

Fall 2023 COM Assessment Findings

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Indirect assessment of COM courses in Fall 2023 focused on instructor perceptions and practices, including their emerging policies for generative AI (GAI) technologies. Information was also collected to help guide USP revision of communication-intensive courses. Of 110 COM instructors who received survey invitations, 88 (80%) submitted responses.

Findings of Note



Unsurprisingly, **creating opportunities for students to practice and improve their written and oral communication takes real time and investment**, both for students and for teachers:

- About two-thirds of COM instructors estimated that students produced 20 or more pages of written work during their course. And, nearly 48% of COM instructors indicated that students in their class would spend 20 minutes or more delivering formal presentations, facilitating discussions, or engaging in other oral communication activities over the course of the semester. (This doesn't include time students also spend in preparing and practicing!)
- A majority of COM instructors (~55%) indicated they would spend 30 hours or more on assessing and providing feedback on student written work. And, about 40% or instructors indicated that at least 5 hours of class time would be spent on student presentations or other student-driven oral communication activities; about half of those instructors (19.3% of all respondents) anticipated allocating 10 or more hours to student oral communication activities.

Research into writing-intensive courses provides strong justification for these levels of time investment; as Kuh¹ notes, writing-intensive courses are one of handful of high-impact practices that “increase rates of student retention and student engagement.”



Many COM instructors are adapting to generative AI. Compared to COM instructors who responded to similar questions in Spring 2023, far more Fall 2023 instructors have adopted *some kind* of policy: in Spring 2023 about two-thirds (66.3%) indicated they had adopted no specific policy, while only about 29.5% of Fall 2023 respondents had no specific policy. Fall instructors adopted “full bans” at higher rates than Spring instructors (30.7% in fall vs 16.3% in spring), but they also adopted “allowed if acknowledged policies” at higher rates as well (28.4% in fall vs 8.3% in spring). About 9% of Fall 2023 instructors reported directly engaging students in GAI with at least one assignment. In both spring and fall, only a few instructors (~1%) indicated that they encouraged students to use GAI but provided no guidance nor specific activities. While 40% indicated they had undertaken self-guided reading to better

¹ Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Association of American Colleges & Universities.

understand how GAI might impact teaching and learning, nearly 1 in 3 COM instructors said they had not participated in *any* generative AI-related events they felt would affect their teaching.



Faculty do see the value of engaging students in “digital” communication. Just under 60% of faculty “strongly agree” that it is important to engage students in digital aspects of communication activity (and another 30% “generally” agree). These percentages indicate a real victory for those who argued that “digital” communication should be included as a central element of USP 2015 communication-intensive courses. However, the fact that a much smaller proportion (28%) “strongly agree” that they have adequate skills, training, and expertise to teach digital communication reflects the continuing need to support teaching around digital elements of communication.



COM instructors’ beliefs about essential communication skills, knowledge, and mindsets largely overlap with existing learning outcomes for COM courses (See “Perceived priorities for communication-intensive courses/activities” table, page 7.) Though this conclusion is somewhat intuitive, it is still heartening to see this overlap. Common instructor responses focused on use of sources, critical thinking, rhetorical adaptivity, interpersonal skills (including the ability to navigate different perspectives), presentation skills, genre awareness and ability to create effective structures, and the ability to engage in a writing process (often involving feedback). Excitingly, the most-often appearing responses were ones I coded as “Emotion and self-regulation,” including comments about the value of persistence, reflection, self-evaluation, curiosity, and a value for communication.

Survey Results Part I: Scope of Communication-Intensive Activities

Roughly what percentage of your course grade is based on communication-intensive projects/assignments (as opposed to attendance, lab activities, practice sets, tests/quizzes that do not require extended writing, etc.)?	Less than 25%	25 to 50%	50 to 75%	More than 75%
Percentage of faculty who selected this range	1.1%	5.7%	29.5%	63.6%
Over the course of the semester, about how many pages of writing (including drafts/outlines/slides, discussion posts, essay-based test questions, as well as final documents) do you estimate your students will produce?	Less than 10 pages	10 to 20 pages	20 to 30 pages	More than 30 pages
Percentage of faculty who selected this range	1.14%	34.09%	36.36%	28.41%
Over the course of the semester, about how much out-of-class time will you spend assessing and providing feedback on student written work?	Less than 10 hours	10 to 20 hours	20 to 30 hours	More than 30 hours
Percentage of faculty who selected this range	3.41%	19.32%	22.73%	54.55%
Over the course of the semester, about how many minutes will each student spend delivering formal presentations (and/or facilitating discussions or other oral communication activities)?	Less than 5 minutes	5 to 10 minutes	10 to 20 minutes	More than 20 minutes
Percentage of faculty who selected this range	6.82%	21.59%	23.86%	47.73%
Over the course of the semester, about how much total in-class time will be spent on student presentations (or other student-driven oral communication activities)?	1 hour or less	2 to 5 hours	5 to 10 hours	More than 10 hours
Percentage of faculty who selected this range	25.00%	34.09%	20.45%	19.32%

