to getting through some assignments by learning to allow as guides.
no
Incorporate it more into instruction and talk about what it gets right and wrong about the content. So people can better understand it's uses and limitations.
AI is a tool, although there should be some limits on AI use, it should not be totally banned, if used the right way it can be a very successful tool to further the individuals learning.
i wasn't aware there was a genAI policy in place across the university

none

Should be fine for generating ideas, making sentences better, fidining synonyms. Shoulf focus on making sure students know how to vet information generated.

I think use of AI decreases students ability to critically think and contributes to environmental destruction

The use of AI is ethically fraught, not just because of classroom integrity but also environmental repercussions. I'm happy that information is being gathered around its utilization because excessive use of AI is unethical and damaging in many ways. While I'm sure many students would be saddened to have to cut down on or eliminate their use of AI as it relates to school, I think it's the university's responsibility to practice harm reduction in this capacity and make sure that students understand the extreme environmental toll that AI necessitates.

I think we should learn and understand the potential the tool has to offer.

No

NO

Should be encouraged more to mimic the workplace. Using AI shouldn't be considered cheating in most cases because it is usually encouraged to be used in the workplace. Widener should be teaching students how to thrive in the real world and setting arbitrary academic standards doesn't do that.

Accommodations for disabilities should be explored,

Idk

Not relevant to policy but ai is very useful when a professor is not reachable

8 Additional Comments and Questions

Q: Do you have any additional comments, concerns, or questions about the use of generative AI in higher education that you would like to share?

1. Support for AI Use
Many participants expressed positive views about the use of AI in education, emphasizing the potential for **enhancing learning experiences** and **providing support**, especially for students with specific needs. Some respondents see AI as a valuable tool to assist with **accessibility** and **reducing stress** for students with disabilities. For example, one participant noted:

- *"I believe that for people with learning disabilities, the use of AI in higher education could help make a great impact by turning students' focus to what they should be learning rather than the added stress of formats or legal repercussions of plagiarism for writing papers."*

Others highlighted the **usefulness of AI as a supplementary tool**, particularly for generating ideas, practicing concepts, or as a form of guided support. Another respondent stated:

- *"AI is a tool and should be allowed. It helps me ask questions as if it were my professor, providing full explanations that help me study more effectively."*

For some, AI's ubiquity in the workplace is a reason to teach responsible use in university settings:

- *" Generative AI is going to play a big role in the future. I am already established in my career, and I see how colleagues are getting left behind when they resist the use of Gen AI and similar tools. If you do not allow students to responsibly use AI, they will either A. Use it irresponsibly, or B. Not learn to use it, and be left behind in the real world."*

These respondents view AI as an **empowering technology** that can enhance learning efficiency and support students when instructors are not available.

2. Concerns About Fairness and Academic Integrity
The most frequently mentioned concerns were related to **fairness, academic integrity, and ethical issues** surrounding AI use. Participants worried that students using AI might have an unfair advantage over those who choose to work independently, potentially undermining the value of their education. A participant expressed:

- *" I think that students use it way too much, especially in the humanities, and get away with it, which is unfair to the students who actually do the work."*

Some viewed AI as a **shortcut** that discourages genuine learning and critical thinking:

- *" I think the use of ai is detrimental to students and our ability to learn and think critically and i think use of ai should be severely limited and or monitored or not used at all.*

The issue of **plagiarism** was also highlighted multiple times. Respondents noted that AI-generated content used in assignments should be treated with the same severity as traditional plagiarism. For

example:

- *"Using AI to write any portion of an academic paper should have the same penalties as plagiarism."*

Additionally, there were concerns about faculty using AI to grade assignments or create lesson plans, which respondents felt could lead to a decline in **personalized feedback** and **academic quality**:

- *"It freaks me out. I like being able to critically examine something on my own. I don't want professors relying on AI to give me a grade."*

3. Suggestions for Responsible Implementation
A substantial number of participants advocated for a **balanced approach** to AI integration, suggesting that AI can be used responsibly if appropriate guidelines are established. Respondents stressed the importance of using AI as a **learning aid**, rather than as a substitute for genuine intellectual effort:

- *"Utilizing AI to write full essays doesn't seem right, but using it to expand our vocabulary or help us process information should be allowed."*

There were suggestions to **incorporate proper training** on ethical AI use, emphasizing that both students and faculty should understand how to utilize AI tools effectively while also recognizing their limitations. One respondent suggested:

- *" Try not to resist or gatekeep what is already happening; teach us to use it appropriately and effectively."*

