# AI at SUNY Geneseo

## AI and GenAI

***Artificial intelligence (AI)*** is a term usually used to describe either an area of research within computer science, a property that some researchers claim (controversially) belongs or could belong to certain computer systems, or a set of technologies for generating new content (text, images, sound, etc.) from existing content.

This document focuses on the last sense of the term, also commonly referred to as ***generative artificial intelligence*** or ***GenAI***. While GenAI isn't new, it suddenly seems to be everywhere: not only in free-standing tools with names such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Copilot, DALL-E, and Midjourney, but also, increasingly, as an affordance built into other tools, such as search engines, word-processors, image editors, email and messaging interfaces, mobile apps, coding environments, and websites.

## Engaging with GenAI

The growing prevalence of GenAI—in academia, the workplace, and everyday life—imposes an important obligation on educational institutions like Geneseo. **We must do everything in our power to ensure that our students engage with this new technology critically, responsibly, and competently.**

We can best fulfill this obligation by **engaging with the technology ourselves**, both by learning about it and by testing it firsthand—seeing for ourselves what it can accomplish and where it fails. From this starting point, we can go on to engage students in discussion of the technology in the classroom and beyond. Where we're comfortable engaging them in *using* the technology, doing so will create opportunities for collaborative exploration and deeper, richer conversation.

## Establishing clear expectations

In the classroom, this conversation should include **clear guidelines from the instructor about whether, how, and where using GenAI to complete assignments is acceptable**. The conversation should complement a **clear statement of these guidelines in the course syllabus**. A good statement will **distinguish** between free-standing AI tools and those built into word-processors and other software, such as tools for checking grammar and spelling, suggesting word choices, or improving clarity. In establishing ground rules for the classroom, it's important to recognize how pervasive and sometimes inescapable this latter category of tools has become. **Prohibiting the use of GenAI completely and absolutely will likely raise more questions than it answers** for students about acceptable use, and is in any case **unrealistic** given that detecting the use of many built-in tools is difficult if not impossible.

## Engaging responsibly, critically, and competently

Engaging with GenAI **responsibly** means, among other things, recognizing that **certain types of data should *never* be provided to GenAI tools as inputs.** These include

* data protected by the **Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act** (FERPA), such as education records;
* **confidential data** of any kind;
* **personally identifiable information** (PII)—that is, information related to an identifiable individual;
* **content protected by copyright**. This last category includes **student work**. Original works of authorship are under copyright from the moment of their creation and do not require registration to be protected. **While authors may choose to provide as input to GenAI works in which they themselves hold the copyright**, they should do so with caution, understanding the potential for their work to be used as training data by the provider of an AI tool or service. Under the terms of Geneseo's license with Microsoft, Microsoft may not use as training data the content entered into its Copilot AI tool by users logged into the tool with their Geneseo accounts. But users must decide for themselves how reassured they feel by this fact. *Caveat scriptor*.

Engaging with GenAI **critically** means, among other things, recognizing that AI tools replicate the biases and misinformation in their training data, can't distinguish fact from falsehood, frequently invent their own facts (a phenomenon sometimes called "hallucination"), and can't even perform basic calculations or data analysis reliably. It means **understanding that AI is having and will likely continue to have widespread and significant social, economic, political, and environmental effects:** threatening job security, destabilizing conventional understandings around intellectual property, polluting civic discourse, and contributing to climate change—but also leveling the playing field for individuals with certain types of disabilities, opening new avenues for creativity, and providing new tools for advancing individual and public health.

Engaging with GenAI **competently** means, among other things, understanding when and how to best use AI as an effective aid to **brainstorming and creativity**, a useful tool for **summarizing and organizing information**, or a powerful means of **surfacing patterns** in large quantities of data. It means, as well, understanding that AI performs these tasks through processes of statistical analysis and inference, *without itself understanding what it is doing*. To most people, the word "intelligence" implies conscious awareness and the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and actions. At times, GenAI tools may appear to exhibit these properties, but in fact they're nothing more than sophisticated machines for predicting the next plausible word, pixel, or other bit of data.

## Upholding and advancing Geneseo's values

As we engage with GenAI at Geneseo, individually and as a community, we should ask ourselves continuously **how and when we can use this technology in ways that uphold and advance our values.** Below are some questions to consider raising with colleagues and students, organized by these values. **Many more questions could be raised in connection with each value**, and some questions could be repeated under more than one value. Those below are simply intended to help get substantive conversations going.

### Learning

* How does artificial intelligence, in particular generative artificial intelligence, work?
* Can we use GenAI to improve learning?
* Can GenAI make learning more equitable?
* Does GenAI create obstacles for learning? If so, how can we overcome them?
* As a community of learners, how can we best exchange knowledge, perspectives, and questions about the roles, risks, and opportunities of GenAI in our disciplinary and professional areas?

### Creativity

* Can we use GenAI to unlock creativity? To create in new ways?
* What are the opportunities and risks for creators (authors, artists, etc.) in using GenAI?

### Belonging

* Within our community, who benefits from GenAI? How can we ensure that the benefits are enjoyed inclusively, not exclusively?
* Does GenAI have corrosive effects on community? (For example, by perpetuating bias or facilitating the spread of misinformation.)

### Civic engagement

* What is the business model for GenAI tools and services? Outside our community, who benefits from our use of GenAI? Can we trust the providers of these tools and services?
* Who does the work of sorting and sifting the data used to train GenAI models in order to improve them? What are the working conditions of these "humans in the loop"? How are they compensated for their work?
* What political remedies are possible or necessary, in the form of laws and regulations, to mitigate the negative effects of GenAI? To expand who benefits from its positive potential?

### Sustainability

* What are the environmental impacts of GenAI?
* How do the energy needs of GenAI affect the communities living near the data centers and power sources necessary to fuel it?
* How can we minimize the negative environmental effects of GenAI at Geneseo?
* What are the implications of GenAI for the sustainability of Geneseo as an institution and higher education as a civic project?