

Mayhall AI policy:

Gen AI, my teaching philosophy, and this class: Yes, you need to read this, it's long, but hello, you're in college

From The New York Times, "Welcome to Campus. Here's Your ChatGPT," 7 June 2025:

OpenAI's push to A.I.-ify college education amounts to a national experiment on millions of students. The use of these chatbots in schools is so new that their potential long-term educational benefits, and possible side effects, are not yet established.

You may or may not know that right now people who work in higher ed are still worried about Gen AI - how it's changing our jobs as professors, how students learn, what to do about students 'cheating' with AI, what it might do to things in the near future like your ability to get a job after graduation, whether we can continue teaching online classes, and even whether reading will continue to be an essential skill (and that's just in the area of education! don't even get me started about the economic, political, ecological, and ethical issues). Because I'm Very Online™ I can give you citations for all of these, and more, unfortunately. I am not exaggerating the seriousness of what we are all facing.

I've listened to way too many swaggering techbros and cranky anti-tech people and information-packed podcasts, participated in workshops and webinars and learning communities, read sooo many Substacks, blog posts, books, newsletters, and reporting, but more than anything, I trust my 20+ years of teaching and learning experience. I've also talked with and listened to many many students - informally, and also in classes like this one when we have conversations about AI and ethics. Of course I've tried out all the models, too. And I've thought long and hard about this.

One thing we need to acknowledge at the outset is that whether or not your professor wants to incorporate Gen AI into your class will depend on the discipline they're a specialist in - is it a class preparing you for a specific job/career in which AI skills are in demand? What are the learning goals for the class, and does AI help, or hinder, students achieving those? What kind of preparation/background do the students in the class have - in the discipline, but also in AI? What kind of AI expertise does the professor themselves have? It can't just be a simple statement like - we're using it, or I'm banning it - professors have to think through a lot of issues before they make an informed decision, at least in my opinion. All of this is happening in an environment where the apps and what they can do are changing too fast to keep up with.

There's a lot of talk in education about how if AI can do it, then it's not worth doing by humans. Writing, for example. Thinking that what Gen AI produces is writing is

the problem, though – Large Language Models like Claude, Chat GPT, and Gemini don't 'write' so much as they **extrude text** based on prediction models. But there's also the issue of *why* we ask students to write in classes. Even if it's something an AI model can produce, the human act of writing is, according to a lot of experts in the field, important *as a process* for several reasons: 1) through the process of writing you learn what you're thinking, 2) getting your thoughts down on paper helps you organize your them, 3) learning how to write helps you communicate better, and 4) writing can make you a better reader, and vice versa.

Now you might think, oh, well, I won't need to read and write, the model will do it all for me, but I am here to tell you that that world is not here. Not yet, and it might never be. I hope it will not, because it's giving Wall-E, honestly. I read a lot of science fiction and those kinds of worlds are never utopias. **And a lot of AI experts are saying that the old school skills of reading, writing, critical thinking, and communication are the things that will make students stand out in the job force. You can be taught how to use AI if you have those skills, and you'll need them to use AI well.**

How about the idea that you can just look things up, or ask the model to give you the answers to something? Have you tried that with something you actually know something about? How did that go? Probably not as well as you had hoped, and there's reasons for that. For one, the text it comes up with is really generic. We'll also talk about 'hallucinations' in class (iykyk). But the reason I want to call out here is the thing psychologists call cognitive offloading, which is the idea that you use external tools to do something you used to do with your brain – like the fact that most people don't know anyone's phone numbers except for their own, or that without Google Maps people don't know how to navigate beyond their usual routes, and have completely lost the ability to use a map. (and just for the record, Gen AI/Chat CPT is NOT just like a calculator.)

What troubles me about cognitive offloading is that the pro-AI people say that using AI will free us up to do the REAL human things – to be creative! To emphasize human relationships! Never mind that most people are using these apps by themselves, so is it communal? (nope). My question is, how can you be creative if you don't know anything? Or how to learn it? Memorization is not a dirty word, people!

I've also been obsessed with the issues of attention and focus, and I know you've probably thought about it, too. My phone's screentime monitor stabs me every time it comes up, and I know my ability to read hard copy stuff has suffered. I will not ban electronic devices in this class, but you should think about how you want to handle taking notes – by hand? Or on a laptop/tablet? Because it matters for distraction and your concentration, and because taking notes in this class is mandatory.

So all of this is a very long introduction to my own approach to Gen AI in this class, which honestly is based on how I've thought about this class since I first started

teaching it: it's a general education class, which means something very specific to me. General education is the backbone of a college **education** (more than a degree), and it's in classes like this that you learn how to think, set within the context of a particular discipline. I have the advantage that most of you have never studied art history, so it's also a great case study in how to learn, as well, and that's the approach I've taken in this course for like forever. So we'll be working on your **metacognitive** skills as techniques you can use for this class, but for your **life**, too.

Therefore: neither you nor I will be using Gen AI in this class, because I want you to fill your brain with all the interesting, provocative, and curious-making information about the ancient past that you can. In the end, we have to live with ourselves, in our own minds, and you need things to think with, and about. I like to spend my time thinking about the unbounded creativity and innovation ancient peoples demonstrated through the things they made, and I also love looking at those things. I don't have to look that stuff up because I know it, and I can keep learning about it because I have that base. Without that background knowledge I literally wouldn't know it existed – so I'd never think to ask a chatbot about it. **And I will never use Gen AI for grading** or for any part of designing and implementing my teaching practice. Lastly, the more you know about something, the more interesting it becomes, IMO.

I won't claim that this stuff will prepare you for a job (although some of it will), but we're not just brains on sticks! You are more than your job, you are a human being, with a life. Let's think about that together in this class – how other humans have thought about the big questions we all have: why are we here? What happens when we die? What makes a good life? Why do we go to so much trouble to preserve the things ancient peoples made, and to spend time looking at and discussing them? Why do we have museums, and what do people find so fascinating about them? And how can we use this class to learn about our own learning?

The technical bits:

Grammarly is free for students (and now it's a multi-platform AI agent) and Copilot is incorporated into all aspects of the Microsoft Suite. There's now an AI even in Canvas (and Open AI announced a collab with Canvas last summer)! There are ways to turn these off, or to just not use them, but of course I can't tell if you've done that. **I do not use 'AI detectors' because they're not reliable (Pangram, I'm looking at you), but I and my experience ARE.** I can tell when someone's using it, especially students – **and I'll reserve the right to ask you about anything that looks particularly bullshit and AI.** And of course there are all those APIs (application programming interfaces) built on top of the LLMs, from Perplexity to Notebook LM to all the apps that take notes for you, create flashcards, and then quiz you, just to name a few education ones. We'll talk about

this in class and try to come up with some ideas **together** about whether AI can help you study – but not do assignments.

Embrace your humanity, humans! Believe in your own capabilities and potential!

There are new AI apps all the time, in any case. Good luck keeping up with them.

I'll leave you with something that's being talked about a lot in the Gen AI space these days, seven rules that the writer Neil Postman came up with around technology way back in the 1990s that are *still* relevant:

1. What is the problem to which technology claims to be a solution?
2. Whose problem is it?
3. What new problems will be created because of solving an old one?
4. Which people and institutions will be most harmed?
5. What changes in language are being promoted?
6. What shifts in economic and political power are likely to result?
7. What alternative media might be made from a technology?

After being the generation that got to test-run smart phones in middle school, social media as young teenagers, and pandemic online middle or high school learning, do YOU *also* want to be generation that tests whether you can actually learn anything at college if you use AI to do your work for you?

"Whoever does the work does the learning."