"I'd Never Actually Realized How Big An Impact It Had Until Now": Perspectives of University Students with Disabilities on Generative Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

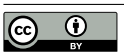
Prior research on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education has surfaced a number of barriers that prevent full inclusion. Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has begun to attract interest for its potential to address longstanding barriers to access. However, little is known about the impact of these tools on the living and learning experiences of post-secondary students with disabilities. As a mixed-abilities team, we investigated student experiences with GenAI tools by collecting survey and interview responses from 62 and 21 students with disabilities, respectively, across two universities to measure students' use of GenAI tools and their perspectives on the impact of these tools in ways related to disability, university support, and sense of belonging. Despite concerns over potential risks of GenAI and unclear university policies, students described GenAI tools as a useful resource for personalizing learning, promoting self-care, and assisting with important self-advocacy work. Guidance demonstrating safe, acceptable uses of GenAI tools, along with clear policies and resources that acknowledge diverse student needs, were desired. We discuss implications of these tools for accessibility and inclusion in higher education.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Accessibility**; **Empirical studies in HCI**; • **Applied computing** → *Education.*

Keywords

Students with Disabilities, Higher Education, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Student Perspectives



CHI '25, Yokohama, Japan

ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-1394-1/25/04
https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3714121

ACM Reference Format:
Alex Atcheson, Omar Khan, Brian Siemann, Anika Jain, and Karrie Karahalios. 2025. "I'd Never Actually Realized How Big An Impact It Had Until Now": Perspectives of University Students with Disabilities on Generative Artificial Intelligence. In *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '25), April 26–May 01, 2025, Yokohama, Japan.* ACM, New York, NY, USA, 22 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3714121

1 Introduction

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, have prompted debates among educators and administrators in higher education (HE) regarding their impact [2, 6, 11, 93]. While much of the discourse around students' use of GenAI tools has tended to focus on academic integrity concerns, our understanding of the sociotechnical implications on an increasingly diverse student population is still in its infancy [33, 41, 101, 116]. Among this diversifying student population are those who identify with one or more disabilities. With nearly one in every five undergraduate students in the U.S. reporting a disability, students with disabilities [1] represent a significant and growing proportion of the student population [42]. Within HE, students continue to encounter barriers that hinder access to, and full participation in, academic (e.g., courses) and non-academic (e.g., establishing a close social network) spaces and activities [94]. These barriers often force students to expend additional time and energy for engineering workarounds that meet their access needs [52, 100]. Consequently, students may struggle to develop a sense of belonging and perform worse academically [86, 92].

Given their emergent abilities, GenAI tools have received interest as a resource for meeting certain access needs. In combination with early insights into the applications and shortcomings of GenAI

[1]Throughout the paper, we chose to primarily use person-first language (PFL) due to its use by the disability support offices at both of the universities from which we recruited and its use by many of our participants. It is important to acknowledge that people may have different language preferences, preferring identity-first language (IFL) to PFL. For the aforementioned reasons, we chose to primarily use PFL.

tools for persons with disabilities in education contexts, including recognition of the potential for the perpetuation of harmful, more quantitative and qualitative work that engages with the experiences of students with disabilities around GenAI tools is urgently needed [46, 68]. Importantly, decisions on AI policy in HE that fail to consider the lived experiences of students with disabilities could have harmful and marginalizing consequences [22]. For example, Gadiraju et al. [44] show how large language model-based dialog systems can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about persons with disabilities. As educators and administrators in HE seek to develop comprehensive AI policies, resources, and use cases for GenAI technologies, understanding the impact of these tools on the lived experiences of students with disabilities is essential for informing responsible decisions that ultimately lead to improved access and that foster a more inclusive learning and living environment in HE.

Motivated by the rapid evolution of GenAI technologies and the need to include historically marginalized perspectives in the discourse around AI, we present work that attempts to shed light on the impact of GenAI tools to university students with disabilities. Following a participatory approach with a member of our research team who also works as an access specialist at our university's disability support office, we surveyed and interviewed students with disabilities from two large, public universities in the United States (U.S.) to learn about their experiences with GenAI tools. Using both quantitative and qualitative data collected from 62 survey and 21 interview responses from both undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities, we answer the following research questions:

- **RQ.1** How have students with disabilities used GenAI tools in their university experiences?
- **RQ.2** To what extent do students with disabilities perceive that GenAI tools have impacted their university experiences with respect to disability, university support, and sense of belonging?
- **RQ.3** To what extent do students with disabilities perceive that GenAI tools have impacted their use of accommodations?

Answers to these questions benefit educators and administrators, students, and DSO staff. Answering RQ.1 adds nuance to a developing understanding of GenAI's impact on the learning experiences of students and, notably, its applications to important *non-academic* contexts of university life, such as personal health and wellness, career development, and community-building. Answering RQ.2 and RQ.3 provide early evidence on the extent to which these impacts intersect with disability. Specifically, answering RQ.2 spotlights existing access barriers in HE and suggests how GenAI might contribute to improving inclusion efforts. Moreover, answering RQ.3 lends insight as to the influence of GenAI tools on students' engagement with DSO supports, an important campus resource involved in crafting access.

Insights generated from our survey and interviews suggest the diverse ways in which students with disabilities have leveraged GenAI tools–most commonly ChatGPT–to more fully participate in the academic and non-academic contexts of university life. From an academic standpoint, GenAI tools enabled students to tailor their interactions with course content to match their individual information processing needs and to simplify the process of communicating about access, saving time and effort. Some students leveraged GenAI tools to increase the effectiveness of their accommodations. For others, GenAI tools served as an effective alternative to formal accommodations, providing not only support but also suggesting additional resources beyond those offered by the DSO.

By helping students to manage their academic demands, GenAI tools created space for students to attend to important life activities outside of academics, like self-care. For students transitioning to post-secondary life, GenAI tools proved valuable for locating and connecting with on-campus communities, including cultural and identity-based groups, as well as for supporting lifestyle routines to ease the transition to independent living. Concurrent with students' optimism about using GenAI tools moving forward was a general awareness of the inaccuracies and biases associated GenAI tools. Evident was a lack of clear AI guidelines that acknowledged both the varied needs of a diverse student population and the inclusion-related applications of GenAI tools. We discuss implications of GenAI tools as an accessibility resource, for student self-advocacy, and considerations for GenAI policies and educational resources that embrace the abilities and needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

2 Related Work

To ground our work, we begin by reviewing relevant literature on accessibility barriers in HE, HE's response to GenAI technologies, and applications of GenAI tools by persons with disabilities. It is important to note that there are several models that exist for conceptualizing disability, two of the most common being the medical and social models. Under the medical model of disability, disability is conceptualized as a problem of the individual that is in need of "fixing". In contrast to the view of disability as a flaw of the individual, the social model conceptualizes disability as a function of physical and social barriers within the environment, which are a product of neglecting the diverse abilities of individuals and which prevent full participation [80, 97]. Because we are interested in understanding how students use GenAI tools to meet their individualized needs while navigating their university experiences, the social model serves as a useful conceptualization for this work.

2.1 Accessibility Barriers in Higher Education

A growing proportion of post-secondary students in the U.S. self-identify with one or more disabilities [7]. In the HE context, common barriers to full inclusion that have been mentioned by students include negative faculty attitudes [50, 76, 85, 103], stigma [112], college stressors [50], the quality and accessibility of disability support services [50, 78], inaccessible course design and digital materials [78, 102], finances [109], and balancing academic and social lives [59, 75, 78].

These barriers lead to unequal opportunities between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. For example, courses designed without diverse abilities in mind can lead to students with disabilities spending more time negotiating academic demands, resulting in less time for social and extracurricular activities compared to their peers without disabilities [92]. Such activities serve as valuable opportunities for forming relationships and improving students' sense of belonging, which has a positive and reciprocal relationship with students' ability to self-advocate,

form social relationships, and master the student role [79, 113]. Compared to those without disabilities, students with disabilities may have unique experiences in perceived support from faculty, development of effective study skills, and social cohesion [87].

Disability support offices (DSOs) play an important role in crafting access through collaborations with students and staff to provide reasonable accommodations. However, the process for registering with the DSO and receiving accommodations can be daunting, as students are expected to initiate the process and acquire medical documentation, work with an access specialist to determine reasonable accommodations, and communicate with their instructors to request and implement academic adjustments [32]. Each step possesses unique hurdles, from needing an awareness of DSO services to communicating with others for implementing the accommodation [7, 8, 12–14, 25, 30, 67, 72, 74, 107, 110]. This hidden, additional time and energy put forth by students for the sake of gaining and maintaining access, referred to as the *burden of survival* by Shinohara et al. [100], is a consequence of inaccessible environments.

In light of these barriers and of early applications of GenAI technologies to accessibility contexts, such as Microsoft's Seeing AI tool for generating descriptions of scenes captured via phone camera [2], there is interest in the applications of GenAI technology to improve access for students with disabilities [84]. However, while these GenAI-based systems may reduce certain barriers to inclusion, they may introduce, or even amplify, others, such as perpetuating harmful disability stereotypes that could affect stigmatization [44].

2.2 Generative AI in Higher Education

In the wake of waves of new and rapidly developing AI tools, such as ChatGPT, students and administrators in HE have been left with the difficult task of reasoning about the impact of these tools on students. Given the ability of GenAI tools to generate human-like content, such as language and code, concerns regarding academic honesty and student learning have dominated discourse [16, 29, 33, 36, 55, 115, 117].

In response, HE officials have begun to develop policies and resources that address the use of GenAI tools [1, 3–5, 26, 45]. In a survey by Ghimire and Edwards [45] that included 21 provosts and academic officers at HE institutions from across the United States, nearly 80% of officials reported that their institutions were currently developing an AI policy. Another survey by Barrett and Pack [15] showed a similar need for AI policy development–in a sample of 68 instructors, 63 of which were employed by HE, nearly 95% reported that their institutions currently lacked an AI policy. The authors found that nearly 95% of both the instructors and university students in their sample had not been offered training on AI by their institutions, while 90% of instructors had not educated their students on appropriate uses of AI.

As officials in HE seek to develop policies in response to GenAI tools, a comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions between students, their living and learning environments, and GenAI tools is necessary for informing responsible policy decisions. For example, students that were surveyed and interviewed by Budhiraja et al. [23] expressed a desire for more training on effective uses of GenAI tools, while findings from Smolansky et al. [101] emphasized that educators should exercise caution in how they adapt their courses in response to GenAI so as to not neglect diverse learning needs. While prior work has started to investigate the use of GenAI tools by students more generally, more work is needed to understand the impact of these tools across different student sub-populations, especially those that have historically been marginalized.