Another participant proposed:

- *" If we stop looking at it as the enemy, it can be our friend and help us improve and progress further and faster."*

4. Strong Opposition to AI Use
While many respondents saw potential in AI, there was also a significant group that **rejected its use entirely** within higher education. This opposition was based on the belief that AI undermines the **core values of education**, such as originality, intellectual growth, and critical thinking. One participant wrote:

- *" Gen AI has almost no business being in Bachelor's Degree+ education, except for rote work. People use them as a substitute for learning or their own brain, and professors use them to be lazy. If we're getting assignments that Gen AI can do well, that is a clear indication that we are not being taught material or being tested in a way that requires human intelligence and intellect, which is counter to higher education principles. "*

Some respondents felt strongly that AI should be **banned** from all aspects of academic work, fearing that reliance on AI could lead to a generation of students lacking essential skills:

- *"DO NOT ALLOW IT! I think it is concerning that higher education institutions are encouraging AI use. Degrees from such institutions should automatically we worth less because of the very real possibility that students are using generative AI to complete their coursework. I'm very disappointed that Widener is allowing this to happen and even worse, ENCOURAGING IT!"*

These comments indicate a deep concern that AI could **devalue higher education**, making degrees less

meaningful if students are not engaged in genuine learning processes.

5. Need for Training and Understanding
Finally, many respondents pointed out the need for **better training and guidance** on AI usage. These participants acknowledged the benefits of AI but felt that their knowledge was insufficient to use it effectively. They called for workshops, tutorials, and clear communication about AI policies.
Some respondents requested more guidance on how AI could be used specifically in an **academic context**, rather than leaving students to experiment on their own:

- *" I think AI should be embraced and taught in a manner that improves student learning and promotes them to understand how to use it…training students to embrace and learn how to properly use these tools as an aid would be extremely beneficial."*

There was also an emphasis on removing the **stigma** surrounding AI use, so students could feel comfortable leveraging it responsibly:

- *"The stigma around AI needs to be removed."*

Summary
In conclusion, the responses indicate a **mixed but nuanced perspective** on the use of generative AI in higher education. Some see it as an empowering tool that can make education more accessible and personalized, while others worry about its impact on **academic integrity**, **learning quality**, and **critical thinking**. The most pressing recommendation from participants is the need for **clear guidelines** and **appropriate training** to ensure that AI serves as a beneficial complement to traditional educational practices, rather than a replacement. For institutions like Widener, understanding these varied perspectives will be crucial in developing policies that support both **innovative learning** and **academic standards**.

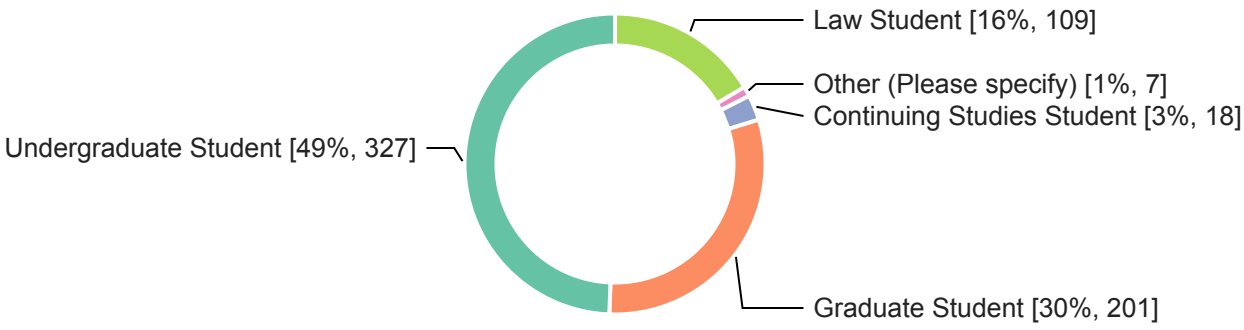
Quantitative Summary of Themes

- **Supportive of AI Use**: Approximately 25% of responses.
- **Concerns about Fairness and Academic Integrity**: 30% of responses.
- **Suggestions for Responsible Use**: 20% of responses.
- **Rejection of AI Use**: 15% of responses.
- **Need for Training and Understanding**: 10% of responses.

