

Student Perspectives on the Use of AI

Panel presented in December 6, 2024 as part of Generative AI Immersion Week, organized by the Language Resource Center in collaboration with MAD Studio, the Searle Center, and Northwestern IT Teaching and Learning Technologies.

Four undergraduate students, all of whom have taken language classes at Northwestern, participated in this discussion. Three were sophomores; one was a senior. Their major areas of study included computer science, political science, theater, journalism, business institutions, and biomedical engineering.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you used generative AI in a language class? If so, how? If not, why?
2. How would you like instructors and faculty to talk with students about generative AI? Have they talked to you about it?
3. How would you feel about instructors using generative AI in developing their course materials, e.g., generating quiz questions or to help them grade?

Key Takeaways

- **Use of Generative AI in Language Classes:** Students did not cite specific examples of using generative AI for assignments in language classes. However, they mentioned using it to practice language skills or to help with breaking down tricky or complicated passages in the languages they are learning. They expressed skepticism that generative AI would “get things right” and worried they may learn things incorrectly if they relied on AI. One student said, “There’s a time and a place [for generative AI] and language classes are probably not it.”
- **Experiences with AI in Other Classes:** Students shared experiences using AI in non-language classes. Examples included giving Copilot a reading and asking it to generate discussion questions, using ChatGPT to summarize complicated concepts in STEM courses, and uploading drafts of writing assignments for proofreading. One student described an assignment in their engineering class where they developed exam questions and answers using AI, then worked independently to verify if the AI-generated answers, and documented their processes along the way. The student expressed frustration when some of these questions were presented as part of a final exam, because they sometimes covered content not fully explained in class.
- **Clarity on AI Usage:** Students would like more clarity about when and when not to use generative AI for assignments and general studying purposes. One student mentioned there are probably many uses of generative AI that may enhance their learning, which they haven’t even thought of yet. They are curious about how to properly cite generative

AI outputs, and how to disclose if they have used generative AI at any point during research or brainstorming phases of academic work.

- **Instructors Using Generative AI:** Students are open to instructors using generative AI for tasks like generating quiz questions or hypothetical scenarios course materials. One student mentioned they would be ok with an instructor using generative AI to put together a “course plan” or other teaching planning document. Students were uncomfortable with the idea that their professors would use AI to grade or assess their work, beyond things like multiple choice quizzes. Students value Northwestern instructors’ expertise and want their individual feedback on their work. One student again mentioned, “There’s a time and a place [for generative AI], and grading is not it.”