2.3 Generative AI and Accessibility

Along with the relative novelty of GenAI tools is a growing body of literature that has begun to explore their impacts within the disability community. In interviews with blind users of GenAI tools, Adnin and Das [10] found that, aligning with insights from sighted users, GenAI tools can be quite useful for co-creating content and streamlining information retrieval, yet verifying output quality remains a challenge [106]. Besides content creation and information retrieval, within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community, text-based AI tools have been found to be especially useful for supporting communication in written English, improving confidence and serving as a kind of cultural mediator; however, such tools lack alignment with DHH culture and communication norms [53]. The use of GenAI tools as a form of social support, both emotionally and for navigating social interactions, was echoed by Mullen et al. [77] in interviews with adults with disabilities, along with tasks including ideation, writing, and planning. For users of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, using GenAI to generate text suggestions can save time, effort, and frustration when communicating by enabling more efficient construction of responses using prompts [114]. Jang et al. [56] found that Autistic workers valued GenAI tools as a source of communication assistance and social advice, particularly when workplace resources for support were lacking. Furthermore, GenAI tools have seen increased utility within neurodivergent communities; Shardlow and Nawaz [98] was among the first efforts to leverage text simplification to simplify complex documents and laid the groundwork for future GenAI systems. In a study with 12 students with an intellectual disability Elkot et al. [40] demonstrated how guided conversations with a GenAI system can tailor English language learning for students with diverse learning needs.

In the area of accessible creativity, research is beginning to show the potential of GenAI tools for supporting the artistic pursuits of creators with disabilities. Introducing the concept of Artistic Fusion, S. Guedes et al. [91] showed how text-to-image tools can help creators with intellectual disabilities by inspiring new forms of artistic expression via artist interactions with fusions of AI-generated and human-created artworks. Work by Bennett et al. [18] engaged with creatives with disabilities to learn about how GenAI had impacted their creative processes. Notably, they found that GenAI could serve not only as a tool for shaping creative work, but also as a foundational bridge for accessing creative work, such as through image-to-text models that can describe the visual state of a piece [18].

While previous work has begun to shape our understanding of the implications of GenAI tools for the disability community, research that centers the experiences of those disabilities in the HE context is relatively nascent. Most similar to our work is that

[2]https://www.seeingai.com

by Glazko et al. [46], who, in an autoethnographic study of seven accessibility researchers comprising graduate students and faculty, documented their team's use of GenAI tools for tasks related to meeting an access need in work, research, or daily life. Tasks for which GenAI tools were used included summarization and information extraction, interpersonal communication, visual imagery creation, document accessibility, graphical user interface design and development, and making web visualizations accessible. In some cases, GenAI tools were a useful asset to improving accessibility in an academic context. For example, GPT-4, a GenAI model, helped to correctly identify the necessary steps to making accessible tables for a research paper. However, in many cases, GenAI tools provided support that was either shallow, biased, or at least partially incorrect, raising questions about the full extent of their utility to students with disabilities.

Inspired by both Glazko et al. [46]'s findings and conversations with students, faculty, and access specialists at our own university, we seek to provide further clarity on the implications of GenAI tools for students with disabilities. To do so, we studied the perspectives of university students with disabilities regarding the impact of GenAI tools on their university experiences. Through a comprehensive analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected from survey and interview responses, we seek to enrich and complicate current discourse on the opportunities and limitations of GenAI tools as an accessibility resource in HE. By understanding *how* and *why* students with disabilities use GenAI tools, we gain a powerful new lens through which to understand accessibility barriers in HE [57].

3 Methods

In this section, we begin with an acknowledgment of our positionality as a mixed-abilities research team (Section 3.1). Next, we describe the process of designing an online survey (Section 3.3) and interview protocol (Section 3.4) for collecting data on participants' use of GenAI tools and their perspectives on the impact of these tools, followed by a description of our data analysis approach (Section 3.5). Our university's Institutional Review Board both reviewed and approved this study.

3.1 Positionality

Our research team includes U.S.-based students, faculty, and staff who each have experience serving in student-facing roles, including as primary instructor, teaching assistant, student, and access specialist. Our team has both professional and research interests in disability studies, accessibility, inclusive teaching practices, and AI, with varying levels of prior research experience (undergraduate, PhD, senior faculty, and no prior experience). In addition to representing multiple gender and racial identities, our team is also varied in how members self-identify with disability, including physical disability, multiple chronic disabilities, neurodivergent, and not self-identifying with a disability. Our team possesses unique lived experiences with accessibility, including multiple years performing accessibility research and graduate teaching, graduate training in Special Education and accessibility, and self-directed research to aid personal medical journeys. Team members also had varying levels of expertise with GenAI technologies, from having used GenAI tools to having taken technical courses covering GenAI models. Collectively, these unique experiences and perspectives led us to design our survey and interview so as to also consider the potential non-academic impacts of GenAI tools on university students with disabilities. Moreover, the diversity of our lived experiences prompted us both to reflect on our own assumptions and to cross-validate our interpretations in discussions of qualitative data.

3.2 Research Agenda

During the development of the current work's research agenda, over the course of two months, our research team was engaged in a series of discussions that centered around technology's role in crafting access in HE. During these discussions, one of our team members, who serves as a university access specialist, shared several interesting observations about their students' use of GenAI tools. For example, to estimate assignment grades, some students had asked ChatGPT for a grade by prompting the chatbot with both their completed assignment and the assignment's rubric. In cases there was no course-provided rubric, students had leveraged ChatGPT to generate unofficial rubrics based on the assignment description.

These observations prompted broader questions about how students with disabilities might be using GenAI tools in the academic and non-academic contexts of their post-secondary experiences. Further motivating these questions were experiences had by the research team in both attending and organizing disability events on campus and through conversations with DSO access, media, and information technology specialists, which illuminated the barriers to participation that students continue to encounter in HE settings.

To formalize both our exploratory discussions and preliminary questions into a research agenda, the first author proposed an initial set of research questions that were further developed by the first author in collaboration with our team member who serves as an access specialist during three, 1-hour discussions on Zoom. These agenda-setting discussions took place between the Summer and early Fall of 2023, and consisted of defining the research questions and outlining the study design. Inspired by the use of surveys in prior work to explore the perspectives of students more generally on AI, we designed a survey to collect data on both the use of GenAI tools by students with disabilities and their attitudes toward the disability-related impact of GenAI tools within the context of their university experiences; a follow-up interview allowed us to more deeply engage with student perspectives [15, 27, 51, 81, 101].

3.3 Survey Design

The first author, in close collaboration with the research team, drafted an initial set of survey questions around students' use of, acceptance of, and attitudes toward GenAI tools across several major contexts of student life: coursework, teaching, research, and non-academics (e.g., social life). We also asked about the disability-related impact of GenAI tools on students' university experiences (e.g., sense of belonging) and, for those who were registered with their university's DSO, on their engagement with academic accommodations. During a series of four, 30-minute development meetings spanning a period of six months, the research team further improved the survey's overall flow and clarity. The experiences

of our team's access specialist heavily informed terminology (e.g., students would be more familiar with the phrasing "AI tools" than "GenAI tools") and the presentation of questions on DSO accommodations, services, and attitudes.

We created and hosted our online survey on the Qualtrics platform [88]. To improve the accessibility of our survey, we used only WCAG 2.0 AA-compliant question types and theme, and the survey's flow was configured both to enable backward navigation to revisit questions and to allow exiting and returning to the survey at a later time to support breaks. We piloted our survey with several groups, including our team's access specialist, undergraduate and graduate students with mixed abilities, and researchers from the university's Special Education Department.

- **Generative AI Tools**: Participants were first provided with both a definition of "Generative AI tool" and an illustrative example for grounding their interpretations of the kinds of AI tools to which we were referring. We asked participants about the GenAI tools that they had used (and if none, why that might be), the accessibility of those tools (definitions of "accessible" and "access need" were provided), and how they had used them. We also asked for their attitudes on the impact of GenAI tools in the contexts of disability, sense of belonging, and university support. To probe factors related to participants' acceptance of GenAI tools, we were inspired by the scale developed by Strzelecki [105] for predicting the adoption and use of ChatGPT by post-secondary students; so that the scale more appropriately fit our research context and survey design, we modified the wording of scale items to reflect AI tools more generally and, through discussion, selected a subset of items for the sake of length.
- **DSO Registration and Accommodations**: If registered with their university's DSO, participants were asked about the support services and accommodations that they had used. For each accommodation used, we asked about their use of it, its effectiveness in meeting their access needs, and how GenAI tools had influenced their both use of and interest in it. We included a subset of questions from the Attitudes Toward Requesting Accommodations scale developed by Barnard-Brak et al. [14] [3].
- **Demographics and Feedback**: We collected basic demographic information, including age, gender, academic level (undergraduate or graduate), field of study, years at current institution, and disabilities self-identified with. Participants had the option to either remain fully anonymous or to be redirected to a separate survey where they could provide their university-issued email to be sent a $5 Amazon e-gift card (The median survey completion time was approximately 14 minutes).

Participants accessed the survey through an anonymous link. Those interested in receiving compensation or in participating in a follow-up interview after completing the main survey were redirected to a separate survey (also hosted on Qualtrics) for providing their university-issued email address. Responses to the main survey and the email collection survey were stored separately and were connected to one another through a unique identifier to allow for excluding responses with data quality concerns from interview consideration. Email address data was deleted at the end of the study after all participants had been compensated. Additional survey details can be found in Appendix A.1. Due to length, the full survey instrument is included in the supplementary materials.

3.3.1 Survey Recruitment. We recruited university students who were currently enrolled (at the time of this study) [4] from two large, public, research universities in the Midwestern U.S.. Although existing within the same university system, differences in student demographics and campus climates (e.g., population of working students) motivated us to recruit from both universities. Participants were required to be 18 years of age or older and to be physically located within the U.S.. Given that nearly two-thirds of post-secondary students who report a disability are not registered with their institution's DSO, we chose to also include students who were not registered with the DSO but who self-identified with one or more disabilities.

We recruited students by placing physical fliers [5], advertising in campus and DSO newsletters, posting in our university's Slack community for campus members who self-identify as neurodivergent, and emailing university departments with requests to share study information with their students [19]. Digital recruitment materials were checked for accessibility by the first author, who holds a professional certificate in digital accessibility, using Adobe Acrobat Pro. The survey was opened on February 4 at the authors' university and, once approval to recruit had been granted by their IRB, on March 11 at the partnering university. The survey was closed at both sites on May 26.

3.4 Interview

We followed the same collaborative process as that described in Section 3.3 for developing our interview protocol. We chose to adopt a semi-structured approach to accommodate deeper exploration of unexpected responses during interviews. Prior to recruitment, we piloted our protocol with a graduate student who self-identified as disabled and used their feedback to improve question clarity and to identify probing opportunities.

