



Spring 2026 COM Assessment: Findings

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In Spring 2026, UW offered 158 sections (taught by 118 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 50 respondents participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 43%.

This survey contained 14 questions; approximately half of these questions inquired about general information regarding the COM course and the other half were about AI use in the COM classroom. Eleven of these questions were multiple choice, two questions allowed for multiple responses, and 1 question was short answer. The key findings and compiled data to the survey can be found below.

Key Findings

- Most respondents taught their COM class 3 or more times; this is great for continuity and developing COM expertise.
- Good writing and communication instruction will always be a resource rich endeavor; this is reflected in respondents' answers on class size and time spent grading outside of class. Most of the respondents' classes have 20 or less students; this is an ideal size for COM classes according to the NCTE. Our COM class requirement at UWYO is 24 students or less (unless instructors receive an exemption). This current course cap is reflective of our peer and stretch peer institutions COM course caps (this includes Colorado State University (24), Montana State University (22), and University of Idaho (22)). Finally, most (72%) surveyed instructors spent 20-30 or 30+ hours assessing and providing feedback to students on written work throughout the semester. Richard Haswell estimated that to provide feedback and a grade on a single essay typically requires about 40 minutes of instructors' time; you can read more about Haswell's connection between class size and instructor workload [here](#). Grading time and class size is not an arbitrary connection; increasing classes by 5-10 students means adding tens of hours of outside of class work to an instructor's workload over a semester.
- There is significant variation in AI use and approaches in COM classes depending on discipline and course number. COM 3 and COM 2 classes were more likely to allow for some AI use, while most COM 1 instructors said they prohibited AI use entirely.
- The majority of respondents (76%) suspected that students were using AI unethically; additionally, most (74%) respondents believed that AI had a moderate to substantial reduction in students' ability to think independently.

Potential Action Items

- If your course cap is above the required 24 student course cap for UWYO COM courses, then it would be best to ask for additional resources from your department or program. Some courses with exemptions to the 24-student course cap have either multiple instructors or TAs to assist with grading, etc.
- Regardless of your perspective on AI, it is helpful to give students clear boundaries and expectations for AI use in your class. According to the survey data, more respondents allowed for AI use in some capacity than

not—still, more respondents suspected unethical AI use than not. I would encourage COM instructors to frequently revisit their AI policies with their class (and perhaps their justification for their policies); students are receiving mixed messages on AI use, so make sure they understand your policies prior to assigning any high-stakes assignment.

Quantitative Results

Q1: How many times, prior to Spring 2026, have you taught this specific COM course?

Response	Count	Percentage
0	6	12%
1	10	20%
2	2	4%
3	4	8%
3+	28	56%

Q2: What is the approximate enrollment of this course?

Response	Count	Percentage
10 or fewer	1	2%
10-15	8	16%
15-20	18	36%
20-25	18	36%
25+	5	10%

Q3: Over the course of the semester, about how much out-of-class time do you spend assessing and providing feedback on student written work?

Response	Count	Percentage
Less than 10 hours	1	2%
10-20 hours	13	26%
20-30 hours	9	18%
More than 30 hours	27	54%

Q4: In this course, would you prefer a course cap higher than 24 students?

Response	Count	Percentage
Definitely not	32	64%
Probably not	8	16%
Might or might not	5	10%
Probably yes	3	6%
Definitely yes	2	4%

Q5: Which of the following statements most accurately describes the students who enroll in this COM course?

Response	Count	Percentage
In department or program students	21	42%
Range of students	25	50%
Other	4	8%

Q6: What do you see as the three to five biggest gaps in student preparation for activities in your course?

Response	Count
Critically reading and analyzing text	27
Revising and editing writing	22
Formulating an argument	19
Developing message structure	15
Locating, evaluating, and synthesizing research	14
Demonstrating a command of mechanics/grammar	13
Drafting writing	13
Delivering formal oral presentations	11
Recognizing audience	11
Developing content	10
Recognizing purpose	10
Developing visual materials	8
Demonstrating engaged listening	8
Using digital technology to compose messages	5
Engaging in informal discussions	5
Other	2

Q7: Which of the following statements describe(s) your approach regarding generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, Perplexity, DALL-E, Copilot) this spring? (Select all that apply)

Response	Count
Prohibited AI use	21
Allowed AI use w/ acknowledgement	16
Explored AI capabilities/limitations	12
Other	5
No AI policy	3

Q8: How many of your communication assignments this spring intentionally asked or allowed students to use AI for some part of the project?

