

Generative AI and Academic Integrity in Conestoga COMM and ENGL Courses

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Introduction

Since the advent of generative AI (GenAI), the landscape of teaching Communications courses at Conestoga has changed dramatically. At the request of the former Executive Dean of Interdisciplinary Studies, the Conestoga Community Engaged Writing Initiative (CCEWI) engaged in an internal research project to better understand the impact of GenAI tools on academic integrity in writing courses taught by the Communications Department. The project explores the degree to which academic integrity violations (AIVs) relate to the use of GenAI by students in these courses, and it identifies priorities among faculty for mitigating the inappropriate use of GenAI tools.

Methodology

In Fall 2025, CCEWI solicited quantitative data from Conestoga's Academic Integrity Office. This data includes the number of AIVs in all COMM and ENGL writing courses taught in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies from Fall 2023 to Spring 2025, and it identifies those which were the result of the inappropriate use of GenAI tools.

We also surveyed all full-time Communications professors at Conestoga (excluding ourselves as researchers). We asked seven questions that were designed to generate qualitative data on professors' impressions of the frequency of AIVs over the last two academic years, particularly those related to GenAI. We asked what steps professors are taking to address GenAI-related AIVs in their courses, how supported they feel by the college in taking such steps, and we asked them to rank a variety of possible supports for the likelihood of their efficacy in lowering the number of GenAI-related AIVs. We also allowed professors the opportunity to express any additional thoughts they have about GenAI and their courses.

Key Findings

- Although the number of sections of COMM and ENGL courses has decreased over the past two years, the percentage of faculty interactions with the academic integrity portal that were related to inappropriate GenAI use has increased up to as high as 99% in Spring 2025.
- Communications professors are extremely concerned about the number of AIVs in their classes, particularly as they relate to GenAI use.
- Communications professors have taken measures to mitigate GenAI-related AIVs with some impact, but they require the resources of time for collaboration and course development, along with in-person delivery options, to fully implement sustainable strategies.

Discussion

Data from the Academic Integrity Office reveal the number of times faculty reported GenAI related offences, and our survey of full-time COMM and ENGL professors reflects faculty impressions of the significant increase over six semesters.

Academic Integrity Portal

Conestoga faculty report academic incidents using the Academic Integrity Portal. They may report offences, warnings, or instances in which they recommended students for citing, referencing, and paraphrasing education. Table 1 below compares the number of COMM faculty interactions with the Academic Integrity Portal with AIVs involving the unauthorized use of GenAI tools from Fall 2023-Spring 2025.

Table 1. COMM faculty Interactions with the Academic Integrity Portal vs. GenAI AIVs

| Semester | Fall 2023 | Winter 2024 | Spring 2024 | Fall 2024 | Winter 2025 | Spring 2025 |
|--|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Number of sections* | 403 | 313 | 153 | 342 | 236 | 93 |
| Number of Faculty Interactions with AIV portal | 1704 | 2095 | 1154 | 1098 | 820 | 398 |
| Number of AI-related AIVs | 815 / 48% | 1218 / 58% | 635 / 55% | 721 / 66% | 480 / 59% | 395 / 99% |

**Section numbers are accurate within a reasonable degree of variation due to stacked or ghosted sections.*

Data reflects that GenAI use has consistently contributed to at least half of the AIVs filed in COMM and ENGL courses, and that Spring 2025 showed a sharp spike to 99% of all cases.

Faculty Survey

We received 17 responses to our faculty survey (out of a possible 18 responses), representing the majority of full-time faculty in the Communications Department (excluding ourselves). Results suggest that faculty members are deeply concerned about both AIVs and unethical GenAI use by students:

AIVs and Generative AI

- A total of 88% of respondents reported being extremely (53%) or moderately (35%) concerned about the number of academic integrity violations in their courses, agreeing that they occur regularly (53%) or often (35%)
- 53% of respondents reported that “over 90% of academic integrity violations have involved the unauthorized use of GenAI tools” and another 41% reported that “approximately 75% of academic integrity violations have involved the unauthorized use of GenAI tools”