Interested survey respondents were emailed at most three times with an interview request that included a copy of the informed consent document and explained why they had been contacted. Participants from the authors' university could choose to participate either remotely or in person, while those not from the authors' university participated remotely due to geographic distance. For remote interviews, which used Zoom, participants were not required to enable their video. The offer of a remote option was also important in ensuring multiple means of participation to those for whom in-person participation was inaccessible, as suggested by a pilot participant who had prior research experience interviewing individuals with disabilities remotely. This suggestion aligns with prior work demonstrating the importance of flexible interview methods as a form of accessible research design [24, 61]. All interviews

[3]Due to low internal reliability, responses to these questions were not considered in our final analysis.

[4]While we received multiple participation requests from former students, we chose to focus on students who were enrolled at the time of the study to capture perspectives reflective of trends in GenAI and the university climate.

[5]Due to geographic distance, physical fliers were only placed at the authors' university.

were one-on-one, and all in-person interviews were held in private spaces at a university library or laboratory. All in-person locations were ADA accessible and digital copies of interview materials were checked for accessibility using Adobe Acrobat Pro. Interview participants were compensated $15 per 30-minutes with an Amazon e-gift card.

At the start of each interview, the first author explained the purpose of the study and provided participants with a physical copy of the informed consent document [6], taking time to review the document and answer any questions. To ground participants' in the context of using GenAI tools, the first author provided participants with a physical document showing four different example uses of GenAI tools, including image generation, summarization, and question-answering [7]. All interviews were audio-recorded, with participants providing verbal consent prior to recording. Following several rapport-building questions, participants were asked about (a) their experiences with GenAI tools in courses and their perspectives on course AI policies, (b) their use of GenAI tools outside of academics, (c) the implications of GenAI tools for disability support, and (d) their expectations for using GenAI tools moving forward. The final interview protocol is included in the Supplementary Materials.

3.5 Data Analysis

We computed descriptive statistics for closed-response survey questions to show the centrality and spread of participants' attitudes. For open response questions, the first author used QualCoder-3.5, an open source qualitative analysis software, to manually open response code, grouping similar codes to generate high-level themes [35].

Before deletion, all interview recordings were locally transcribed on the first author's computer using an open source, locally installed version of OpenAI's Whisper speech recognition model; at no point were data shared externally or used in model training of any kind [82]. The first author then manually checked all transcripts for correctness by re-listening to each recording, removing any personally identifiable information.

The interview transcripts were collaboratively analyzed by two of the authors, one of whom self-identifies with a vision disability and another who does not self-identify with a disability. Given each author's unique identities and lived experiences with disability, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was chosen for its embrace of the influence of researcher subjectivity on the process of generating insight rather than a single objective interpretation [8] [21]. The coders began by independently reading over each transcript before coming together to discuss interesting turns of dialogue and high-level patterns in participants' experiences and attitudes. Guided by an interest in participants' experiences with GenAI tools as university students, each coder independently and inductively coded the same three, randomly selected transcripts. During the course of two weeks and three meetings, the coders synchronously went through and discussed their codes for each turn of interviewee dialogue, explaining the codes they had generated and their rationales for doing so. In the process, they combined semantically similar codes and discussed the introduction of new, distinctive codes. During these discussions, the coders collaboratively created an entry for each code in a generative codebook, maintained using Google Docs and shared between both coders, to store code names, definitions, and examples illustrating the code's use [89]. Importantly, this codebook combined the interpretations of both coders and served as a basis upon which the coders acknowledged and reflected on their interpretations of the data, anchoring their discussions and subsequent coding in a shared context.

After developing an initial codebook, the transcripts, including those that had been used to develop the initial codebook, were then randomly assigned to each coder and independently coded using an abductive approach to allow the development of additional codes reflective of new, unexpected insights [37]. In an iterative process, the coders were attuned to codebook developments and revisited transcripts as new codes were added. Once both coders were independently satisfied with their own coding process, they convened to discuss the final codebook, going through each code and examining examples of coded excerpts from across transcripts. In beginning to form higher level themes, both coders then met to discuss initial observations of the codes and to explore potential relationships between codes based on topical similarity (e.g., courses) and the expression of shared ideas (e.g., resource availability) to form tentative groups in a shared spreadsheet. Through an iterative process of discussing and grouping codes, the coders reached consensus on a final set of themes. During this process, both coders were constantly re-referencing both the transcripts and the coded dialogue segments to confirm that the ideas interpreted from the coded dialogue aligned with those represented by the coders' interpretations of the higher level themes.

4 Survey Findings

We begin by describing the GenAI tools with which participants had experience and the tasks for which they had used them (Section 4.2). In Sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5, we present quantitative findings on participants' attitudes toward the impact of GenAI tools, complemented by qualitative explanations. For participants who were registered with their university's DSO, we present attitudinal findings and qualitative explanations regarding the perceived effect of GenAI tools on participants' engagement with DSO-provided accommodations (Section 4.6).

4.1 Participants

57 (58.2%) and 11 (73%) participants from the research team's university and the partnering university, respectively, attempted and completed the survey. The median survey completion time was 14 minutes (P_{25}=10; P_{75}=20). After manually inspecting each survey response, we excluded 6 responses for suspected straightlining due to unusually short completion times, leaving 62 responses included in our analysis. The majority (n=52) of those responses came from students who attended the research team's university. Table 4 in Appendix A.2 summarizes the demographics of our survey sample.

[6] Remote interview participants were provided with digital copies of interview materials.
[7] Included in Supplementary Materials.
[8] For this reason, the authors chose not to prioritize inter-rater agreement metrics.

4.2 Use of Generative AI Tools

The median number of GenAI tools survey participants had used was 2 (P_{25}=2; P_{75}=2), with 59 having used at least one tool. ChatGPT (n=55), DALL-E (n=17), and Google Bard (n=12), were the most commonly used GenAI tools. Most (n=49) participants who had used at least one GenAI tool had only used the free versions, with half (n=31) using GenAI tools at least once a week or more (see Appendix A.2). Several (n=3) participants had never knowingly used any GenAI tools. When asked why that might be, they expressed concerns over privacy and confidentiality (n=3), a general caution towards jumping into new technology (n=2), accuracy of output (n=1), not having a need or interest (n=1), insufficient training or support on how to use GenAI tools (n=1), and skepticism of AI technology (n=1).

While most (n=39) participants found the GenAI tools they had used to be very accessible, some (n=17) had encountered accessibility barriers during use (see Appendix A.2). Limited or challenging interactivity (e.g., needing to craft the "right" input for achieving a desired output; confusing user interfaces; limited support for multiple input and output modes, such as speech, visual, auditory), cumbersome account management (e.g., navigating the account creation process; financial cost), and output quality (e.g., ambiguous; inaccurate; difficult to parse) were noted areas of limited accessibility.

Of those who had used GenAI tools, 53 had done so for course tasks; writing assistance in the form of editing (n=35), feedback (n=30), and ideation (n=30) were the three most popular course tasks for which GenAI tools had been used. It was also common for participants to have used GenAI tools in academic research. Of the 45 participants who had research experience, the two most common research-related uses were for assistance with writing and editing papers (n=18) and code (n=16). Few (n=16) survey respondents had served on a course staff; of those who had, 6 had used a GenAI tool to assist with course duties, which included designing in-class activities (n=2), grading coursework (n=2), providing feedback (n=2), and supporting course communication (n=2). Notably, a majority (n=47) of participants had used GenAI tools in their personal and social lives, including for personal entertainment (n=26), networking and professional development (n=19), and schedule management (n=17). To get a sense for the most popular uses, Table 1 summarizes the top five most frequently reported tasks in each context for which participants had used GenAI tools.

In general, participants felt that they had both the knowledge (n=51) and resources (n=50) necessary to use GenAI tools, encountering little difficulty in using them (n=47). In line with our task-related findings, most participants (n=45) agreed that GenAI tools were useful in their academic studies. Participants reported that friends and peers (n=37), social media (n=32), and course instructors (n=26) were several of the most prominent sources of influence affecting their use of GenAI tools, while family (n=4) was not. While a majority (n=41) of participants planned to continue using GenAI tools, it was a relatively even split between those who said that using GenAI tools had become a habit (n=26) and those who said it had not (n=29). Figure 1 provides a summary of participant attitudes toward the acceptance of GenAI tools.

University-related Context	n_s
Courses	**53**
Editing my writing	35
Getting feedback on my work	30
Brainstorming or outlining ideas	30
Collaboration or communication	27
Asking questions about course content	24
Personal and Social Life	**47**
Entertainment	26
Networking and professional development	19
Time management and scheduling	17
Health and wellness	13
Personal projects	12
Academic Research	**42**
Writing papers or reports	18
Writing or debugging code	16
Brainstorming research project ideas	14
Conducting a literature review	13
Creating content for presentations or posters	10
Teaching	**15**
I have not used AI tools in teaching duties	2
Designing learning activities	2
Grading assignments or assessments	2
Providing student feedback and support	2
Communicating with students	2

Table 1: Top five most frequently reported tasks for which survey participants (N_s = 62) had used GenAI tools within the contexts of courses, teaching, research, and personal and social life activities.

4.3 Disability-related Impact

To learn about participants' attitudes toward the disability-related impact of GenAI tools, we asked them to rate the extent to which GenAI tools had impacted their university experience in ways related to their disability using a 4-point scale (1=*Not impactful*; 4=*Very impactful*). As shown in Figure 2, participants' perceptions were distributed fairly uniformly across each impact level, with most (n=44) participants indicating that GenAI tools had at least had a slight disability-related impact. For both this question and those discussed in the subsequent sections, we followed up with an optional open-response question to gain deeper insights into the perspectives of participants with non-neutral attitudes.