Response	Count	Percentage
0 assignments	31	62%
1 assignment	8	16%
2 assignments	1	2%
2+ assignments	5	10%
All assignments	5	10%

Q9: How many times this semester do you suspect that students in your COM course may have submitted *unethical* AI-assisted work?

Response	Count	Percentage
0 times	11	23%
1-3 times	22	45%
3-6 times	8	16%
6-10 times	7	14%
10 + times	1	2%

Q10: 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
No impact	19	38%
Minimal impact	11	22%
Moderate impact	7	14%
Substantial impact	1	2%
I don't know	12	24%

Q 11: To what extent do you think that AI use may have reduced students' ability to think independently when completing COM-related assignments?

Response	Count	Percentage
No impact	3	6%
Minimal impact	2	4%
Moderate impact	15	30%
Substantial impact	22	44%
I don't know	8	16%

Q13: In 2025 or 2026, what kinds of generative AI-related professional development activities did you participate in that may impact your teaching? (Select all that apply)

Response	Count
None: I have not participated in any generative AI-related events that will affect my teaching	14
Presentations that helped me understand "big-picture" impacts to my discipline or profession	14
Presentations/webinars/workshops that provided concrete ideas for assignment revision	9
A learning community or book discussion that allowed me to explore this topic with others	8
Trainings that helped me see how to take advantage of generative AI to automate/extend/improve teaching tasks	6
Self-guided reading to learn more about generative AI's potential impacts on my field/discipline	20
Self-guided reading to learn more about generative AI's potential impacts on teaching and learning	23
Other	4

Q 14: When you consider all of these way that you may be adapting your COM course to generative AI—including redesigning assignments, locating readings to develop student knowledge of AI, detecting potential use of AI, using AI to prepare class lectures, working with AI to create/adapt assignments, learning how to use AI in support of your teaching, etc.—how much have those efforts impacted the overall time you spend on this course?

Response	Count	Percentage
Substantially more time	7	15%
Slightly more time	23	48%
No net time change	6	12%
Slightly less time	2	4%
Substantially less time	1	2%
I have not spent any time	9	19%

Qualitative Feedback

Question twelve was short answer and optional; approximately half of all respondents opted into answering. This question asked instructors to comment on their emerging efforts to help students navigate generative AI platforms when they produce COM-related work. These comments reflected the mixed feelings around AI use that exists in quantitative data. A selection of responses can be found below.

I have 3 observations: 1. There were a few students who adamantly refused to use AI and had a great oppositional view about AI. 2. Students love to use AI, when it is beneficial to them. 3. Student evaluations were very negative toward the professor introducing the creative ways of integrating AI in their assignments or even using AI essay prompts, or creating AI for outlines or power points.

In this upper division class, students who have developed views and voices of their own on the content would not touch AI, they said. It would be beneath them. Unfortunately, the students who were weaker to begin with used AI, or so I suspect, and therefore lost the opportunity to practice their skills, thus remaining weak students. A sad situation, I think, and I'm struggling with it.

Since AI is a pervasive issue across all disciplines, perhaps a COM course should be devoted solely to using AI effectively and ethically? Honestly it seems pointless to have old-fashioned (manual) writing assignments in COM courses if students are just going to use AI to write everything in the future.

I think we need to introduce students to proper use of AI early on in their college career.

I work in healthcare there is a great deal of unreliable info found using AI. Navigation must include how to assess the veracity of information.

