A Statement of Principles on Artificial Intelligence in Academic Work

Towson University AI Institute
Draft for Preliminary Discussion

Preamble

Artificial intelligence has entered academic work. Some in our community have embraced it, some have deliberately declined it, and by now none of us can quite ignore it. What remains the same is the set of values of our university: intellectual inquiry, the creation and stewardship of knowledge, and service to the public. But AI tests how we live up to those commitments. It can be harder now to know when work is a person's own, whether a cited source is real, or who is answerable when a system takes part in a decision. How much AI helps or harms depends on the choices we make about it, including the choice not to use it. These principles are offered to help the Towson community reason through those choices.

They are meant to orient, not to mandate. They apply the university's long-standing values to this new technology. The principles do not replace disciplinary judgment or existing university policy. They do not change the academic-integrity code: it continues to govern, including where AI-generated work is presented as a person's own. Nothing here is an enforcement instrument. These principles should not be cited on their own in evaluation, integrity, or personnel proceedings. Departments and programs are encouraged to develop more specific guidance consistent with them, as some already have.

The principles grow from Towson's mission of intellectual inquiry, critical thinking, and preparing graduates to serve as effective leaders for the public good.

Our Principles

1. Professional judgment and academic freedom.

Decisions about whether and how AI figures in academic work belong to the people who hold the relevant expertise and responsibility: instructors in their courses, scholars in their research, departments in their programs. That includes the freedom to decline AI as readily as to adopt it. The principles that follow are pursued without overriding this judgment; the university does not settle by fiat what belongs to disciplinary and professional expertise.

> *The freedom to choose one's methods carries the responsibilities it always has: honesty, accountability, and care for others.*

2. Opportunity and capability.

AI opens real possibilities. Used well, it can help students and scholars analyze more, work faster, and reach questions they could not reach before. Fluency with these tools is increasingly expected in the professions our graduates enter. Used without judgment, the same capability stands in for the effort by which understanding is built. We treat the ability to use AI well, and the judgment to know its limits and when to set it aside, as a capability worth building. This aspiration is not only a matter of individual initiative. It depends on an institution that can evaluate and support new tools on a timescale that matches the work.

> *We intend for Towson to be among the institutions putting AI to ambitious and thoughtful use, guided by our educational mission and by the world our graduates will enter.*

3. Rigor and critical inquiry.

Our university mission begins with intellectual inquiry and critical thinking. AI can widen the range of evidence, counterarguments, and perspectives within reach of scholars. It can also substitute a fluent, confident answer for the thinking that produces understanding. Because these systems return what is statistically likely, they can state facts, sources, and quotations that are entirely credible and entirely fabricated, and they pull work toward the conventional and away from the original.

> *We treat what AI produces as a claim to check rather than an answer to trust, and we choose uses that deepen inquiry and build judgment rather than replace the effort by which expertise is formed.*

4. Human accountability for the public good.

We prepare leaders who make informed, ethical choices. Two commitments follow from that, and they have to stay joined. Meaningful authority over consequential decisions stays with people: AI can inform or recommend, but a person keeps the ability to understand, question, and override it. Accountability then rests with whoever holds that authority.

> *Responsibility must track control. No one should answer for an outcome they had no real power to shape, and no one should hand a decision of consequence to a system that can answer for nothing.*

5. Integrity and honest attribution.

Scholarship has always advanced by synthesis. Every scholar's judgment is a meld of others' work. Our norms ask us to credit the specific sources of key ideas, without requiring us to trace every influence that shaped our thinking: our education and experience enable us to stand behind the result. AI tools strain this settlement. They can reproduce specific, citable work while stripping the markers that would let anyone trace it, and it places no accountable person behind what it produces. Integrity means that we are responsible for supplying what AI cannot. Where an idea or a fact has a source, we are obliged to look for it, not merely to credit it when it happens to be visible; a claim we cannot trace is an unchecked claim, not an unowned one. And where AI has shaped our work, we say so.

> *Responsibility cannot be handed off to a tool; credit belongs to the judgement we bring to what it produces.*

6. Transparency and trust.

Teaching, research, and collegial work rest on trust, and trust depends on being clear about how work is produced. We are open about how and where AI contributes, in a manner appropriate to the context; the line between minor assistance and a contribution that shapes the work is one that disciplines and instructors have to draw. This transparency runs in both directions. The university should be as open with its community about its own use of AI in decisions that affect people as it asks individuals to be.

> *We disclose AI's role, and we prefer a culture of openness and trust to one that treats people as suspects.*

7. Access, equity, and inclusion.

Towson commits to access, equity, and student success on a multicultural campus. Used thoughtfully, AI can widen participation, extending access, drafting support, translation, and other assistance to students who have too often been underserved. Left to the market it will just as easily deepen divides, because the most capable tools cost money and because AI can carry bias into what it produces.

> *We choose uses that broaden opportunity, we work to keep student access to the tools a course requires, and we guard against the biases AI can introduce.*

8. Responsible stewardship.

In our work, we hold data and we make decisions that affect the people we serve, and AI draws on a wider world of resources and labor to do its work. It can help us serve our community better. It can also mishandle sensitive information, and its benefits come with real costs: the energy and environmental resources its infrastructure consumes, the often-unseen human labor that trains it, and, closer to home, the effect on colleagues whose work our choice to adopt these tools may reshape.