> *"AI has made it so I have an assistant of sorts... It provides me extra support while I navigate a busy, and often overwhelming, lifestyle"* – P10 (Very impactful)

Many participants were motivated to use GenAI tools by a desire for support in juggling the overwhelming demands and expectations of the student role, with several expressing that disability compounded the challenge. For P56, using GenAI tools to efficiently complete coursework made available valuable opportunities for important self-care activities, affording "more time to take care of myself." P3 and P42 seconded this sentiment, sharing that stress and anxiety management were indirect benefits of using GenAI tools to

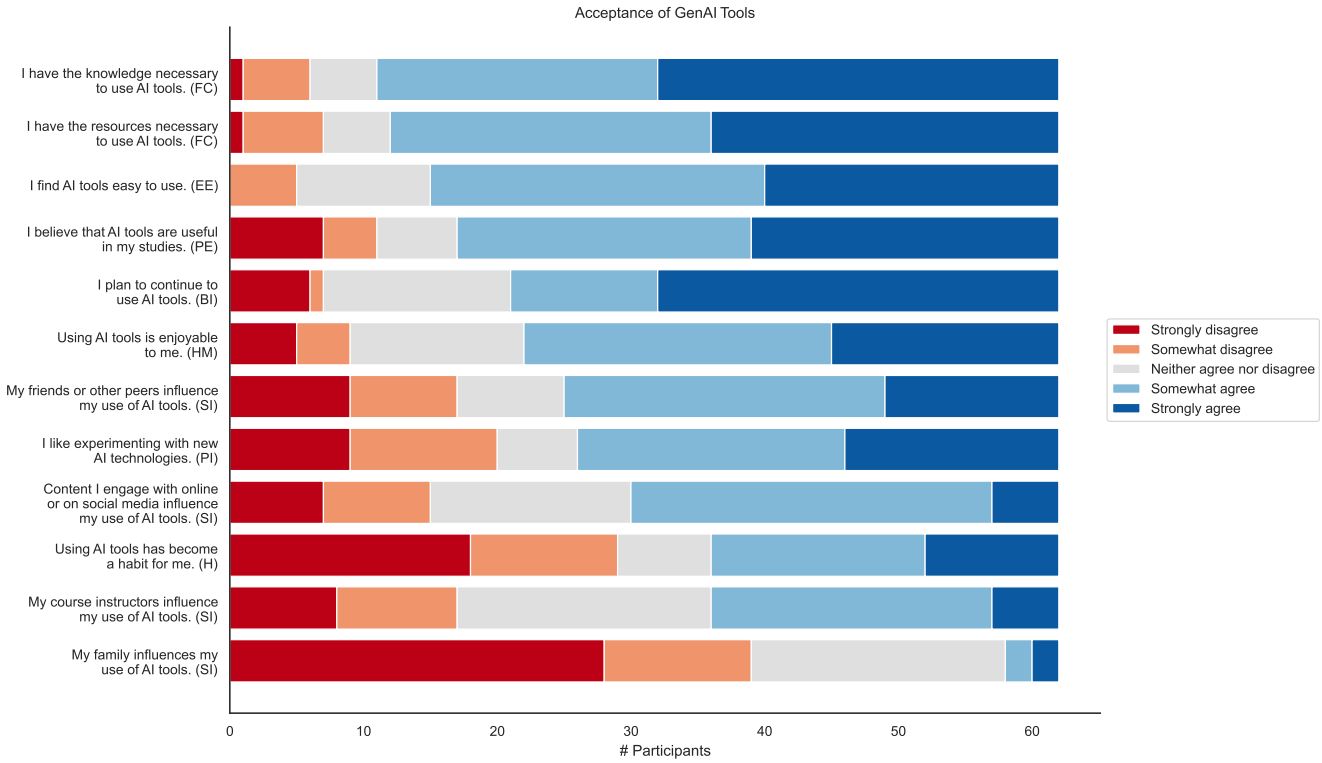


Figure 1: Survey participants' attitudes toward potential factors related to their acceptance of GenAI tools (performance expectancy=PE, effort expectancy=EE, social influence=SI, facilitating conditions=FC, hedonic motivation=HM, habit=H, behavioral intention=BI, and personal innovativeness=PI. Attitudes were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly disagree*, 5=*Strongly agree*).

manage their schedules and for help with completing smaller, more routine tasks, "like writing emails", making it less likely to "shut down" in the process. This was particularly helpful for those who were beginning to navigate living independently for the first time. P4, a first-year undergraduate student with dietary restrictions, had found that GenAI tools could be used to discover new gluten-free recipe ideas for meals that they could make on their own.

> *I have used ChatGPT to help me get accommodations through the university, and also to help me communicate more directly and assertively with professors about my accommodations and needs with respect to my disability.* – P31 (Slightly impactful)

The utility of GenAI tools as a writing assistant for drafting, editing, and customizing access- and accommodations-related messages to instructors was a recurring use case. For example, P54, who experienced health-related flare-ups, expressed that using a tool like ChatGPT to "draft an email... in a given tone" simplified the communication process when they were feeling unwell and needed to notify their instructors. In this way, using GenAI tools to assist with composing emails helped participants to feel more confident in communicating with instructors.

Several participants explained the impact of GenAI tools on their ability to access lectures. On occasions when P51, a student who is hard of hearing and receives captioning services, missed an instructor comment during lecture, they used ChatGPT to "fill in what [the instructor] might have said" when reviewing the captions. Using GenAI tools to clarify instructor remarks also benefited participants who returned to class following a disability-related absence and wanted clarity on a term or concept mentioned by the instructor while absent. While participants tended to view GenAI tools as an asset to supporting communication, for several, such tools were sometimes believed to be a safer alternative to anxiety-inducing interactions with instructors and peers when assistance with course content was desired.

> *I have a written expression disorder and struggle to communicate adequately in writing. AI gives me a draft to work with and reduces the immense cognitive load of writing.* – P43 (Very impactful)

Participants who self-identified with ADHD and specific learning disabilities often shared that using GenAI tools to summarize content, simplify language, and serve as a writing assistant introduced new, more personalized ways for processing written information and for scaffolding their own thoughts into writing, saving them time. As P26 explained, "with ADHD this is really helpful when I have read something 15-20 times and I seem to tune out or not be able to process, having something to validate or check what I

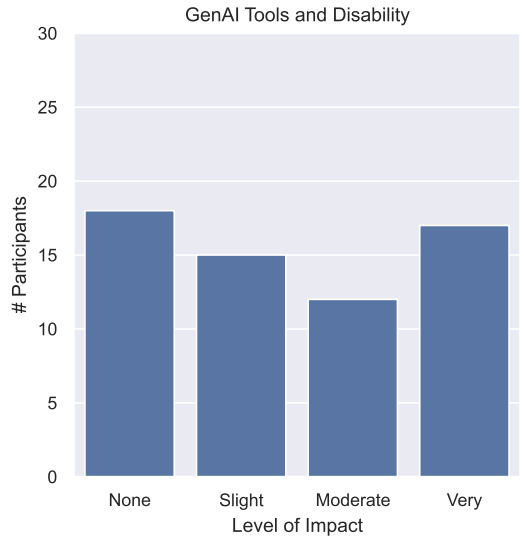


Figure 2: Distribution of participant perceptions of the extent to which GenAI tools had impacted their university experiences with respect to their disability.

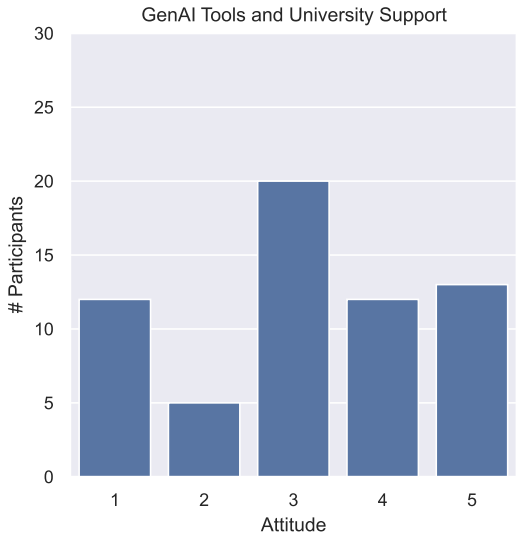


Figure 3: Distribution of participant attitudes toward the following statement: *As a student with a disability, I feel that AI tools support me in important ways that the university does not.* Attitudes were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly disagree*; 3=*Neither agree nor disagree*; 5=*Strongly agree*).

see or understand has helped me not hyper-fixate or spend wasted time." However, as P1 shared, the decision to leverage GenAI assistance was not always straightforward, lamenting that "AI adds a certain amount of paranoia to turning any assignment in, as there can be suspicions of dishonesty. This exacerbates anxiety-related disorders."

4.4 University Support

To evaluate the extent to which GenAI tools had filled in any gaps that may have existed in the support (not necessarily disability-related) provided by university resources, we asked participants to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: *As a student with a disability, I feel that AI tools support me in important ways that the university* ***does not.*** 25 participants were at least somewhat in agreement, while 17 at least somewhat disagreed (see Figure 3).

Unsurprisingly, multiple participants referenced the constant availability of GenAI tools as a distinctive advantage over university resources, acknowledging the infeasibility of 24/7 human support. This contrast in availability extended to the DSO; as P31 stated, "sometimes I need advice/counsel from AI that my access specialist is too busy for." Participants indicated that the availability of made GenAI tools well-suited for supporting smaller, day-to-day tasks for which support was desired but for which involving university resources, such as the DSO, was perceived as being either impractical or unnecessary.

Participants, particularly those who self-identified as neurodivergent, appreciated that GenAI tools offered them more personalized learning opportunities. Notably, they perceived that the level of personalized learning support that they could receive from a GenAI tool was beyond what their instructors either could or were willing to provide. Closely related, stigma was an important consideration factoring into decisions on whether to use a GenAI tool for certain tasks. Defined by Goffman [47] as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting", stigma is a powerful social force that affects the disclosure and help-seeking behaviors of marginalized student groups, including those with disabilities and older learners [14, 30, 70]. For example, P26, a student with ADHD and a health-related disability, remarked that being able to use a GenAI tool for writing assistance had reduced their reliance on a human proofreader and, as an adult learner, had "reduced embarrassment about where I have issue and need support."

> *I have been denied accommodations that allow me to respond orally to assignments instead of writing them. ... Speech-to-text, which is what [the disability services office] proposed, does not work for my disability... AI helps me still submit a written work as required for my assignments without cognitively overburdening myself.*
> – P43 (Strongly agree)

In several cases, participants used GenAI tools to replace or supplement university supports. This included use as a creativity support tool for brainstorming accommodation ideas, serving as an informal workaround when formal accommodations were either denied or failed to adequately meet the intended access need. However, GenAI tools were often not an adequate or even desired replacement for established university resources. In fact, participants tended to emphasize their preference to first consider the support options available from the university before considering GenAI tools. Sharing this attitude, P47, a first-year student undergraduate student who self-identifies with a psychological or

psychiatric disability, expressed that "while the university lacks adequate support in multiple areas, these needs are not satisfied by the use of AI tools."

4.5 Sense of Belonging

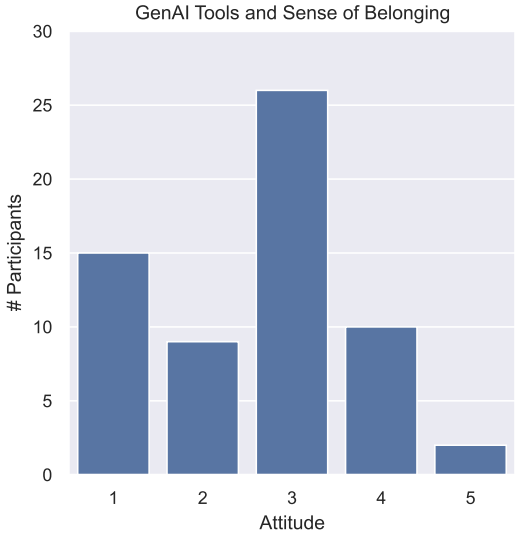


Figure 4: Distribution of participant attitudes toward the following statement: *As a student with a disability, I feel that AI tools have impacted my sense of belonging at the university.* Attitudes were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*Strongly disagree*; 3=*Neither agree nor disagree*; 5=*Strongly agree*).

