

## Using AI in EDLF 4080

### Artificial Intelligence (Chatbots generally or Chat GPT specifically)

AI tools, like ChatGPT or other chatbots, can automate many tasks quickly and relatively accurately. For example, they can help you brainstorm ideas for papers, draft outlines, generate rough essays, analyze texts, and write computer code. We believe these tools can complement and improve your work, just as graphing calculators or software extend your ability to analyze quantitative problems or bibliographic programs (Zotero) can improve your ability to find and organize relevant literature. We encourage you to become familiar with programs like Chat to help you analyze, synthesize and write about educational policy.

You can use chatbots to enhance your engagement with the course material and strengthen your analytic skills by complementing your own reading and synthesizing of the readings and videos. Alternatively, you could use AI to substitute for your efforts to understand and synthesize material. In this class we are structuring policy memos that, if you use chatbots, require you to do so as a complement, rather than substitute for your own efforts.

This choice is particularly relevant as you consider how to approach the writing of policy memos for this class. Understanding the implications of various sources of evidence to inform policy decisions—the heart of this class—entails: understanding the policy question, reviewing the relevant evidence, assessing the extent to which the issues examined in the research apply to the policy question at hand, synthesizing an understanding across sources of evidence based on several criteria<sup>1</sup> (see below). As you may know, AI has become increasingly effective performing complex analysis of this sort and it will continue to improve to the point where, given sufficient prompts and experience with your style, AI will be able to write a policy memo in your voice that is as good as, or perhaps better than, the one you would write without AI.

Why then not leave it to the chatbot to write your memos (and other assignments) allowing you to spend that time on other activities? We believe the skills you will learn in this class writing policy memos and other assignments will prove useful in a variety of settings. For example, policy is often made in complex, evolving interactions among key stakeholders, each of whom may make different assessments of the evidence based on differing values. AI can effectively leverage the existing history of evidence to provide useful insights but will be a poor substitute for an informed you in these meetings. An AI generated or informed memo may be a good foundation for such a policy discussion but will be an insufficient guide in the real time conversation where policy is hammered out. To be effective in those meetings you will need to know the details on which the chatbot generated memo is based and be able to employ that nuance to revise the recommendations in response to the policy discussion. You will be at a disadvantage if all you know is what is in the chatbot generated memo.

In addition, chatbots have known problems with hallucination or fabricating statements or references and passing them off as facts. If you use material from a chatbot, you should check them for accuracy. You will be held responsible for the accuracy of the statements in your memos. Finally, the act of writing and revising your thoughts about policy questions helps you clarify priorities, communicate more effectively and better understand the issues.

Before asking a chatbot to write a policy memo, you should write a draft and revise it once without the use of a chatbot. You bring a unique perspective to the policy question and the evidence. Beginning with the chatbot draft will likely close some of your good, creative and novel ideas. Then submit the whole assignment to the chatbot, reviewing the memo it generates. In our experience, the resulting memo may

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<sup>1</sup> As we will discuss in more detail, criteria to assess evidence includes whether the intervention credibly determined the outcome, the magnitude of the effects, and the weight of the accumulated evidence.

not fully address the assignment. As a result, you should ask it to revise the memo with more attention to whatever seems missing. Then compare your memo to the chatbot memo. How do they compare? The chatbot memo may help you build your analytic and writing skills; your insights and nuance will help apply the generic lessons from AI to the specific context you are asked to examine. Ultimately you should produce a final memo that is the best of both, citing the chatbot for the contribution it made that was not in your draft memo. These skills are an investment which you can apply in many other contexts. We will spend a class modeling and discussing this process.

We will write three policy memos. For two of these each of you will schedule a 5-minute briefing meeting with the instructors where we will ask you about your memo and pose scenarios similar to the original memo question but with some variation. Our goal is to assess the depth of your understanding of the material beyond the specific issues raised in the memo assignment. It will be difficult to succeed in these briefings if your understanding is limited to what is the chatbot generated memo. These briefings will be one third of the grade for that memo. The last memo will not incorporate a briefing. For each memo you will sign the honor pledge that you abided by the class policy on writing memos:

To summarize, before asking a chatbot to write a policy memo, you should write a draft and revise it once without the use of a chatbot. Then submit the whole assignment to the chatbot, reviewing the memo it generates. In our experience, the resulting memo may not fully address the assignment. As a result, you should ask it to revise the memo with more attention to whatever seems missing. Then compare your memo to the chatbot memo. Ultimately you should produce a final memo that is the best of both, citing the chatbot for the contribution it made that was not in your draft memo.

### **Policy Memos (45%)**

3 graded memos during semester. Memos will be based solely on the readings assigned for that topic. Evidence from other sources is not permitted.

**1<sup>st</sup> memo (15%).** School accountability. Students will submit both their initial draft memo and a final memo that incorporates whatever chatbot insights they choose. Students will be graded on their initial (without any chatbot content) memo and the final memo that may incorporate chatbot content and language (10 percent) and on the oral briefing (5 percent).

**2<sup>nd</sup> memo (15%).** Charter schools. Students will submit both their initial draft memo and a final memo that incorporates whatever chatbot insights they choose. Students will be graded on their initial (without any chatbot content) memo and the final memo that may incorporate chatbot content and language (10 percent) and on the oral briefing (5 percent).

**3<sup>rd</sup> memo (15%).** Teacher quality. Students will submit both their initial draft memo and a final memo that incorporates whatever chatbot insights they choose. Students will be graded only on the final memo.