> *We protect people's data, keep human judgment in decisions that affect people, weigh what AI use means for the people who do the work, and treat its material and human costs as our concern rather than someone else's problem.*

The Principles Across Our Mission

In teaching. Our aim is to develop human judgment, not to produce finished work. Instructors decide whether and how AI figures in their courses, according to the standards of their discipline and learning outcomes; prohibiting it is as legitimate a choice as requiring it. Students are entitled to know clearly what each course expects. Where AI use is required, it should be integral to the learning rather than incidental. Requiring a tool also means ensuring it is provided, or its cost made known before students enroll; where a student still cannot access it, the outcome is met through support rather than a lower bar. Instructors should not ask students to put their own or others' personal work into tools that do not protect it. Where it is relevant to a course, AI literacy is worth teaching, including a clear-eyed sense of what these tools can and cannot do, alongside the forms of practice and productive struggle a field depends on.

In research. AI is a legitimate research instrument, and using it well is part of good scholarship. As with any instrument, human authors remain accountable for the validity and

integrity of their work. AI is not an author; authorship carries responsibilities only a person can discharge. We treat AI-assisted results as findings to check and characterize, not to trust, and we check what AI gives us before it enters the record: a reference we have not verified is not a citation. For human subjects research, we disclose proposed uses of AI in research to the Institutional Review Board. We disclose material AI use as the norms of our field, venue, and funder require, and we document our methods, so others can follow and, where the tools allow, reproduce them. We use AI to accelerate the work while keeping the interpretive judgment at the heart of scholarship. And we honor the terms under which data and others' unpublished work are entrusted to us: confidential manuscripts, proposals under review, and protected data do not go into tools that would expose them.

In service and administration. Where we use AI in service and administration, we use it to reduce burden, not to offload responsibility. We do not enter confidential personnel or student data into tools not approved for it, and we follow the university's data-protection requirements. In decisions that materially affect a person's education, employment, or standing, including admission, hiring, the promotion and tenure process, and aid, a responsible person makes the decision and can be held accountable for it. If AI tools are used to assist such decisions, its effect is examined for bias before deployment and reviewed again as the tool or the use changes. We are transparent, in a manner appropriate to the context, when AI materially shapes an official decision or communication. And much of this work is carried out by staff, whose jobs these tools can change; their perspective belongs in the decision to adopt them.

In professional preparation. Some programs prepare students for professions (for example, teaching, nursing, social work) that carry duties of care toward the people they will serve, including minors, and standards set by external accreditors and licensure boards. In these programs, using AI well includes learning the legal and ethical obligations of the field, protecting the data of the people students serve, and modeling the practice students will carry into it. Students on placement are also bound by the rules of the site that hosts them, which may differ from Towson's; programs should prepare students to ask what applies rather than assume.

What This Asks of Each of Us

These are shared aspirations, not assigned duties, and they add no obligations beyond those already in university policy.

Faculty are best placed to set and communicate the expectations for their own courses and scholarship, including any decision to limit or exclude AI, and, where they choose to, helping students develop the judgment to use these tools well.

Students are asked to follow the expectations set for each course, as well as research and creative projects; they are asked to be honest about whether and how they use AI, and to take responsibility for their own learning.

Chairs and deans can support how these principles are specialized within each discipline, work toward fair access to the tools a course requires, and respond proportionately (e.g., through dialogue where a student is learning, and through the academic integrity process where the code is broken).

The university works to extend to its community the same transparency and accountability these principles ask of individuals. It works to see that any AI-related tools a course requires are provided, or that their cost is disclosed in advance and handled as other required course materials are, rather than falling to students as an unplanned personal expense. Careful adoption review and timely answers are both obligations, and the depth of review should correspond to what is at stake. A review with no clock becomes a prohibition that no one decided, and no one can appeal.

A Living Statement

Artificial intelligence tools and our practices around them are evolving quickly, and this statement will evolve with them. It is authored and maintained by the AI Institute. It has not been adopted as university policy; it is offered to the community for discussion and will be revised as understanding matures and as people respond. The Institute will keep it current, convene the continuing conversation, and develop a companion implementation guide — disclosure norms, model syllabus language, tool guidance — that puts these principles to work. We welcome feedback from across the university. These principles are a starting point for a shared conversation, not the last word.

About this draft

The initial draft of this statement was prepared by Alexei Kolesnikov, Director of the Towson University AI Institute, at the request of the college deans, for review by the Institute's leadership team and subsequent discussion with the deans. The draft was reviewed and edited by the AI Institute leadership team. In keeping with the transparency the draft describes, we include a statement from Alexei Kolesnikov about the initial draft.

This draft draws on several generative AI statements, such as Ohio University's Center for Teaching and Learning statement on generative AI, the Leiden Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Mathematics, and existing departmental statements, including the one by the TU Department of English. It also reflects wider conversations about academic values and human dignity in scholarship, and in public life I had with many of his colleagues.

This draft was written with the assistance of an AI system, used as a research and drafting aid. I set the structure, made the judgment calls, and take responsibility for the result. The text was also read repeatedly against its likely objections: from faculty who want no part of AI in academic work, from colleagues who think the university is moving too slowly, and from those who would ask by what authority a statement like this is issued at all. I chose to change the text where those objections resonated.