As defined by Strayhorn [104], "sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers." To measure participants' attitudes toward the impact of GenAI tools on their sense of belonging, we asked them to rate their level of agreement with the following statement: *As a student with a disability, I feel that AI tools have impacted my sense of belonging at the university.* As shown in Figure 4, participants tended to hold a neutral attitude, with 24 at least somewhat disagreeing and 12 at least somewhat agreeing.

In general, participants felt the impact of GenAI tools on their sense of belonging at their university to be fairly minimal. Some felt that GenAI tools were irrelevant to their feeling of a sense of belonging, while others commented that they did not have enough experience with GenAI tools for their sense of belonging to have been impacted. As P20 put it, "all students of all types use AI on assignments, but this is not something that I, a disabled student,... consider 'common ground' between us."

> *I don't go to the writing center because I feel I don't have to. This minimizes my face-to-face interactions I would have had without the AI. I do miss out on interacting with the university community that way.* – P38 (Somewhat disagree)

Notably, participants' comments suggested a tension in how they felt GenAI tools affected their connections with the university. For some, GenAI tools stoked the feeling of belonging through noticeable improvements in being able to meet academic demands. P33, a first-year graduate student with ADHD and a psychological or psychiatric disability, said that they felt more confident in their own academic abilities with GenAI tools as a resource. Likewise, P48, a third-year undergraduate student with ADHD and a psychological or psychiatric disability, shared that the additonal support from GenAI tools increased their sense of belonging through feeling "more up to speed with classmates." Using GenAI tools as a tutor for course materials made P6 "feel more that I deserve to be here because I am more successful with my work." Several participants suggested how a reliance on GenAI tools could be isolating. Due to the accessibility of GenAI tools, P10 noticed a decline in their visits to campus's writing center, while P1 shared about experienced heightened anxiety over a concern that their coursework would be suspected of academic integrity violations. Reduced on-campus interactions and isolating feelings in courses may complicate the process integrating into academic life [111].

4.6 Use of Academic Accommodations

Prior work has highlighted a positive relationship between students' use of academic accommodations and performance and graduation outcomes [19]. Most (N_A=39) of our participants had used a formal university accommodation at some point. Of this group, the most commonly used accommodations were extended time on tests (n=26), disability-related extensions (n=21), disability-related absences (n=13), and priority registration (n=13). Participants had used a median of 3 (P_{25}=3; P_{75}=3) different accommodations. For each accommodation reported, we asked participants how GenAI tools had impacted both their use of the accommodation and their interest in using it in the future. Participants expressing non-neutral attitudes were asked to explain their attitudes in an optional open-response question. Table 2 summarizes the accommodations used by participants and their attitudes toward the impact of GenAI tools on accommodation use and future interest.

Of participants who had used an accommodation, one-third (n=13) reported that GenAI tools had affected their use of at least one of their accommodations, while 5 participants indicated that GenAI tools had affected their interest to use at least one of their accommodations in the future.

- **Alternative media production**: Alternative media production (AMP) reformats inaccessible course materials, such as untagged PDFs, into accessible formats. By using available GenAI tools to reformat inaccessible materials on their own, P50, a student who is Blind/Low-vision, explained that they were "not asking for alternate versions of PDFs" as often, reducing their dependence on AMP services. Due to the sometimes slow turnaround time and the ability of GenAI tools to serve a similar function, P50 was less interested in using AMP services in the future. However, P50 expressed concern over the quality of content created with GenAI tools.

Accommodation	n_s	↑ use	↓ use	↑ int	↓ int
Extended time for test	26	2	2	1	1
Disability-related extensions	21	1	3	1	0
Distraction-reduced testing environment	14	0	2	0	0
Priority registration	13	0	0	0	0
Disability-related absences	13	1	1	1	0
Note-taking/lecture recording software	7	2	0	2	0
Technology for tests	4	0	0	0	0
Audio description	3	0	0	0	0
Assistive technology software	3	0	0	0	0
Video captioning	3	0	0	0	0
Accessible furniture	2	0	0	0	0
Live captioning	2	0	0	0	0
Peer note-taker	1	0	0	0	0
ASL interpretation	1	0	0	0	0
Alternative media production	1	0	1	0	1

Table 2: Effect of GenAI tools on current use of accommodations and interest in using accommodations in the future as perceived by survey participants. "↑ use" indicates those who perceived that GenAI tools had at least somewhat increased their use of an accommodation, while "↓ use" indicates those who perceived that their use of an accommodation decreased. Similarly, "↑ int" and "↓ int" indicate the same relationship for perceived impact on the interest to use an accommodation in the future.

- **Note-taking or lecture recording software**: This accommodation provides students with software tools designed to support note-taking activities. Several participants had used GenAI tools to augment the utility of their note-taking software. For example, P21 could use the notes they had taken with their note-taking software as input to a GenAI tool for generating helpful study guides, motivating a desire to "take good notes so I have a better study guide." In P2's case, GenAI tools came in handy for organizing their notes. Similar to P21, P2 was more interested in using note-taking software in the future, likely due to the enhanced utility of their organized notes as a study resource.
- **Disability-related extensions**: This accommodation provides students with extensions on course assignments. With the assistance of GenAI tools, P53 was able to complete their work more quickly and felt as though they did not "need extensions as often"; however, this did not diminish their interest in using disability-related extensions in the future. For P31, having ChatGPT "develop the email for extensions" simplified the communication process and made them feel "more comfortable" to use disability-related extensions, which increased their interest to do so in the future.
- **Disability-related absences**: This accommodations excuses students who may be unable to attend class for disability-related reasons. As with disability-related extensions, using GenAI tools as a writing assistant helped students to feel more comfortable informing instructors about their needs. P31 explained that they "get anxious... about reaching out to professors about disability-related absences, so I asked ChatGPT to help me with an email structure to alleviate my anxiety," sharing that they "still use that email template now." Consequently, P31 explained that they were more comfortable with, and interested in, using disability-related absences moving forward. On the other hand, because they were able to complete their work more quickly with support from GenAI tools, P53 had more time for important self-care activities, making them feel "less sleep deprived and more likely to attend class."
- **Distraction-reduced testing environment**: This accommodation provides students with access to a distraction-reduced space for completing course assessments. Two participants reported that GenAI tools had decreased their use of a distraction-reduced testing environment. Despite this, one of the two participants shared that GenAI tools were not related to their use of the accommodation, suggesting that the participant may have misunderstood the question.
- **Extended time for tests**: This accommodation provides students with extended time on course assessments. P46, who reported that GenAI tools had increased their use of extended time, explained that they now felt "more prepared" for tests with the help of GenAI tools. In P9's case, although their use of extended time had decreased, they clarified that this was not because they had used "AI during exams." While P62's interest in using extended time in the future had somewhat increased, they clarified that this was more so about GenAI tools helping them to "manage studying techniques and build confidence" for assessments.

4.7 Summary of Survey Findings

Our survey findings help illustrate that students with disabilities have diverse perceptions regarding current support systems throughout HE and that GenAI tools play a role in students‘ participation in the university experience, helping us to gain early answers RQ.1 and RQ.2. Students reported using a wide array of GenAI tools, generally noting at least slight positive disability-related impacts. Often, this came in the form of personalizing information consumption and production, supporting communication, and supplementing or complementing formal accommodations. They particularly valued the constant availability of these tools compared to traditional HE resources. While GenAI tools minimally impacted students‘ overall sense of belonging, some accounts suggested that they leveled the playing field with their non-disabled peers. In answering RQ.3, we find that GenAI tools affected students' use of and interest in using certain accommodations, including note-taking software,

disability-related extensions/absences, distraction-reduced testing environments, and extended time for tests. During the interview phase of our study, survey participants echoed these sentiments and provided further nuance to their responses for answering RQ.1 and RQ.2.

5 Interview Findings

While the qualitative findings from our survey provide a glimpse into the perspectives motivating participants' self-reported attitudes toward the impact of GenAI tools, we wanted to engage with participant perspectives in a more open format. To do so, we scheduled follow-up interviews with 21 interested survey respondents to learn more about their experiences with GenAI tools in academic and non-academic contexts and their perceptions of GenAI as an accessibility resource. Here, we present the six major themes that we generated through RTA.

5.1 Participants

Of the 44 and 7 survey participants from the research team's and partnering university who had completed the survey at the time when interview requests were distributed, 36 and 4, respectively, had expressed interest. Of those who had expressed interest, 17 and 4, respectively, accepted a request for an interview. In total, the first author conducted 21 interviews between March and April 2024, 12 of which took place over Zoom. The average length of each interview was about 39 minutes (S=10.6 minutes). Interviewee demographics are summarized in Table 3 in Appendix A.2.

5.2 Balancing Student and Instructor Visions for Generative AI

From allowing and encouraging students' use via GenAI-based assignments to heavily restricting, and often forbidding, GenAI tools, instructors' approaches to regulating the use of GenAI tools were varied and not always well aligned with students' beliefs on what should constitute acceptable use. This was most often the case when participants felt that their instructors were reluctant to recognize what they perceived as the learning-related benefits of GenAI tools. As P2 put it: "they don't really accept you using AI tools... I feel like it could be really helpful... So I really just want them to like, kind of have... more understanding and like, knowledgeable outlook on what it can do for other students." This was especially true in the context of disability, where no participants ever felt as though their instructors had discussed or considered GenAI tools from an accessibility angle, believing this to be a "second thought" of instructors behind academic integrity.

