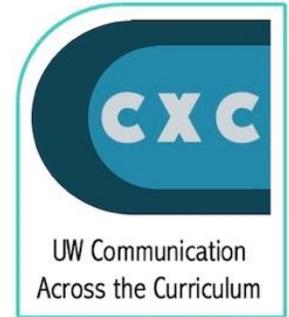


# Spring 2023 COM Assessment Findings

assembled by Rick Fisher, Director of UW Communication across the Curriculum



Indirect assessment of COM courses in Spring 2023 focused on instructor perceptions and practices, including their emerging policies for generative AI technologies (such as ChatGPT). Eighty-seven of 131 Spring 2023 COM instructors (~66%) submitted responses.

## Potential Action Items for Future COM Instruction

1. **Update course policies to reflect your position on student use of ChatGPT and related technologies.** UW appears to be on the way towards an academic dishonesty position that “submissions generated, in whole or in part, by an Artificial Intelligence-based application without attribution to the application will be treated as plagiarism.” Given the quickly changing nature of, access to, and integration of generative AI, however, faculty should consider taking an *intentional, meaningful, and contextual* stance towards student use of these technologies.
2. **Pat yourself on the back—and make greater use of local resources.** Overall, respondents indicate a high level of pride in their communication-intensive assignments—including the use of informal assignments designed to engage students in learning new and unfamiliar material. That’s neat! Simultaneously, many acknowledge that they have not accessed resources to help them further improve their instructional approaches. A variety of [USP](#) and [CxC](#) resources are readily accessible, and many COM instructors indicated that real-time, on-campus workshops and events have helped them improve their teaching of COM courses.

## Survey Results: Instructor Attitudes, Beliefs, and Practices

Table 1 presents instructor responses to a variety of questions about their confidence, beliefs, and activities in their COM courses.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel confident in my ability to help students improve their <i>written</i> communication skills.	68.6%	31.4%	0.0%	0.0%
I feel confident in my ability to help students to improve their <i>oral</i> communication skills.	58.1%	38.4%	3.5%	0.0%
I feel confident in my ability to help students to compose, critically analyze, and/or present information through digital media and in <i>digital</i> environments.	57.0%	34.9%	7.0%	1.2%
I believe that communication assignments in my course help students to better learn key course content.	65.1%	32.6%	2.3%	0.0%
In my course, most students' final draft work is typically much stronger than their first draft work.	60.7%	39.3%	0.0%	0.0%

In my course I include informal communication assignments that enable students to grapple with new or unfamiliar ideas or processes.	62.7%	31.3%	6.0%	0.0%
In my course students receive individualized feedback about their strengths and weaknesses on many communication assignments throughout the semester.	76.7%	23.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Overall, I am proud of the communication-intensive assignments in my course.	57.0%	40.7%	2.3%	0.0%
Overall, I believe students see the purpose/value of the communication-intensive assignments in my course.	47.7%	40.7%	8.1%	3.5%
I wish that the enrollment cap for my COM course were higher.	7.9%	9.2%	21.1%	61.8%

Of note:

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Nearly 98% of instructors indicate some level of pride in the communication-intensive assignments in their course.
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Over 97% of instructors believe that communication-related activities help students learn content in their courses. More impressively, 94% report including informal assignments that are meant to help student grapple with new or unfamiliar ideas.
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Overall, instructors feel confident in their ability to teach oral, written, *and* digital communication skills. Some are less confident in their ability to teach digital communication skills (with 8% slightly or strongly disagreeing that they are confident in this ability).
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Over 10% of instructors are not sure that students see the value or purpose of communication-intensive assignments in their course.
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Over 80% of COM instructors do not wish for higher enrollment caps. Of those who “slightly” or “strongly” wished for higher course caps, half (6 of 12) were instructors of COM3 courses intended primarily for students majoring in the course program/department, while the others were instructors of COM1, COM2, and COM3 instructors teaching courses for a variety of majors. One instructor commented, “The course went okay with 20 students enrolled, but I feel a smaller class would have been better,” and others noted that higher enrollments would diminish their ability to provide high-quality feedback to students.

### Survey results: COM instructor expertise and use of resources

Over half of respondents (47 of 87; ~54%) indicated that they had taught their COM course three or more times, while about 1 in 8 (11 of 87; 12.6%) indicated that this was their first time teaching the course. The remainder had taught the course once or twice previously.

Just over half of COM instructors (52%) indicated that they had never accessed supporting materials on the USP or CxC websites, and about 21% indicated that they had never attended in-person or synchronous online faculty development activities specifically focused on developing students' communication skills. Disappointingly, even instructors who had taught COM courses several times previously were not more likely than less-experienced instructors to indicate they had referred to locally developed COM support materials.

When asked to name the resource that has been most influential to their teaching of communication-related assignments, respondents named books (*How Learning Works*, *Becoming Rhetorical*, *Writing with Style*, *How to Take Smart Notes*, *The Best American Sports Writing*, *Technical Communication* [by Mike Markel], *Taller de escritores*, and the APA manual); departmental colleagues and mentors; program directors (of ENGL 1010, COMM 2010, and Honors Colloquium), on-the-job experience; observation of other teachers; coursework in curriculum/instruction; formal training in debate; research on teaching effectiveness; Writing Center resources; campus faculty development programs including ECTL faculty learning communities and LAMP, LeaRN, and FYS trainings; EPScOR and grant-writing workshops; and interactions facilitated by UW Communication Across the Curriculum.

### Survey Results: Adapting to ChatGPT

Table 2 shows COM instructors' reported approach(es) to the availability of ChatGPT and similar AI this spring. Understandably, most faculty took a conservative approach, either making no change to existing policies or banning use of the technology. Faculty indicated that there were likely to make changes in future semesters, and they hoped for greater guidance from the university on appropriate policies.

I didn't adopt any specific course policy related to ChatGPT this semester.	66.3%
I explicitly prohibited students from using ChatGPT for all work related to my course.	16.3%
I allowed students to use ChatGPT for some work in my course, as long as they acknowledged it.	9.3%
I encouraged students to use ChatGPT but didn't provide specific guidance or activities.	1.2%
I engaged students in exploring ChatGPT's capabilities/limitations in at least one assignment.	5.8%
Other	5.8%
* Faculty were allowed to choose multiple statements	

Many instructors indicated interest in future professional development offerings, though 21 said they felt unready to think about programming to help them prepare for ChatGPT in the classroom and 6 indicated they had no plans to change their teaching. Instructors expressed most interest in workshops focused on concrete ideas for assignment design (35); trainings that could help them use ChatGPT to improve or automate their teaching tasks (35); presentations to help them understand big-picture impacts to their department or field (26); workshops about using ChatGPT to help revise/improve departmental curricula (26); and faculty learning communities to promote collaborative thinking about impacts and responses to ChatGPT and related technologies (24).