Survey Results Part II: Adapting to Generative AI

Which of the following statements describe(s) your approach regarding generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, Perplexity, DALL-E, Copilot) this fall?		
	Fall 2023	Spring 2023
I explicitly prohibited students from using generative AI for all work related to my course.	30.7%	16.3%
I didn't adopt any specific course policy related to generative AI this semester.	29.5%	66.3%
I allowed students to use generative AI for some work in my course, as long as they acknowledged it.	28.4%	9.3%
I engaged students in exploring generative AI's capabilities/limitations in at least one assignment.	9.1%	5.8%
I encouraged students to use generative AI but didn't provide specific guidance or activities.	1.1%	1.2%
Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>I cautioned them against using AI because Unireg. on Plagiarism</i> <i>I didn't incorporate it this semester, but feel I might try some simple exercises in it, in terms of how to generate feedback from it for drafting thoughts.</i> <i>I encouraged students to use generative AI and provided specific guidance and advice.</i> <i>I mentioned academic honesty in relation to generative AI.</i> <i>I simply asked my students to communicate when they used it. The only use was to make data cleaning easier prior to reading it into R.</i> <i>It was stated in our syllabus that students could use AI, only on assignments specified by the instructor. However, there were no assignments that AI was allowed on.</i> <i>Our 1010 class had a policy across all sections that prohibited AI usage.</i> <i>The use of AI (artificial intelligence) tools is permitted in class for instructor specified activities and only with student acknowledgment. Students' use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on academic dishonesty.</i> 	9.1%	5.8%

In 2023, what kinds of generative AI-related professional development activities did you participate in that may impact your teaching?	
Self-guided reading to learn more about generative AI's potential impacts on teaching and learning	40.2%
None: I have not participated in any generative AI-related events that will affect my teaching	32.2%
Self-guided reading to learn more about generative AI's potential impacts on my field/discipline	28.7%
Presentations that helped me understand "big-picture" impacts to my discipline or profession	25.3%
Presentations/webinars/workshops that provided concrete ideas for assignment revision	20.7%
A learning community or book discussion that allowed me to explore this topic with others	10.3%
Trainings that helped me see how to take advantage of generative AI to automate/extend/improve teaching tasks	9.2%
Other: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Applying with a trans-disciplinary team for a grant to collaborate with First Nations communities on the possibilities for working with AI to impact the narratives that tourists will find when they use AI to plan tourism to First Nations.</i> <i>Rick's informal group AI discussion.</i> <i>I have educated myself of generative AI by reading articles and Dobrin's book, AI and Writing</i> 	3.4%

Looking toward future semesters, what specific adaptations you plan to make to your course in relationship to generative AI?

- to guide them on how to use it as long as they acknowledge it.
- I plan to have an assignment where students write their own piece and then compare it to an AI piece.
- This was the first semester I had students who used AI to write their papers. I am probably going to have a specific AI policy next semester
- Same as this term. I might have an entire lesson on how to use AI while teaching a future class.
- PitchVantage, Packback
- Looking to try many iterations of my 4 -week unit as we learn more about ethical uses of AI on higher education and receive more institutional guidance.
- Including an AI specific assignment
- In our class, the students need to do their own writing.
- In general, I think this course has previously been set up in such a way as to incentivize using generative AI (i.e. to keep pace with a large number of assessments that could be drafted using GAI). To build "AI-proof" assessments will mean breaking these assignments into smaller component parts, in my opinion; doing this while still delivering an experience that is both meaningful and achievable (for students to complete, and for me to assess), I think we need to significantly dial back some of these activities to more skeletal elements. This may mean we don't mean [meet?] previously established standards for a COM2 course. Interested to talk more about this down the line.
- I'm still considering the "if you use it, cite it" policy, with all the caveats.
- I'll clarify that AI is also prohibited for generating written responses to the posts of others, within weekly online threaded discussions.
- I would like to have a conversation with students about how they can ethically use AI for assignments.
- I would like to do a better job at incorporating it or at least acknowledging it because I know students are starting to use it.
- I will probably spend far more time discussing it, potentially creating an assignment to address it.
- I will as related to AI generated images. I had that come up in a class as related to visual images. I thought about the written word and assignments, but not about visual images. I allowed the AI generated images, but the students had to 1) deal with the errors with the images (students said they spent hours on correcting the errors since AI gave humans three arms) and ultimately regretted the choice to use AI and 2) showed the students how to cite AI in the references.
- I want to encourage students to explore using AI's generative qualities.
- I want to design at least one AI assignment for my Spring COM 3 research paper, which the students write in multiple drafts. I am scared because I fear I am letting the genie out of the bottle if we use it early in the process to generate an outline for a thesis-driven research paper. I fear that students who aren't yet using it will simply shift into use of AI for most of the paper. I fear these will be the least interesting research papers for a course I've taught for nearly twenty years.
- I think more in-class writing.
- I plan on going more in depth and dressing how AI could be used in education, and what to be aware of/what might not make it worth it
- I hope to continue to walk along side my students as they discover the best uses.
- I had a student use ChatGPT for an assignment and it was very obvious because it could not replicate the way a human would have completed and written about an ethnographic observation. I allowed that student to re-do the assignment ethically from actual direct experience/observation to correct their work and their re-do was excellent. If this happens again and I recognize it as easily as I did this assignment, I plan to offer a similar opportunity. I know that students use AI citation generators online as well for citations, and they almost always produce incorrect citation formats. I am going to be working with all students to download Zotero or Endnote citation generators (also AI but accurate) so that they can benefit from the time-saving nature of these programs and get citations correct (as I have).
- I do plan to more fully engage my students with AI's abilities, options, and pros and cons to various apps.
- I do hope to have open conversations about AI with my students and to encourage them to explore, but to do so responsibly.
- I didn't adopt a specific policy but events in other classes has convinced me to address use of AI more explicitly (and I believe I'd veer toward allowing students to use but requiring them to acknowledge, and spending time on how to use effectively).
- I can tell students are using it to complete essays and bibles, but I can't prove it. My plan is to shift toward citing generative AI and using AI well.
- For the purposes of this Gateway class, AI will have to be more accurate in its citations or proficient in its writing for me to be impressed by it or worried about it.
- Considering less focus on an iterative major research paper.
- Beginning in the fall semester, I will explicitly address AI policy in the syllabus. I will also conduct a Zoom session (online class) to discuss appropriate use of ChatGPT.
- As I put in the other comment above, I am considering the use of AI to help them draft perhaps outlines of their papers, or using free writes to transform into essays, and then make sure they understand how to use it. I have thought about using it for citation exercises.