Oftentimes, participants noticed an absence of AI course policies, which exacerbated confusion over what constituted acceptable use. Of the guidelines that participants had encountered, unclear permissibility of GenAI tools, including a lack of course-specific uses and prompt ideas, was a common complaint. As P15 recounted of an instructor's policy:

> *Essentially, what she said is, if I think your work is AI generated, I'll put it through like, one of those softwares that are supposed to, like, figure out if it is AI generated. But then she went on to say... these softwares aren't exactly the most accurate. So I'm sure if you changed a few words or something, you could pass it off as your own, which... it was kind of hard for me to determine like, what her intentions were in saying that. Like is she encouraging it? ... is it like, if you can get away with it type thing?* – P15

P15's account highlights deficiencies in existing approaches to regulating the use of GenAI tools in courses. In response to these diverse AI course policies, nearly all participants recommended that instructors develop clearer guidelines recognizing the supportive and permissive academic applications of GenAI tools. P20 theorized how instructors might frame such guidelines: "I think... they could tell you like, if you struggle with taking notes, like, this can get you started or if you're lost in the reading, these are some ideas you should look into and have a strong understanding of for the quiz." P6 recommended similar approaches while also emphasizing the need for instructors to understand how GenAI tools can create more equitable learning experiences for students with diverse executive functioning abilities:

> *You know, I think that it would be good to tell them just how valuable [GenAI] is as someone with pretty bad ADHD that has a lot of trouble with focusing and with actually synthesizing information and remembering what the author said in the last sentence... It's incredibly helpful for actually, you know, beginning the project, just getting the general gist of what's going on, converting the complicated language to something so I can really just get an intuitive grasp on it a little bit."* – P6

P6's and P20's accounts represented a common desire among those in our sample–many of whom self-identified with non-visible disabilities–for greater recognition and inclusion of neurodiverse mindsets. In general, there was a belief among participants that instructors who are more supportive of students using GenAI tools could encourage new, and potentially more personalized, learning opportunities. P19's course experience captured this notion:

> *[this instructor was] really cool because... she'll actually say like, oh, it's okay if you guys use... AI to help yourself like figure out what the code should be to do something. And I, I love that. I'm like, oh, thank you. Like I'm glad that you do that... She's like, okay, like this is how you learn to do it from the AI. Like I'm glad you got it done, but this is how else you can do it. You know, I'm like, oh, cool. Now I know like two ways to do this thing. Like that's so awesome.* – P19

5.3 Balancing Student Needs with Higher Education's Expectations

Nearly all participants elaborated on the utility of GenAI tools for navigating HE. A recurring sentiment among participants was feeling overwhelmed by academic demands and responsibilities outide of courses, like involvement in student organizations and family life. P3 described the weight of these expectations, sharing that "I feel... the pressure to take on a lot of different... obligations outside of class. So I'm in like training courses for different things and still trying to take like the maximum amount of credit hours

that I can. And I feel like because of that it's been like definitely... overwhelming for me to do my assignments completely... I don't feel my energy is best served you know spending hours... doing that when I can invest it in a lot more like action-based causes that I'm involved in on campus." P3's account represented a desire among many participants for more time to engage in activities beyond courses for enriching their university experience.

Participants spoke passionately on how large academic workloads, in combination with the added time and energy required for navigating inaccessible university environments, obstructed the ability to pursue valuable non-academic interests, obligations, and welfare, including student organizations, family responsibilities, and self-care activities. To that end, several participants, like P19, appreciated the support that they received from using GenAI tools and how that helped create opportunities for such pursuits:

> *I think my favorite thing about the AI stuff is that it, like the expectations as a college student, they're really high... And we still have lives, like we still have a life outside of that that we have to manage. So I think in that sense, like, I really appreciate the AI for helping me meet those expectations.* – P19

P13 emphasized this point, explaining that "for people who have disabilities or just people who have schedules that are not as flexible as they would like it to be," GenAI tools could be a useful resource for receiving guidance, managing one's schedule, and accessing learning opportunities, like office hours, given the student's availability and access needs.

5.4 Availability and Effectiveness of University Resources

When discussing their experiences with university resources and services, such as the campus DSO, course office hours, or career services, participants often focused on comparing their availability and effectiveness to that of GenAI tools. For example, when seeking disability support from their university's DSO, several participants relied on using GenAI tools to circumvent the administrative barriers commonly involved in the process of receiving academic accommodations in HE. P10 shared their frustration with the overwhelming bureaucracy of the accommodations process:

> *I didn't even get involved with the resource center for my hard of hearing abilities until I had already been in school for two years... And it can be very daunting, the bureaucracy of it all, versus with AI, it's just right there. There's no limitations, you don't have to go through paperwork, and all of these sorts of things. And also AI doesn't require documentation of a disability.* – P10

In some cases, GenAI tools were actually preferred over formal learning supports due to their convenience and availability. As P13 highlighted: "I think [GenAI tools have] been helpful for me because, like, it's just more convenient than like going to the Chemistry Learning Center or TA office hours. So it gets me... help when I want it, when I need it." P13's narrative captures a frequently valued trait of GenAI tools: the ability to provide timely, targeted support without needing to wait for resources to become available.

5.5 Supporting Personal Well-being

Participants discussed how their use of GenAI tools related to their mental and physical well-being. P21 shared how these technologies empowered them to more easily manage their health amid intense academic demands: "I can just put in, hey, make me a schedule and it will schedule things for me. It can even do meal prep for me, workout exercise routines, too, and really just plan out things that I want to do that might be a little bit hard to like plan out." By serving as a "second brain," (P13), GenAI tools enabled participants to prioritize their non-academic needs by supporting them in managing their academic responsibilities.

> *So like I said, if there's like something I need to write or I need to kind of plan out a research concept, just like not being needed to expend a lot of energy, and I'm already working towards like getting better, has been really helpful for me as somebody who has a disability. And I just feel like even that like for myself, for people who have disabilities in general, it is like really important to have those extra resources and tools during times where we are going through things that other people can't understand.* – P13

This kind of personal support extended to receiving advice or information related to personal matters, including disability:

> *Yeah, so it's again, it's not anything that I take super seriously, but you know, I'll ask it some pretty personal questions, like just related to like mental health stuff. If I'm feeling lonely or something, which I guess is an interesting perspective if you're thinking about disabilities that have to do with, you know, mental faculties, things like ADHD, autism, depression... I've asked it, like, about coping mechanisms or, you know, how to deal with addiction, things like that.* – P15

P15's experience brings attention to how GenAI tools have in some ways taken on roles that might otherwise have been filled by university resources, such as the student health center or counseling services.

5.6 Connection and Community

Finding community on campus was important to participants as they progressed through HE, with several describing how GenAI tools supported this process. As an incoming freshman, P2 used a GenAI tool to learn more about the American Sign Language (ASL) community after arriving to campus:

> *Using AI tools in like transitioning here has also been so helpful because... I'd never actually realized how big an impact it had until now, because I would be like trying to make friends... I asked AI... what clubs that are on campus... And then I was just kind of like, hey, like... I love ASL, like, is there like a community where I can like continue learning American Sign Language here on campus. And it showed me ASL club, it showed me that the deaf community had like events like this day and this day... So being able to like see some of that community here was like really comforting.* – P2

GenAI tools were also used to help grow campus communities. For P9, who held a leadership position in a student organization, GenAI tools were helpful when writing emails on behalf of the organization when they "didn't know how to say something."

There was evidence of the role played by GenAI tools among international students when integrating into the campus community and connecting with instructors. P16, an international student with health-related and psychiatric disabilities, felt that using GenAI tools for written work shielded them from potentially discriminatory mindsets of instructors. By using a GenAI tool to review their writing, they felt that this helped to counter stigma related to international students' communication abilities, sharing that "there's always a stigma that the English is not perfect for international students" [60].

In general, participants' experiences alluded to the challenges associated with the process of transitioning to HE and the importance of considering intersectionality for contextualizing barriers. Several participants commented on the need to increase the visibility of disabled and marginalized communities on campus for helping support integration.

5.7 Mindfulness around Generative AI

Although participants expressed optimism around the potential use of GenAI tools in supporting their HE journeys, most consistently emphasized the importance of exercising mindfulness when using these technologies. Several participants shared their concerns around academic integrity, such as P12: "when I am writing,... I still have like, concerns about the plagiarism and everything so I don't, still don't want to go into that."

Nearly all participants held concerns around the accuracy and credibility of output from GenAI tools, as participants tended to reiterate the importance of thinking critically. P11 detailed their thoughts on this topic: "I think AI can be a good guide, but you should also be like thinking critically about what it is saying and kind of question it a little bit because of what I said about bias. Um, and facts not always being like, accurate. Um, and also like, don't obviously like, don't blindly believe it, but also use your brain... think about your own perspective and your own opinion." As far as affecting their use of GenAI tools, in general, while participants acknowledged inaccuracies as an important consideration when using any GenAI tool, participants stressed the importance of exercising careful scrutiny whenever using GenAI tools for information retrieval, often cross-verifying information with a search engine or experimenting with different prompting strategies. Biased output, such as that exhibiting ableism, was a major concern among several participants, but less frequently acknowledged compared to inaccuracy. Several participants pointed out strategies that their courses had used to raise students' awareness of AI-induced bias. In one of P11's courses, students were assigned a reading about AI tools generating biased output, clarifying that "I haven't learned that in any of my other classes. I've never thought about that." The disability film studies course for which P14 had worked as a teaching assistant created an assignment where students were asked to use a GenAI tool to write a story about "a disabled child who attends Summer camp" and to then reflect on how GenAI represents disability after watching *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*. P14 thought that it had been a "helpful experience" for students and noticed more students "recognizing" ableist representations of disability, like "inspiration porn." Because "AI has a lot of, like, the racial biases, ableist biases, homophobia and transphobia biases, that can really then impact people," P14 emphasized that widespread awareness of AI-induced harms was essential.

To raise awareness of these harms, participants highlighted the need for more education about safe and appropriate uses of GenAI tools. Regarding actions that the university could take, P15 recommended that schools provide a formal resource with examples demonstrating "appropriate uses and... inappropriate uses. So if you're using [GenAI tools] for like, guidance or for ideas, that's like in the appropriate column. But if you're just copying [the output of GenAI tools] word for word, that's inappropriate." While an online search suggests that more universities are doing just that, ensuring that students know that these resources exist is key. P11 suggested that existing university-provided trainings, such as that on preventing substance abuse, could serve as a model for designing trainings on AI safety, noting that "it would probably be cool just to have that knowledge in people's faces a little bit... so that they... question AI before blindly believing everything." Given the extent to which students are exposed to GenAI tools and their potential harms, official, institution-wide trainings that treat AI safety in serious regard seem warranted.

5.8 Summary of Interview Findings

These interviews help to answer RQ.1 and RQ.2 by revealing the diverse ways in which the support provided to students by GenAI tools took shape, serving as versatile aides for access in academic life, supporting personal wellness and health, and helping students to connect with the university community in often subtle ways. While students with disabilities employed these technologies to navigate their journey throughout HE without much external guidance, they expressed a clear desire for institutional recognition and guidance. Their awareness of GenAI's limitations and potential biases emphasizes the need for educational frameworks that balance technological innovation with responsible use, creating environments for students to leverage these tools while maintaining academic integrity and personal well-being.

6 Discussion

Our work extends findings from [46] on the use of GenAI tools for accessibility in the HE context by exploring the perspectives of a sample of students with disabilities on the impact of GenAI tools to their university experiences in the contexts of courses, teaching, research, and personal and social life. In this section, we situate our findings in the broader literature and offer recommendations for leveraging our findings to foster more inclusive environments in HE.

