

TAMING CHATGPT (AND OTHER AI BEASTS): DESIGNING A GENAI CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEANINGFUL LEARNING

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Abstract

More than three years after the paradigm-breaking release of ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022, many higher education institutions still struggle to position themselves towards GenAI. They are understandably reluctant to embrace tools that allow students to outsource cognitive processes and potentially bypass key learning outcomes. Yet a blanket ban is not realistic either, as GenAI is rapidly becoming indispensable in professional practice. Many institutions have therefore gravitated towards general policies calling for “responsible use.” Well-intentioned as these may be, they often leave students uncertain about what is permitted. Some avoid GenAI altogether for fear of misconduct, while others use it liberally, creating uneven learning conditions. Moreover, generic policies may clash with teachers’ intended learning outcomes: GenAI may undermine the learning value of some tasks while enriching it for others. What is needed is a clear and precise, yet flexible, framework that adapts to varied learning objectives while remaining consistent across courses. A customizable GenAI Code of Conduct — a document with a fixed structure but adaptable elements — offers such a solution. In this workshop, participants will explore how to develop and implement such a code collaboratively, ensuring student support and staff buy-in rather than imposing a top-down policy. Through discussion, collaborative critique, and hands-on guided design activities, we will explore effective content and formatting, drawing on a code co-developed by the engineering faculties of KU Leuven and Hasselt University (Belgium). Participants will leave with a first draft tailored to their particular context and a clear pathway to build support and integrate it across their faculty.

Keywords: *Generative Artificial Intelligence, ChatGPT, technology in education, educational policy, higher education.*

1. Introduction

The public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 sent shockwaves across numerous sectors, not least higher education. It was immediately evident that generative AI (GenAI) would become profoundly impactful; far less clear, however, were the mechanisms through which that impact would unfold, the speed at which changes would materialize, and the approaches educational institutions should adopt in response. The uncertainty surrounding GenAI’s rapid evolution even led to the publication of an open letter by the Future of Life Institute (2023), urging developers to pause further GenAI development until adequate safeguards could be established. Unsurprisingly, competition urged developers to keep pushing out ever more powerful large language models at an astonishing rate, while universities, structured to respond methodically and deliberately to pedagogic change, were struggling to keep up.

The most straightforward policy response available to higher education institutions was to simply prohibit the use of generative AI tools by students and to maintain existing pedagogical and assessment practices. However, such an approach is now widely regarded as untenable for at least two reasons. First, students are likely to continue using these tools regardless of formal prohibitions, particularly in the absence of reliable and valid detection mechanisms (Weber-Wulff et al., 2023). Second, the ability to use GenAI tools effectively and responsibly is increasingly viewed as a relevant professional competence, with employers expecting graduates to be conversant with AI-supported workflows (Waring, 2024). A blanket ban could therefore compromise the employability of students, or at the very least, disconnect higher education from evolving workplace realities. Conversely, an overenthusiastic, unrestricted adoption of GenAI tools is equally problematic. Allowing unlimited use would enable students to delegate core cognitive activities—such as analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving—to an external, artificial intelligence, thereby eroding the very learning processes that universities should cultivate. Moreover, an

uncritical adoption of generative AI would introduce a whole range of additional risks, including threats to academic integrity, to the development of critical thinking skills and creativity, as well as concerns related to privacy and equity.

In response to these competing pressures, many universities have converged on a more nuanced position. Drawing on so-called soft law policy frameworks developed by organizations such as the OECD (2023) and UNESCO (2023), institutions now typically permit the use of generative AI, provided it is applied ethically, fairly, and transparently, aligned with intended learning outcomes, and does not adversely affect students' learning processes. However, such high-level guidelines often remain abstract and insufficiently operationalized. While they articulate important normative principles, they frequently fail to provide students with the practical means to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate use in concrete learning contexts (Dabis & Csáki, 2024). This lack of instrumentalization generates considerable uncertainty among students. Because the guidelines are not readily actionable, students interpret them differently: some adopt a cautious stance and refrain from using GenAI tools for fear of penalties or accusations of fraud, while others engage more liberally with GenAI tools. The ambiguity inherent in many GenAI policy statements could result in a situation of educational inequity: under ostensibly uniform rules, differences in interpretation (and risk tolerance) could translate into unequal assessment outcomes.

In many universities, this problem is addressed by delegating responsibility for more detailed guidance to individual course instructors. Institutions such as Stanford, Princeton, and Harvard explicitly instruct students to follow course-specific policies regarding the use of GenAI tools (Giugliano, 2025). While this approach allows instructors to align GenAI use with disciplinary norms and specific learning outcomes, it also introduces a degree of variability. Across a curriculum, students may encounter markedly divergent—and sometimes conflicting—expectations, leading to confusion and policy fatigue. What is called for, then, is a coherent institutional framework: a shared, recognizable policy document that offers sufficient uniformity to ensure clarity and fairness, while remaining flexible enough for course instructors to be adapted to the particular learning objectives and assessment demands of individual tasks.

2. Objectives

The aim of the workshop is to engage participants in critical reflection on both the form and content of such a policy document, and to support them in developing a draft version of a “GenAI Code of Conduct” tailored to their specific institutional or disciplinary context. This code is intended to remain sufficiently flexible to align with the learning outcomes of particular courses, while maintaining a coherent and recognizable structure across contexts. Additionally, the workshop aims to have participants reflect on how to ensure student and faculty buy-in for the introduction of such a document.

3. Workshop proceedings

Participants will be seated at small group tables to facilitate interaction and hands-on collaboration. Following a brief introduction by the workshop facilitator, participants will first engage in a structured exchange of experiences and current practices related to students' use of generative AI. This initial discussion will address whether guidelines are currently provided, the level of detail of such guidelines, how they are communicated or enforced, and to what extent these approaches are perceived as effective. Participants will also reflect on common challenges, such as students' adherence to guidelines, the volume and nature of student questions regarding usage of GenAI tools, and how instructors respond when they suspect that large language models have been used in ways that were not intended.

Building on this exchange, participants will then reflect on both the form and content of a policy document designed to bridge the gap between high-level institutional principles—such as academic integrity, equity, and fairness—and the concrete, task-specific questions students encounter when using GenAI tools. Central guiding questions include how such a document can maintain a recognizable structure across contexts while remaining adaptable to diverse courses and learning outcomes, and which guidelines are essential and non-negotiable within a GenAI Code of Conduct.

In the subsequent phase of the workshop, participants will be introduced to the GenAI Code of Conduct developed jointly by the Faculty of Engineering Technology at KU Leuven and Hasselt University. They will be invited to critically assess this document and to identify elements that would require modification or elaboration to fit their own institutional, disciplinary, or pedagogical contexts.

Participants will then work – collaboratively if possible – to develop a draft version of a GenAI Code of Conduct tailored to their specific needs and contexts. These drafts will be peer feedbacked and discussed critically.

The workshop will conclude with a plenary discussion on issues of acceptance and implementation, focusing on strategies to ensure that both students and staff recognize, understand, and adopt the proposed Code of Conduct.

4. Conclusion

This workshop helps bridge the gap between high-level GenAI policies and the practical questions students and instructors face in everyday practice. By working collaboratively on a flexible GenAI Code of Conduct, participants translate abstract principles into clear, usable guidance that can be adapted to specific courses while remaining consistent across a program or faculty.

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