*Addressing the Challenge in the Classroom**

- Respondents have taken significant steps to address AIVs related to GenAI, the most popular being modelling ethical GenAI use during class time (94%), adapting assignments so that students are less likely to use GenAI (82%), adapting assignments to incorporate the ethical use of GenAI by students (82%), incorporating statements on GenAI use in course shells (82%), and updating assessment rubrics to reflect an emphasis on authentic voice (59%)
- When asked to what extent these adjustments have mitigated AIVs related to the unauthorized use of GenAI, 47% responded “somewhat,” 24% responded “moderately,” and 18% responded “very little”

**Most COMM and all ENGL courses are still taught virtually, either asynchronously or synchronously.*

College Supports

- 71% of respondents feel just “somewhat” supported by the college in their teaching of COMM and/or ENGL courses in the age of GenAI
- When asked to rank potential supports in terms of how likely they are to assist faculty in making meaningful progress toward reducing AIVs related to unauthorized GenAI use, the top contenders in the “extremely likely” category were as follows

- Adequate/ongoing SWF time to revise course outlines and model shells to address ethical and appropriate GenAI use by students (76%)
- Adequate/ongoing SWF time to collaborate with colleagues and other experts on solutions to AIVs related to GenAI (76%)
- Flexible options to assess student work in environments where they cannot access GenAI (for example, in person) (65%)
- An Academic Integrity Office committed to stricter penalties for students who are in violation of the college's academic integrity policy (especially repeat offenders) (53%)

As Figure 1 illustrates, faculty have a strong preference for support that provides them with the time and autonomy to collaboratively develop course material that could reinforce ethical AI use, the time and autonomy to collaboratively develop assessments that are less AI-vulnerable, and flexible delivery options that could eliminate unsupervised AI use by students. Faculty members are less convinced that further training on GenAI will be helpful.