6.1 Generative AI and Accessibility in Higher Education

Nearly all our participants identified one or more ways that GenAI tools had improved the accessibility of their university experience. In some instances, GenAI tools met needs that were believed to be too minor to justify university involvement or where reaching out

for assistance was deemed uncomfortable or undesirable. There are multiple reasons that could explain why some students might delay or even abstain from seeking university support, including a lack of time, a lack of knowledge of available supports, a desire to establish an identity independent of disability, or a general feeling of "things going well" [62]. In the case of AI chatbots, like ChatGPT, the ability to serve as a non-judgmental source of personalized support helped some cultivate a greater sense of mastery of the student role. Frequently, the availability of GenAI tools and their capacity to handle a range of requests made them useful for addressing students' needs.

In some instances, GenAI tools either partially or completely compensated for the limitations of existing university supports. Across participant narratives, such as that of P2 and their use of GenAI tools for finding a reading support tool that was "more incognito" and less "embarrassing" than what the DSO provided, GenAI tools functioned as another option, extending beyond what the university was equipped to provide. Offering multiple means of meeting an access need is key to ensuring flexibility in the support options available to students, particularly for those for whom university-provided accommodations are unavailable [34, 95]. This flexibility empowered students with greater independence over *how* their access needs were met when formal accommodations were inadequate, unobtainable, or when more alternative options were preferred. Notably, most post-secondary students with disabilities choose not to disclose a disability to their institution, forgoing access to formal accommodations and DSO-provided support services, leaving little recourse should an access need arise [9]. Even so, the administrative burden encountered by those who *do* decide to seek accommodations from the DSO acts as a substantial barrier, delaying or even deterring interest in DSO support [54]. Consequently, students who are not registered with the DSO, which is estimated to characterize the majority of students with disabilities in HE, are more likely to be adversely affected by strict policies that restrict the use of GenAI tools, limiting the utility of an alternative resource for achieving access [9].

For students who are registered with the DSO, our findings reveal important insights into GenAI's effect on access labor. Communication between students, course staff, and access specialists is integral to fostering access in HE [69]. As a common form of labor performed by students with disabilities, communicating about accommodation needs with instructors can be daunting, as it often involves uncertainty around what information should be shared, how to communicate it, and the instructor response [30, 43]. In this way, students act as the managers of their disability identity information [112]. Creating and maintaining access in HE is rarely the result of any individual effort; the framing of interdependence captures this idea, acknowledging that access can be a product of the relationships between people and the environment that collectively work together to achieve access. Using this framing, recognizing the access labor performed by students with disabilities is imperative for understanding how access is co-created [17]. In some ways, because of GenAI tools, the type of access labor that students perform and how they performed it is changing. As we learned from out participants, in place of the time and effort spent drafting and seeking human feedback on accommodation-related emails, students can instead use a GenAI tool to either partially or completely compose their messages in ways that align with how they choose to express themselves in relation to disability [63–65]. As another example of a use that arose, students could also discuss with an AI chatbot to get ideas for potential accommodations. In other recent work, researchers demonstrated how participatory inquiry and co-design approaches with students with disabilities resulted in the creation of an AI chatbot that improved the DSO registration process by reducing the administrative burden associated with completing traditional electronic forms [54]. For successful implementation, it is necessary that any efforts at leveraging GenAI for creating more inclusive living and learning environments in HE involve students with disabilities in the transformation process.

Taken together, our work adds depth in responding to the question of "what does the *burden of survival* look like in the era of GenAI?," with future participatory and co-design work needed to explore additional GenAI design possibilities that can further reduce this burden. With much having been speculated about how GenAI tools will change HE, our findings offer concrete examples of student-derived applications of GenAI tools, with access constituting an important application area [38, 49, 83, 90, 118].

6.2 Generative AI and Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy skills, including knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, and communication, are key to empowering students with disabilities to advocate for their access needs in HE and beyond [108]. From our participants, we learned that students found GenAI tools to be helpful as a conversational partner for reflecting on areas where additional support was needed, as an information retrieval system for learning about and navigating the administrative process of DSO registration, and as a tool for supporting disability-related communication with instructors, suggesting that GenAI tools can be a useful asset for supporting important self-advocacy work.

While GenAI tools can provide valuable support to students for exercising self-advocacy skills, over-reliance could complicate or even stymie students' development of self-advocacy skills. For example, in search for rights-related information, hallucination, an issue whereby GenAI systems produce nonsensical or inaccurate output, could expose students to inaccurate or unhelpful information, which could result in students being misinformed or discouraged about their rights [119]. Participants observed how GenAI tools could give inaccurate, incomplete, or unhelpful output if not provided enough context, and that knowing *how* to interact with GenAI was key to getting useful responses. Prior work points to users' prompt engineering skills as being predictive of output quality; consequently, students who are less experienced in interacting with GenAI tools may receive unclear, unhelpful, or misleading results [58]. Because harmful biases are often embedded in the training data, GenAI tools may reify those harms, such as ableism, in their output [68]. Furthermore, using a GenAI tool as a writing assistant for composing accommodations-related messages to instructors may pose its own set of risks. In an investigation of how people perceive AI's involvement in email writing, Liu et al. [66] perform an experiment manipulating two variables: AI involvement (*human-only*, *human with help of AI*, *AI-only*) and interpersonal emphasis (*low*, *medium*, *high*). The researchers found

that, regardless of interpersonal emphasis, that the perceived trustworthiness of *AI-only* communication was rated the lowest. This could be problematic if instructors have negative attitudes or a lack of understanding toward providing accommodations or to using GenAI for communication. It is unclear how instructors perceive disability-related communications from students when GenAI tool use is suspected, or whether this reinforces disability-related stigma–potentially shaping their view of the student and their willingness to provide support [71].

Given the frequency of participants who had used GenAI to write accommodation-related communications, there seems to be an opportunity for the application of GenAI for training and supporting students to exercise important self-advocacy skills. One application could be the design of conversational user interfaces that simulate advocacy situations. For example, [43] hired a trained actor to play the role of a professor for simulating accommodation request discussion with students. After completing the simulation activity, students shared that both participating in the simulation and reviewing a recording of their interaction helped them to improve their self-advocacy skills and to identify changes that they would make in the future. In place of a human actor, we might imagine a similar simulation activity, whereby the student interacts with an AI instructor to simulate a discussion centered around requesting accommodations. Similar GenAI tools have been developed for practicing interpersonal skills, such as for simulating interactions to teach conflict resolution [96] and difficult conversations with medical patients [28].

6.3 Embracing Accessibility in AI Policy and Education

In line with findings from Barrett and Pack [15] and Ghimire and Edwards [45], a recurring theme in our work was the variability in the presence and clarity of course AI policies. In some cases, participants were perplexed by their instructors messaging (or lack thereof) on AI, leading to uncertainty about whether they could use GenAI tools. This lack of clarity adversely impacts students who may otherwise seek out GenAI tools for improving course accessibility and for personalizing their learning experiences, but who are discouraged from doing so due to concerns over violating academic integrity standards or who are unaware of how they could possibly benefit from using GenAI tools.

While discussing the informational resources that they would find helpful regarding GenAI tools, participants stressed the need for training opportunities that demonstrate safe and acceptable uses of GenAI tools. Suggestions from our participants included course-specific tutorials and examples of acceptable use scenarios, integrating GenAI exercises into learning activities for increasing hands-on experience, offering GenAI-focused seminars, workshops, and elective courses, incorporating modules on safe GenAI practices into mandatory student training, and offering spaces, such as through university libraries, to experiment with different GenAI tools with expert assistance. Notably, some participants expressed more comfort and confidence when information came from the university; if not already offered, institutions should consider either creating their own educational resources on GenAI or guiding students to existing resources where they can gain more information about potential uses of GenAI and available tools [1, 3–5].

When asked, none of our participants felt as though their instructors had discussed GenAI tools from a disability support or accommodations perspective. In fact, after the of end of the interview, several participants shared that they had never before considered the disability-related impact of GenAI tools on their lived experience prior to learning about our study. Among other factors, including a limited need or lack of desire to use accommodations in recent academic terms, this could help explain why relatively few of our participants who received accommodations perceived that GenAI tools had impacted either their use of or interest in using accommodations. A lack of awareness of available GenAI tools and limited guidance and knowledge on their accessibility-related applications may have kept some participants from taking advantage of GenAI tools for meeting certain access needs. Many participants said that they planned to continue experimenting with new uses of GenAI moving forward. Similarly, it is possible that participants could have had difficulty reflecting on the accommodations-related impact of GenAI tools. They may have not been aware of how their use of GenAI tools related to their self-perceived access needs. This parallels findings from prior research showing that insufficient knowledge of disability support services available accommodations, as well as not perceiving oneself to be "disabled enough", as being a factor that prevents students with disabilities from receiving support. To increase student awareness of the accessibility-related applications of GenAI tools, DSO webpages could include examples of specific use cases, prompt templates, or ideas for getting started that are grounded in student experiences. These insights could be especially useful for instructors who may be unfamiliar with how best to support students with hidden disabilities [48]. Having been both a teaching assistant and a student who had encountered accessibility barriers in courses, P14 lamented systemic issues rooted in the academic expectations of HE and the stigma associated with using accommodations, expressing a desire for more positive messaging around healthy course loads and support-seeking behavior:

> *So I think really what I'm more frustrated with is, like, I know students are advised to take more hours than they really have time for... Like, I get that for most cases, it's probably, like, a series of systemic failings that might cause them to not actually do the work. But the issue is, like, not doing the work. Like, if there's accommodation need, I would really want to work with a student one-on-one and come up with, like, strategies... And I wish that I could work more with students one-on-one to come up with solutions so that they can still actually get the bare minimum out of what we're trying to teach. Because they're all, they're paying money to learn in school. And if they are not actually doing that, then it's frustrating... I want to work with them, but I also want, I don't want them to feel like they have to trauma dump to, like, try to get help.* - P14

Although our findings suggest opportunities for designing GenAI systems to reduce accessibility barriers in HE, it is important to frame GenAI as a resource that requires caution. AI systems have

the potential to hallucinate information and are capable of perpetuating harmful biases that can further marginalize disabled communities. Mack et al. [68] demonstrate this tendency in multiple focus groups with people with disabilities who identify reductive and stereotypical representations of disability in the output of text-to-image tools. From an educational perspective, the irresponsible deployment of AI systems could further marginalize students with disabilities. For example, Proctorio's automatic proctoring software discriminated against these students by flagging disability-related movements as signs of cheating [22]. Despite their concerns, participants were optimistic about the future of using GenAI tools in their academic journeys to enable new, more personalized learning approaches, and intended to continue using and experimenting with GenAI tools. We echo the call for instructor trainings focused on disability awareness, legislation, and methods for realizing inclusive learning environments through safe, supervised integrations of AI as being key to disseminating knowledge on designing learning environments that are inclusive of a diverse student body [20].