Survey Results Part III: Looking toward Revision of UW's General Education

Preferences regarding site of instruction for communication-intensive courses				
	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
I prefer to have first-year writing instruction taught by specialists in writing, composition and rhetoric (ie, primarily the English department)	43.7%	36.8%	14.9%	4.6%
I prefer to have a foundational oral communication course taught by specialists in public speaking and interpersonal communication (ie, primarily the Communication/Journalism department)	33.7%	41.9%	22.1%	2.3%
I prefer that upper-level communication-intensive courses be taught by faculty with knowledge of specific professional and/or disciplinary communication expectations (ie, primarily faculty in students' major or program)	57.5%	31.0%	9.2%	2.3%

Sense of readiness to teach communication-intensive course content				
	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel I have adequate knowledge/training/expertise to teach foundational principles of academic writing	56.82%	31.82%	10.23%	1.14%
I feel I have adequate knowledge/training/expertise to teach foundational principles of oral communication.	35.23%	46.59%	15.91%	2.27%

Beliefs about <i>value of</i> and <i>preparation</i> for teaching students "digital" communication.				
	Strongly agree	Generally agree	Generally disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel it is important that students learn how to navigate digital aspects of communication (such as document design, creation and integration of graphics, citation management systems, technologies for collaborative projects, applications of generative AI)	59.09%	30.68%	9.09%	1.14%
I feel I have adequate knowledge/training/expertise to teach digital aspects of communication	28.41%	44.32%	25.00%	2.27%

Perceived priorities for communication-intensive courses/activities* (in response to this question: "In general: What do you feel are the TOP 1 TO 3 communication-related knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or habits of mind that successful students should develop during their undergraduate experience?")	
Emotion and self-regulation (including persistence, reflection, self-evaluation, curiosity, value for communication)	23
Critical thinking (including analysis)	19
Use of sources (including comprehending, evaluating, synthesizing, and integrating ethically)	19
Interpersonal skills (including teamwork, collaborative problem-solving, active listening, and responding to diverse viewpoints)	17
Rhetoric (primarily phrased in terms of attention to audience)	17
Feedback/process (including responding effectively to feedback and repeated practice)	14
Structure (including argumentative structures as well as "cohesion")	13
Presentation skills	11
Clarity	8
Genre (often including reference to specific professional/academic genres)	7
Multimodal representation (including both effective production of multimodal texts and effective avoidance of distracting technologies)	7
Voice	2
* These categories are the result of quick analysis involving coding, re-coding, and grouping. Full responses available on request. Others may disagree with my coding approach/categories. -rf	

Support for increasing the focus on oral communication in intermediate-level communication-intensive course	
Context: Proposed Next Gen USP course designations would have the effect of replacing the current COM2 with a course that has a primary focus on oral communication. This change is based in part on ease of transfer (ie, many other institutions have a requirement for a focused oral communication or public speaking course, which means our existing COM2 has created some hurdles for students transferring to or from UW.)	
In general, do you think students would benefit from an introductory course focused on oral communication rather than a mid-level course (like the existing COM2) that attempts to integrate oral, written, and digital communication?	
Definitely yes	11.5%
Mostly yes	27.6%
I don't know	33.3%
Mostly no	19.5%
Definitely no	8.0%