Appendix 1: Student Demographic Information

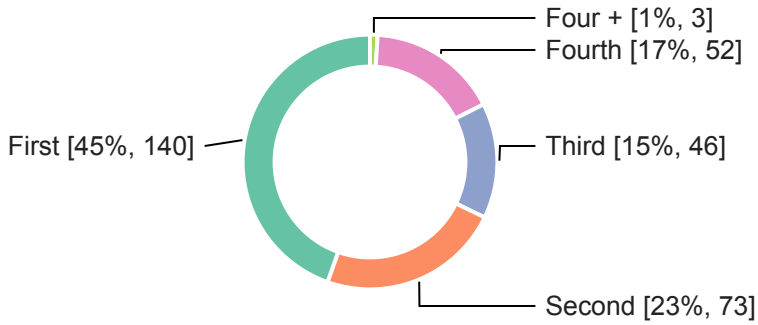
Q: Please select the best description of your student status: - Selected Choice

662 Responses



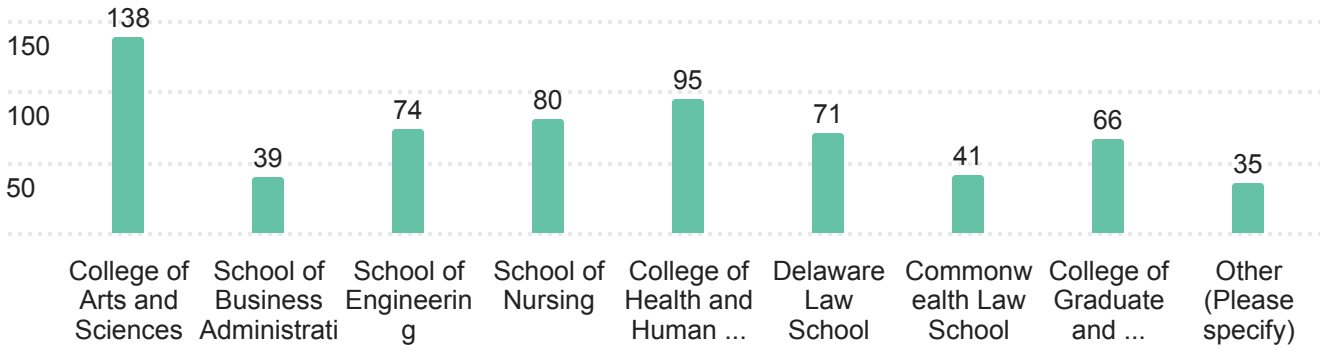
Q: If you are an undergraduate student, what year are you in?

314 Responses



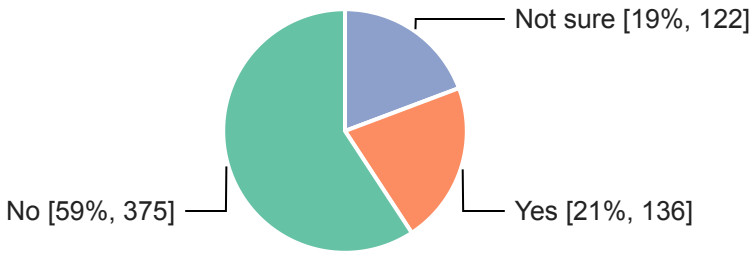
Q: In which school/college is your primary degree located? - Selected Choice

639 Responses



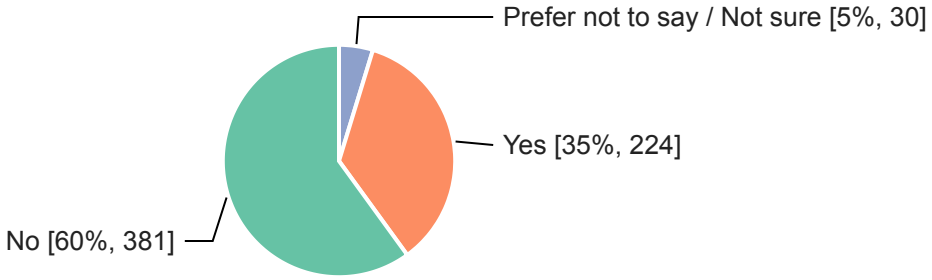
Q: Are you a Pell Grant recipient?

633 Responses



Q: Are you a first-generation college student?

