English Department Position Statement on Artificial Intelligence

The English Department strengthens the liberal education of students by fostering a deepened understanding of language and literacy, by developing critical reading and effective writing skills, and by promoting the richness of literature, past and present. We recognize that technology has always mediated how texts are authored, published, disseminated, read, and taught, and that networked digital technology, in its many manifestations, will continue to shape our practices in English Studies. We also hold that English faculty members are best equipped to evaluate the pedagogical usefulness of educational technology in their content areas.

As professors of literature, language, literacy, and education, we approach generative artificial intelligence critically and with due caution. Current iterations of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot raise serious ethical, environmental, professional, legal, and even existential concerns. In brief, these are as follows: the training process of LLMs appropriates a vast corpus of published works without permission or acknowledgment; AI responses can contain factual errors (hallucinations) or biased information; AI lacks ethical boundaries and has produced hate speech and other reprehensible content; and AI is a performative construct of human intelligence being implemented in situations that demand authentic human thought, empathy, and mindfulness. To these, we add the potentially devastating environmental cost of the widespread, uncritical adoption of AI, whose data centers consume up to 50 times more energy than traditional commercial properties.[1] The relentless pursuit of carbon-intensive AI undermines GVSU's core value of sustainability and risks our university's standing as a national leader in environmental stewardship.

Reading and writing, speaking and listening, teaching and learning: these are the special province of the Humanities in general and of English Studies in particular. There can be no substitute for the human production of language in any of these contexts, even as we strive to interpret its meaning, tame its wildness, harness its power, and use it for good. Deep, meaningful, and consequential learning can only occur through this human struggle with language. There is no shortcut. But we are confident that English graduates are better for the struggle: more effective writers, stronger communicators, more careful readers, and, crucially, more critical thinkers. For their mastery of these skills, GVSU English majors will continue to be highly desired employees in a range of occupations—traditional, technical, and otherwise.

Even amid these and other concerns about AI (some excluded for brevity; some unknowable), the English Department respects the autonomy of its faculty members to determine their own best practices for this and other emergent technologies. Accordingly, we recommend the following guidelines for faculty and student use of AI:

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[1] https://cse.engin.umich.edu/stories/power-hungry-ai-researchers-evaluate-energy-consumption-across-models

- Faculty include an AI policy on course syllabi that clearly details acceptable use. Individual policies may vary from allowing select student use of AI to achieve specific learning objectives (e.g., allowing its use as a sophisticated search engine, a tutor for difficult content, a study partner, a research tool, or a brainstorming aid) to prohibiting AI entirely. Acceptable use policies should also outline consequences for students who violate academic integrity as per the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution.
- Faculty critically evaluate their own use of AI-generated course materials such as class notes, assessments, and presentations. Such teaching materials risk devaluing our profession and promoting a double standard for AI use.
- Faculty design writing-based assessments that emphasize the writing process. Faculty are encouraged to engage students in meaningful, critical dialogue about the writing process and the ethical uses of artificial intelligence within that process.
- Students evaluate artificial intelligence from a critical digital literacy perspective, recognizing its potential, identifying its shortcomings, and interrogating the technocratic power structures, including governments, corporations, and universities, which have enabled its rapid and unchecked rise.

Finally, we hope that our commitment to the above policies will help to lighten our workload, which has been intensified by the pervasive student use of artificial intelligence. Because no academic unit, including the English department, should bear the burden of detecting AI in student writing, we seek better training, more support, and consistent messaging about artificial intelligence from CLAS and the university at large.

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