SOAS statement on the use of generative artificial intelligence

The capacity for artificial intelligence (AI) to create content like humans (generative AI) has been developing rapidly. This dramatic change has been popularised by the recent introduction of generative AI applications such as Open AI's ChatGPT.

New forms of generative AI pose substantial challenges and uncertainties for learning and teaching in higher education, especially regarding the maintenance of academic integrity.

The increasing prevalence of AI in society means that prohibiting students' use of AI tools is unlikely to be effective. As educators, we should approach the use of AI tools with a critical lens, but foster a long-term conversation about the effects of AI in collaboration with students, employers and others.

Our institutional guidance on the use of generative AI tools such as Open AI's ChatGPT at SOAS is developing alongside AI itself. This statement discusses current debates in higher education related to AI and provides recommendations.

AI and higher education

Much of the public discussion over the response in higher education to AI tools focuses on the way we educate.

The challenge of generative AI heightens the importance of authentic assessment. Authentic assessment refers to assessment that in some part:

- Relates to real world tasks
- Allows for the expression of student voice
- Encourages reflection, decision-making and critical thinking
- Focuses on learning as process rather than outcome
- Has meaning for students beyond an assigned grade

Assessment can all too often ask students to recount theory generated by others or to compare one theory to another. More meaningful assessment could involve the interrogation of theories and material based on students' own practices and frameworks of reference. As such, assessments would challenge or develop students' own personal understandings and practices.

This kind of assessment is difficult for AI to respond to as it requires the answer to come from the students' experience and develops student agency beyond the accumulation of knowledge.

For teaching at SOAS, any threat to traditional modes of assessment is considered alongside opportunities to make assessment more authentic. For example:

- Arabic studies may look at the subject material and ask students to relate it to their own lives or the world in the future
- Museum studies may well not only ask students to write essays about the significance of objects, but why such objects are significant to the student, their wider communities, or whether objects are ethically displayed

- Language learners might actually practice their language in active learning sessions and be assessed in groups, with assessment elements that reflect on the speaking experience and/ or personal learning journey they have had
- Any subject that involves performance might not only require writing about that performance but also includes the performance

Rather than prohibiting the use of AI writing tools altogether, the approach in higher education should be to equip students with the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate the information an AI tool provides. This should be considered alongside the commercial agenda of tech companies and the bias of the writing tools, and our teaching should help students to develop skills to reflect critically on this information (and on information from increasingly accessible sources).

Recommendations

Encourage digital literacy

SOAS should promote digital literacy in general, and AI literacy in particular, and support students and staff in gaining a deeper understanding of its use in higher education.

A process for monitoring and evaluating the use of AI writing tools should be revised regularly to ensure that these tools are being used in line with established university guidelines and expectations.

Learning and teaching staff should explore generative AI tools for teaching and assessment critically and with caution.

Staff should ensure that any data collected by AI writing tools and used in staff or student work is handled in accordance with data protection regulations and other applicable legislation.

Emphasise academic integrity

Across SOAS, students undergo academic integrity training, and that training will be revised regularly, focusing on the value of developing integrity in academic and life endeavours.

Provide clear guidelines

Assessments should include clear guidelines for the use of AI writing tools, including the types of content or occasions that are appropriate for the use of such tools.

Focus on assessment design

Assessment and its associated learning activities should be designed to be 'authentic.' Authentic assessment make it more difficult for generative AI to create content that students can submit as their own work.

Assessments, including traditional essays, should include content requirements that make is more difficult for students to rely on AI tools.

Detailed staff and student guidance has been created to support this approach which can be accessed here.

This guidance provides clear guidelines for AI tool usage in assessments, highlighting when and how these tools can be used responsibly, while sending a clear message that assessments should not be generated using AI.

By setting expectations, we aim to promote a culture of responsible AI usage among our staff and students.