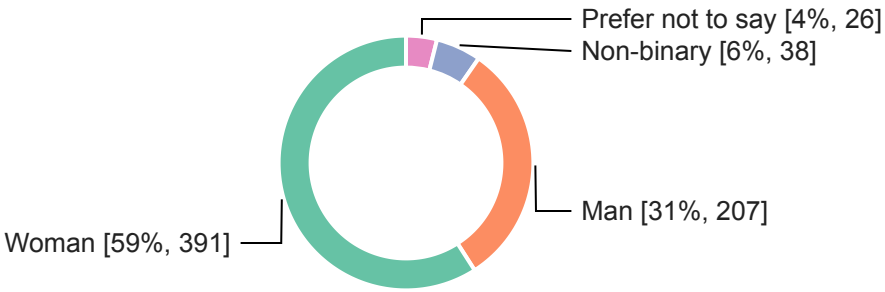
635 Responses



Double click to edit

Q: With which gender identity do you most closely identify?

662 Responses



Appendix 2: Full Text of Responses to Open Questions

Q: From what sources do you generally learn about generative AI tools? If they are internet or social media sources, be as specific as you can.

247 Responses

From what sources do you generally learn about generative AI tools? If they are internet or social media sources, be as specific as you can.
fellow students, Widener website explaining copilot
insta
Facebook
I see commercials for it, but I don't use AI so I don't see much about it.
Marketing/Advertisements from Microsoft and Samsung
Google, Chatgpt
N/A
Instagram and TikTok mostly
Youtube, Google
Friends
workshops/presentations, linkedin learning, youtube
Chatgpt
students, articles
From classmates
Chatgpt
News articles, such as The Atlantic and NYT, and social media such as Twitter (X) and Instagram
Class discussion, academic articles and social media
Google, other classmates, and professors
Internet
google.com

Q22: Do you have any additional comments, concerns, or questions about the use of generative AI in higher education that you would like to share?

180 Responses

Do you have any additional comments, concerns, or questions about the use of generative AI in higher education that you would like to share?

No

I believe that for people with learning disabilities, the use of AI in higher education could help make a great impact with turning students focus to what they should be learning rather than the added stress of formats or legal repercussions of plagiarism for writing papers.

N/A

AI is a tool and should be allowed

genAI can be helpful for students with learning differences, and fact-checking their work is a way to ensure the students are engaging with the material because

I have never used this before but would like more information.

none

embrace it

N/A

As mentioned before, I believe that Widener has a responsibility to manage AI usage in a way that protects the environment.

n/a

NO

No

I think that students use it way too much, especially in the humanities, and get away with it, which is unfair to the students who actually do the work.

It's a great source.

It freaks me out, I like being able to critically examine something on my own, I don’t want professors relying on AI to give me a grade. If everything takes too much time, then maybe the demand for perfection and 50+ hr work weeks, our healthcare, and our humanity needs to be checked first.

nope

I think many of the faculty and students don't understand how it works or its impacts.

Some courses should allow it while others shouldn't, e.g., writing courses while a class like bankruptcy should allow it.

n/a

Q: Do you have any feedback to share about the access to Microsft Copilot provided by Widener?

166 Responses

Do you have any feedback to share about the access to Microsft Copilot provided by Widener?

I don't even know what that is, never heard of copilot. Again, online program never mentioned anything about AI

I do not have experience using Microsoft Copilot

N/A

no

i appreciate the extra security but i still tend to use generic language instead of specific information to protect privacy

Don’t use it

didnt know I had access as a student. I am paying for chat gpt on my own.

n/a

n/a

I am unsure of what this is.

No

NO

No

Didn't know this was available

I don’t use this.

i had no idea we had that.

n/a

NO idea what that is

No

I think that access to Microsoft Copilot is a good thing. I use it for when I have a question and it will answer me and provide sources for that answer.

Q: What kind of trainings on AI would you find helpful? (On what topics and in what formats? For example, Zoom, online videos, in-person training.)

194 Responses

What kind of trainings on AI would you find helpful? (On what topics and in what formats? For example, Zoom, online videos, in-person training.)

Anything and everything. I don't know how to use it or even where to "get" it.

AI prompt writing: the concepts of different prompts on the same topic outputting different results

Zoom classes would be a great format with or in addition to online videos.

N/A

In-person training or online videos

how to fact-check genAI efficiently

In person

Micorsoft pilot

in person training regarding how to help you study using AI

Trainings that candidly discuss the ethical ramifications of AI usage

Online videos or podcasts

Zoom and online videos.

Zoom

online videos

Unless they were required, I would not go to them. If they were required, videoed seems most convenient

Online videos about how to use it and different models for specializing in different things. Such as: image generations, presentation slides generation, general info, etc

Ethical concerns, online videos.

None

online videos

In person