7 Limitations and Future Work

Because our findings are based on a nonrandom sample of 62 students from two large, public universities in the Midwestern United States, the perspectives shared by our participants and the resulting insights may not generalize to other institutions. For example, in recounting their experience at a junior college prior to transferring, P2 shared that, "no one ever talked about or touched AI tools."

New GenAI tools are constantly becoming available, with model and user interface updates transforming the user experience of existing tools. Considering the range of tools available, it is important to note that, often, our participants' perspectives on GenAI tools were informed by only a select few tools, with ChatGPT tending to be the tool with which participants had the most experience.

Given the prevalence of messaging associating AI with violations of academic integrity, participants may have responded in ways that they perceived to be socially desirable. In anticipation of this, we explicitly asked participants to reflect on ways in which GenAI tools had positively impacted their learning experiences—particularly those that instructors might view negatively or might not have considered. To help participants feel comfortable sharing, interviews were conducted one-on-one by a student and it was emphasized that study data would remain confidential and that any personally identifying information would be removed.

While several of our participants had used GenAI tools to help acclimate to university life, the transition to HE is an important process that our study does not explicitly consider. The transition to HE often involves adjustments that can be challenging for students to navigate, particularly for those learning to manage their access needs, and future work targeting the applications of GenAI to the transition process is needed [31, 39].

While only about one-third of students with disabilities in HE inform their institution of a disability, nearly 70% of our participants chose to disclose [9]. The differing experiences of students who do and do not have access to DSO-provided support services likely affect the contexts and tasks for which students find GenAI tools useful. A more focused investigation of how students without formal accommodations use GenAI tools to navigate access could illuminate applications of GenAI to better support students who choose to not disclose.

Since this study captures a snapshot of student perspectives and relies on self-report, it's unclear the extent to which GenAI tools affect student engagement with university supports, like the DSO, and student use of and, interest in, accommodations. Longitudinal studies leveraging objective measures for tracking student use of GenAI tools and of accommodations would bring us closer to a deeper understanding of how students coordinate access in a world with GenAI.

Moving forward, proactively involving both students with and without disabilities in the transformation process is important to the successful implementation of GenAI applications and policies that promote inclusion in HE. Research on involving people with disabilities in the design of assistive and accessible technology has shown that doing so can lead to more inclusive outcomes. For example, in a design thinking course, Shinohara et al. [99] matched student groups with persons with disabilities who served as "expert users" and whose input complemented that of other student groups, enlightening student designers on important functional and social factors and encouraging them towards more inclusive design thinking. To foster more inclusive educational technology, Metatla et al. [73] identified three necessary actions: inviting connections and centering lived experiences, promoting people with disabilities as creative agents, and studying the effectiveness of educational technology within its context of use. For GenAI policies and applications to have a positive effect on students with diverse abilities, future work is needed that involves students with disabilities as co-creators for exploring GenAI as a material for building more accessible educational experiences.

8 Conclusion

In this work, we present findings from a mixed-methods study exploring the perspectives of university students with disabilities on the impact of GenAI tools within the academic and non-academic contexts of their university experiences. Academically, it was common for students to use GenAI tools to personalize their course and research experiences to better align with their own information processing needs and, when needed, to assist with important self-advocacy efforts for meeting their access needs. Outside of academics, GenAI tools served a range of important functions related to personal and social well-being, including helping students to discover and form social connections, establishing lifestyle routines, and managing busy schedules. There is a need for decision-makers in HE to recognize the benefits–and risks–of GenAI as a technology for addressing accessibility barriers and for creating more inclusive living and learning spaces for students. Needed is the direct involvement of students with disabilities in developing GenAI tools, guidelines, and informational resources that include and reflect their lived experiences. Moving forward, additional exploratory and experimental work is needed to better understand how, and to what effect, students with disabilities use GenAI tools for constructing more accessible, inclusive spaces in HE.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by the Center for Just Infrastructures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). We thank the many students who expressed interest in our study and who shared their time and perspectives with us. We also thank Emily Tarconish, Melanie Martin, Aziz Zeidieh, and the Social Spaces research group for providing valuable feedback on the study design and on earlier drafts of this manuscript. Lastly, we thank the staff at the center for Disability Resources and Educational Services at UIUC for their encouragement and collaboration on this work.

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A Appendix

A.1 Survey Design

A.1.1 Definitions and Examples. At the start of the survey, participants were presented with both a definition and example of GenAI to ground their thinking. We chose to use the phrase "AI tools" to refer to GenAI-based tools throughout the survey to make it easier for students to reflect on their own experiences, as our team's access specialist had observed that students tended to refer to GenAI-based tools as "AI tools".

A.1.2 Eligibility Criteria and Survey Mechanics. Participants accessed the main survey through an anonymous link and, in addition to having read and agreed to the information in the informed consent document, were required to satisfy the following participation criteria:

(1) I identify with one or more disabilities
(2) I am currently a student at [university]
(3) I am currently physically located in the United States
(4) I am 18 years of age or older

Participants could complete the survey on their own devices and at their convenience. A "back" button was added to allow participants to revisit previous parts of the survey. The survey could be closed and re-opened at a later time. Once a survey response was started, it would automatically be submitted after 30 days. Multiple submissions from the same participant were not allowed.

As mentioned in Section 3.3, for those interested in receiving compensation for completing the survey or in participating in a follow-up interview, after submitting the main survey, participants were redirected to a separate survey for entering their university-issued email address. If they chose to neither receive compensation nor to be contacted about a follow-up interview, they were not redirected.

A.1.3 Questions. Survey questions were a mix of closed- and open-response formats. Closed-response questions included multiple- and single-selection multiple choice. Most questions measuring attitudes used a 5-point Likert scale with the following options: *Strongly disagree*, *Somewhat agree*, *Neither agree nor disagree*, *Somewhat agree*, and *Strongly agree*. A 5-point scale, rather than one with more options, was chosen to minimize survey fatigue. Some survey questions were immediately followed by an optional open-response question that asked participants to explain or to provide examples to help the research team better understand their perspectives.

Questions asking about DSO registration status, accommodations used, and student interactions with instructors were inspired

by Abreu et al. [8]. Attitudinal questions related to participants' acceptance of GenAI tools were inspired by the scale developed by Strzelecki [105]. For the sake of limiting the length of our survey instrument, we borrowed a subset of scale items from each construct represented on the original scale. To select scale items, we considered both the factor loading on the original scale and, as a team, discussed each scale item until consensus was reached on the items that were we felt most clearly articulated the construct. During pilot testing, we revised question wording to clarity and added new items (e.g., social influence from instructors and course staff) to consider other acceptance-related sub-factors within each factor that were relevant to the post-secondary student context. While items from Strzelecki [105] are rated on a 7-point scale, our survey items used a 5-point scale to limit cognitive load and remain consistent with our overall survey design.

A.2 Additional Survey Findings

Demographic	n_i
Gender	
Man	8
Woman	12
Prefer to self-describe	1
Academic Level	
Graduate	7
Undergraduate	14
Years at University	
1-2	13
3-4	5
5+	3
Program Area	
STEM	11
Social Sciences	6
Business	2
Public and Social Services	2
Health and Medicine	1
DSO Registration Status	
Not registered	6
Registered	14
Prefer to not say	1
Self-identified Disability	
Learning Disability	2
Blind or Low Vision	1
Neurological Disability	2
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	1
Autism Spectrum Disorder	4
Mobility or Dexterity Disability	2
Chronic Illness or Health Condition	6
Psychiatric or Psychological Disability	12
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	8
Prefer to self-describe	2
Prefer to not to say	1

Table 3: Demographics of interview participants ($N_i = 21$).

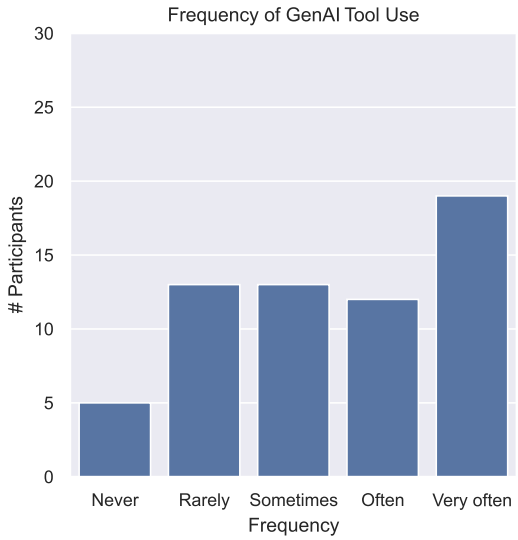

Figure 5: Distribution of self-reported frequencies with which participants used GenAI tools (*Rarely*=Once every few months; *Sometimes*=About once a month; *Often*=About once a week; *Very often*=Several times a week or more).

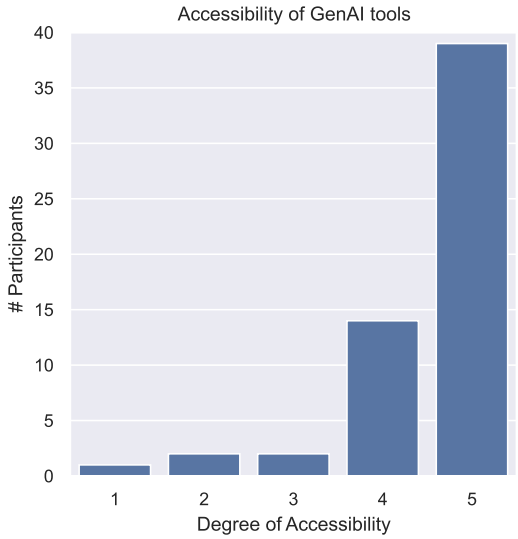

Figure 6: Distribution of participant perceptions of the overall accessibility of the GenAI tools that they had used (1=*Very inaccessible*; 2=*Somewhat inaccessible*; 3=*Neutral or no opinion*; 4=*Somewhat accessible*; 5=*Very accessible*).

Demographic	n_s
Gender	
Man	19
Woman	33
Non-binary	8
Prefer to self-describe	1
Prefer not to say	1
Academic Level	
Graduate	19
Undergraduate	43
Years at University	
1-2	36
3-4	21
5+	5
Program Area	
STEM	32
Social Sciences	17
Business	6
Public and Social Services	7
Arts and Humanities	2
Health and Medicine	1
Unspecified or Undeclared	1
Prefer to not say	1
DSO Registration Status	
Not registered	14
Registered	44
Prefer to not say	4
Self-identified Disability	
Learning Disability	12
Blind or Low Vision	2
Neurological Disability	3
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	5
Autism Spectrum Disorder	11
Speech or Language Disability	1
Mobility or Dexterity Disability	2
Chronic Illness or Health Condition	13
Psychiatric or Psychological Disability	34
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder	25
Prefer to self-describe	4
Prefer to not to say	3

Table 4: Demographics of survey participants ($N_s = 62$).