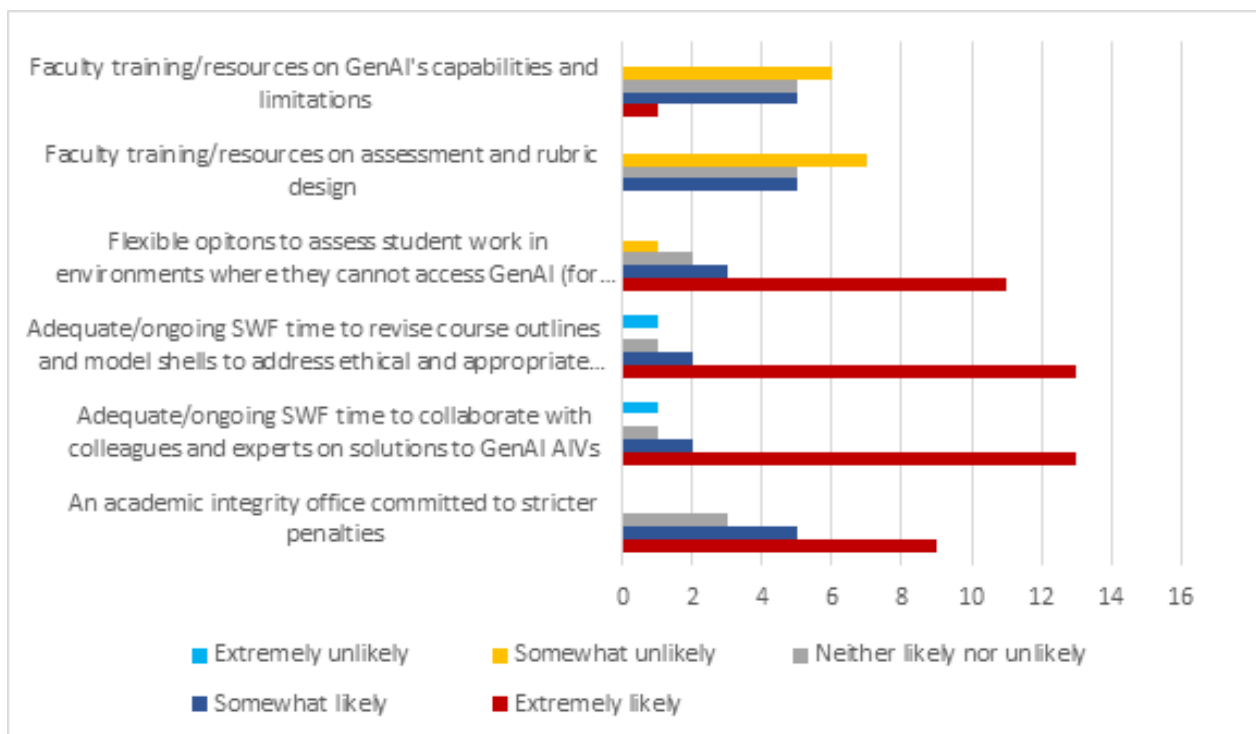


Figure 1. Faculty Perceptions of Support Efficacy

Recommendations

When given the opportunity to provide additional comments regarding GenAI and academic integrity in their COMM and/or ENGL courses, respondents offered some practical recommendations of their own. One faculty member noted the need for “stronger emphasis on talking about how artificial intelligence software can benefit the research process while cautioning students to avoid using it for generating their own text,” suggesting the creation of lessons or units that “underscore” this notion. Another faculty member took this a step further, embracing adaptation on a larger scale so that our courses might “allow for the ethical use of AI instead of completely banning or punishing students for its use” and recommending that we find “new ways for assessing course outcomes that support the use of AI.”

One respondent emphasized the increasing need for “collaborative partnerships or collaborative groups for course development,” explaining that “addressing and troubleshooting issues surrounding academic integrity and unauthorized AI use can be more effective if the burden is shared among a group rather than being the responsibility of one faculty member.” A second faculty member concurred, stating that “We definitely need more time on our SWFs, and we need each other.”

Other respondents expressed more general dismay and frustration over how quickly the technology has advanced in the realm of GenAI and how drawn out and laborious the process of discovering, proving, and filing AIVs has become. In the words of one faculty member, “Regular unauthorized use of GenAI has undermined the entire learning process.”

Therefore, we recommend the following solutions to address the current crisis in Communications education at the college with regards to mitigating the inappropriate use of GenAI tools by students:

- ✓ Maintain a substantial contingent of FT COMM faculty with the expertise, dedication, and experience necessary to tackle the ongoing problem of GenAI and academic integrity as a team
- ✓ Provide the FT COMM team with opportunities to collaborate on meaningful course updates and/or course development by allocating SWF time devoted to such activities – or allow the return of a non-teaching semester in which to complete this necessary work
- ✓ Provide the FT COMM team with opportunities to create shareable and adaptable eConestoga modules (or an entire Level 1 course) on related topics such as content management, digital literacy, and the ethical use of assistive and/or generative AI

tools by allocating SWF time devoted to such activities – or allow the return of a non-teaching semester in which to complete this necessary work

- ✓ Advocate for the return to in-person learning in greater numbers to limit student access to GenAI tools for written assessments in COMM and ENGL courses
- ✓ Recognize that the problem of GenAI and AIVs is especially important to address in COMM/ENGL courses, given the percentage of CLOs focused on producing authentic written work (for example, existing library resources that guide students on the acceptable use of Copilot should be much more subject specific)
- ✓ Develop added supports for faculty to streamline the AIV reporting process (for example, empower faculty to mandate MS Word version histories from students or mandate the use of Grammarly Authorship for all written assessments)
- ✓ Reinstate Writing Services at the college to better support student learning when it comes to the ethical use of GenAI tools
- ✓ Cancel the college's subscription to Grammarly Premium in favour of the Editor tools in MS Word as a viable and cost-effective alternative
- ✓ Disable inappropriate add-ins within MS Office 365 across the college (such as Autopilot, DeepL, Ghostwriter, Quillbot, and Paperpal)
- ✓ Conduct further primary and secondary research (under the auspices of CCEWI) by surveying faculty across the college who teach courses with writing-intensive CLOs and by synthesizing the results with a comprehensive literature review