If students are producing COM related work and are really learning the basics of college writing and rhetoric, AI use inhibits the real thinking and struggle necessary to learn. In a perfect world, students would just use AI to brainstorm or format or to find good sources, but every time I have encountered and addressed AI use in my classroom, the platforms have been solely used in "crutch-like" ways that have instead promoted laziness, surface-level thinking, generalizations, and incorrect responses to prompts. I don't think that AI integration should be a "if you can't beat them, join them" type of addition to the 1010 curriculum. Instead of approaching the issue through the possible integration of AI, I think it needs to be approached through more teacher support, student consequences, increased backing/belief of GAs, less affordance of "plausible deniability" for students (however that may be), and simply prompting students about the ethical/humanitarian/capitalistic/environmental issues with its use. I think that standing firm on the exclusion of AI from the 1010 curriculum shows integrity in actually fostering and supporting deep learning. The right path is not always the easy path.

I appreciate the program's emerging efforts to help students navigate generative AI platforms in COM-related work. Providing clearer guidelines, practical workshops, and discussions about ethical AI use, academic integrity, and responsible research practices would further help students understand how to use these tools effectively while maintaining originality and critical thinking in their academic work.

The times students had used AI, they had no competence or understanding of what they had submitted. As a result, I focused on in-class assignments that aimed to improve student reliance on independent thought.

I think there needs to be more discussion of the environmental costs of using AI as well as about concerns regarding how it "borrows" intellectual property, especially when it comes to creative writing, music, and visual art.

With AI becoming more and more embedded in work, my students who want to develop skills independently of AI are having more and more trouble avoiding it. For example, students know GoogleAI isn't a valid source for a research project, but they also don't understand how to navigate through/around it. Class often takes on a shade of "how do to this ethically and up to standard" because low-functioning AI is so pervasive, and students do not, in any way, have the analytical, editorial, organizational, instructional, you-name-it! skills to leverage high-functioning AI to achieve outcomes related to critical thinking, analysis, academic inquiry, basic argument development, the list goes on. Students want to use their brains, but access to AI keeps making this more and more difficult.

As this is a practicum-based course, my approach to generative AI has been more policy-oriented than instructionally embedded. Students were not permitted to use AI to complete assignments, but they could use it as a support tool if properly acknowledged. Because the course emphasizes live teaching, reflection, and application in real classroom settings, there were limited natural opportunities to integrate AI directly into coursework. That said, I see growing value in helping pre-service teachers learn how to use AI thoughtfully as a tool for brainstorming, refining ideas, and reflecting on practice rather than replacing professional judgment. Moving forward, I am interested in developing more intentional ways to guide students in using AI as a collaborative thinking partner while maintaining authenticity and independence in their work.

In hearing/reading student reflection on intentional AI use, I was surprised and heartened that ~75% had an experience of critical engagement and increased interest in critical use, or intentional avoidance of AI; I have an "attribution statement" policy (with examples and specific guidelines) for assignments without explicit directional engagement with AI, and most students did not utilize that option. 2/24 inappropriately used AI, with 1 student likely doing so 4 times, but I continue to be heartened by the intentional and reflective engagement many students are willing to take on (some of whom did take me up on an "ethical exemption" option in the AI-integrated assignments). Teaching online (asynch) and keeping my educational philosophy influences my engagement with AI, which continues to be ambivalent.

In this course, we use AI tools, such as automatic transcription. I teach the students how to use the software, the mistakes the software can make that may alter the meaning of data, and how to check it. Using AI for generative writing in this class however, can be problematic because their analysis and writing are based upon original qualitative research that they completed in person - they complete interviews and direct observations within a cultural context. I find that most of the students I work with in this class who are utilizing generative AI to "polish" their writing do not need to do so, being able to generative clear ideas and writing themselves, and that when they do use it to polish their writing, they end up having to do additional editing because of general/vague claims made or word replacement issues that change meaning.

I don't think "navigating generative AI platforms" should be a learning outcome for first year writing.

It is a neglect of our duties if we do not guide our students to a responsible use of AI. The university is very much too slow in getting its move on to start AI broadly.

While GenAI literacy is important for graduates today, I think GenAI at the COM 1 and COM 2 level impedes student development. I also feel that it is becoming more difficult to detect AI. If the university were to invest in AI detection software such as GPTZero or Pro level accounts for platforms such as Claude for faculty, it would be a boon.

If you have any comments that you would like to share in response to this report, please use this [link](#).