

# Spring 2025 COM Assessment: Findings

assembled by Rick Fisher, Director of UW Communication across the Curriculum, and  
Shelby Hutson, Coordinator for COM Course Development and Assessment



In Spring 2025, UW offered 108 sections (taught by 103 distinct instructors) related to COM course delivery. Each instructor of COM course(s) received a request to submit assessment data for *one* of the COM courses they taught. A total of 60 respondents participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 58%.

## Potential Action Items

- 1) If you have yet to construct or implement an AI course policy, doing so may help your students understand the larger expectations for AI use across campus and in non-COM classrooms. The survey responses illustrate the wide range of expectations and approaches that students may encounter across their courses; it is our belief that setting clear expectations sets everyone up for success and more ethical AI use.
- 2) A June 2025 MIT study (<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2506.08872>) reported findings about the impact of frequent AI use has on participants' brains. One notable conclusion from the study was that "LLM (Large Language Models) users consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels." We would encourage all COM instructors to discuss the article or read the abstract with their students, since this study can inspire some critical discussion on how and whether to use AI.

## Quantitative Results

The survey included five questions that centered on AI use in COM courses. These questions and responses follow.

Q1: How many times this semester do you suspect that students in your COM course may have submitted unethical AI-assisted work?		
	Count	Percentage
0 times	16	27%
1-3 times	29	49%
3-6 times	7	12%
6-10 times	4	7%
10 + times	3	5%

Q2: How many of your communication assignments this spring intentionally asked or allowed students to use AI for some part of the project?		
	Count	Percentage
0 assignments	37	59%
1 assignment	10	16%
2 assignments	1	2%
2+ assignments	6	10%
All assignments	8	13%

**Q3: Did you include an explicit AI use policy in your syllabus this spring?**  
In other words, did you have a policy that specifically provided information to students about what kinds of AI use were and were not permitted in your course?

	Count	Percentage
<b>Yes</b>	52	87%
<b>No</b>	8	13%

**Q4: To what extent do you think that AI use may have reduced students' ability to think independently when completing COM-related assignments?**

	Count	Percentage
<b>No impact</b>	9	15%
<b>Minimal impact</b>	16	27%
<b>Moderate impact</b>	15	25%
<b>Substantial impact</b>	12	20%
<b>I don't know</b>	8	13%

**Q5: To what extent do you think that AI use may have increased students' ability to think independently when completing COM-related assignments?**

Response	Count	Percentage
<b>No impact</b>	13	22%
<b>Minimal impact</b>	18	30%
<b>Moderate impact</b>	6	10%
<b>Substantial impact</b>	2	3%
<b>I don't know</b>	21	35%

This survey data indicates that COM instructors believe they are seeing a sizeable subset of student work that is produced by AI *unethically*. This is true even for COM instructors who have allow students to use AI for one or more assignments. Additionally, most instructors felt that AI use was having some impact on students' independent thinking--but instructors expressed mixed feelings about whether AI reduced or increased students' independent thinking. The responses to Q4 and Q5 (as well as the qualitative responses below) seem to demonstrate instructors' emerging awareness that AI is not inherently "good" or "bad" but also is not a neutral consideration in their classrooms.

**Qualitative Feedback.** Instructors were invited to provide additional comments; approximately half of all of the respondents did. These comments reflected the mixed feelings around AI use that exists in the quantitative data; some comments praised AI as a "writing partner," while others voiced concern around the impact AI has on learning. Others stated how their policies attempt to mitigate or create boundaries around AI use. Finally, many responses voiced interest in more training on AI integration. The following comments represent the range of attitudes and emerging approaches to AI use in the classroom:

- "I want to work more on using AI to show students how they can improve their writing without completely letting AI do their assignments. I would love more ECTL workshops on this!"
- "I have found it beneficial to help students see the benefits and drawbacks of AI. I believe AI has some amazing tools for research. Students need to also see the importance of checking information generated by AI."

- “I essentially used the statement in my syllabus that if students used AI they had to reference it. I had students specifically reference using AI three times in class. In all instances, the writing from AI was grammatically correct, but full of “fluffy” content that did not fully meet the requirements of the assignment and did not include specifics related to things like financial ratios, profitability, etc.”
- “I have shifted (in an asynchronous online COM2) to either explicitly embrace/encourage ethical engagement with AI tools, or to encourage audio and video products and increase ‘deliverables’ that are direct, conversational interactions. I still have some written discussion posts, but I nearly always integrate a specific text to respond to and relatively complex prompts that (at least at the moment) LLMs are less capable of generating convincing responses for without significant coaching from the requestor. I feel super conflicted, still, about it. I also have added an environmental impact statement (i.e. water, CO2/electricity consumption per chatbot interaction or request) to my AI policy in my syllabus, which I address as part of my ethical use expectation-setting.”
- “ChatGPT’s Deep Research platform seems like a phenomenal resource, particularly because it can cite to legitimate scholarly references. I think it is important for students integrating AI into their written work to look at those sources to independently verify the accuracy of AI-generated text, make it their own, and ensure that AI use is not resulting in plagiarism from those sources. When use is appropriate, AI should be relied on as a writing partner, not a replacement for original work.”
- “I’m pretty clear about not wanting students to use AI in my English-based course. And when I’ve confronted students about using it instead of their own brains, that usually tamps it out--they go back to writing on their own. I really don’t think it’s a lot to ask.
- “I didn’t go into higher ed teaching to surveil students. So, my policy is: ‘Here’s what all we know is highly problematic about LLMs and how they negatively impact beginners in most fields’ skill/knowledge development. Given that, if you want to use an LLM in this class for any assignment, you need to discuss it with me first, so we can determine a way for you to use it that will help you still learn the content/skills of the course. And, AI-generated images are 100% off-limits. There is no ethical application of that version of AI.’”
- “I think that AI is a very important component of the learning landscape at this point and will increasingly be so. I would like the University to continue offering and improving instructor support in this area with trainings, workshops, conversations, and student support services.”
- “I encouraged students use AI in the same way we use Google or Wikipedia--as a place to start, but not finish as related to a research paper and project.”

### **Final thoughts**

LLMs are tools, and we are all still learning how to use them responsibly. Please look for CxC workshops and resources on AI in the near future.