**APSA Abstract Submission**

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) across nearly every sector raises pressing questions about how to regulate these transformative technologies without stifling innovation. Missing from much of this debate, however, are the voices of younger adults, whose familiarity with emerging tools and proximity to future job markets make them key stakeholders in AI’s evolution.

To address this gap, we draw on an original dataset of 1,000 post-secondary students, employing a mixed-methods design that integrates structured survey items with open-ended questions to capture both quantitative trends and the nuanced rationales behind them. Our findings reveal that while most students adopt a cautiously optimistic stance toward AI’s potential, they also express serious concerns about equitable access, job security, and privacy—leading many to favor a rules-based regulatory approach—those which offer concrete, enforceable standards—led by trusted institutions.

This preference stands in contrast to recent findings from the Schwartz Reisman Institute for Technology and Society (2024), which suggest that the broader AI governance landscape is trending toward adaptable, principles-driven approaches to foster innovation. In theory, a principles-based framework may allow rapid adaptation to evolving technologies; in practice, however, our results indicate that many younger adults view such flexibility as inadequate for addressing equity and accountability concerns—especially when proprietary algorithms and corporate interests are at stake.

These findings underscore the necessity of directly engaging younger generations in formulating inclusive, transparent, and enforceable AI governance structures. If younger adults continue to perceive principles-based frameworks as too permissive or prone to corporate overreach, policymakers will need to reconcile these divergent views. This entails crafting regulations that safeguard innovation yet offer clear protections against misuse—an approach that, according to our data, resonates most strongly with the cohort that stands to inherit the brunt of AI’s societal transformations.