ANUSA's Generative AI Report

A REPORT ON STUDENT USE AND PERSPECTIVES ON GENERATIVE AI AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY EDAN HABEL AND CHARLOTTE CARNES

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a student-led survey on the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools at the ANU. The survey was conducted in mid-2024 and captures responses from 378 students across all levels of study and disciplines.

Findings show that GenAI is already embedded in the learning practices of many students. Most respondents who use these tools report using them to clarify ideas, develop structure in writing, or seek feedback, especially when traditional support was less accessible. For others, use remains occasional, hesitant, or avoided altogether. Student responses consistently highlighted both the value and the risks of GenAI with concerns centred around fairness, skill development, and unclear institutional expectations.

Thoughtful and reflective use, what we refer to as *critical engagement*, is what we consider to be a mode of using these tools that enhances higher-order thinking and does not supplant the academic skills that students come to university to learn.

Students are not expecting a free pass to use GenAI for their assessments, but they are asking for clarity, equity, and guidance. This report outlines how ANU can support meaningful learning amid the use of GenAI tools, and offers practical recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term action.

Introduction

The arrival of ChatGPT in late 2022 marked a turning point in the public perception and use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Since then, the use of generative GenAI tools, including Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini and Claude, has become increasingly visible in universities. Their rapid adoption has sparked concern across the tertiary education sector, particularly around assessment integrity and the future of academic skills. Despite student use being the focus of this matter, much of the existing discussion has taken place without student voices at the centre.

This report seeks to address that gap. In mid-2024, in our capacity as elected members of the ANU Student Association's Student Representative Council, we conducted a survey to better understand how students are using GenAI tools, and what their perspectives are on GenAI at university. Our aim was not to resolve the debate over GenAI, but to reflect the complexity of student perspectives, and provide a starting point for a more informed and collaborative dialogue.

<u>Six institutional principles</u> on the use of GenAI were endorsed by ANU's Academic Board in mid-2023, offering high-level guidance on responsible engagement. Around the same time, Universities Australia <u>submitted to a</u> <u>federal inquiry</u> about the need for students to be educated in both the practical and ethical dimensions of GenAI to be prepared for future workplaces. ANU Library has published an evolving set of best-practice resources, but a nuanced university-wide perspective is not clear.

Policy discussions tend to frame GenAI in terms of risk, particularly in relation to plagiarism and authorship. Our findings suggest a more varied picture: one in which GenAI can be embedded in student learning, not just used to generate assessable content. Some students use it as a source of feedback; for others GenAI tools raise concerns about fairness, over-reliance, or breaching university policy. What emerges is not a simple binary of acceptance or rejection of these tools.

We believe that understanding the spectrum of perspectives, as well as understanding how GenAI tools can be used to enhance learning, is key to moving forward. Students are not expecting a free-for-all where they can delegate all their academic labour to chatbots, but they *are* asking for clarity, support, and a sensible application of existing academic values. This report provides evidence for this perspective, and recommendations to guide future work.

Methods

In this study, we administered a survey to members of the ANU Students' Association (ANUSA) to investigate their use and perceptions of GenAI at ANU. Based on discussion amongst the authors, and consultation with students and academics, questions were devised to cover a broad range of issues. The survey instrument was created in Qualtrics. After a pilot survey was shared with a few students, the survey was streamlined to omit a large proportion of the initial questions. The predicted time to complete the final survey was around 7 minutes.

The survey was shared through all ANUSA social media channels and through the weekly newsletter. The authors also independently shared links on social media to student groups and put up posters containing the link to the survey around campus. The survey prompted participants to consent to their anonymised responses being used in a report and shared by ANUSA. The survey was open from 9th of August 2024 to the 10th of September 2024.

The survey comprised both closed- and open-ended questions, three demographic questions, a consent question, and a screening question to verify student status. The demographic questions allowed for stratification of responses by three metrics, 1) international versus domestic student status, 2) program level (postgraduate coursework, postgraduate HDR and undergraduate), and 3) primary College of study. The survey used branching logic, to ensure that questions not relevant to a program level–e.g., assignments for HDR students–were not asked of those participants.

All questions, except for the consent and verification questions, were optional. After screening the responses for valid consent and student status, a total 378 final responses remained. Open-ended responses were coded using thematic codes. Regular meetings between the coders were held to develop the themes, and the coding of each question was iterated on by each coder. A chi-square test was used in the Qualtrics interface, where p < 0.05 was used to identify any statistically significant differences between subgroups.

Results

Demographics

We received 378 valid survey responses. We compared two categories of demographics against the ANU Student Load at the preceding census date to the survey. Our international and domestic student counts are biased towards domestic students (76% in survey compared to 61% at ANU). For program level, our survey over-represents undergraduate students by about 10%.

	Survey count	Survey	ANU Student
			$Load^1$
Total	378		
International	91	24%	39%
Domestic	262	76%	61%
Higher Degree by	42	11%	11%
Research			
Undergraduate	244	65%	54%
Postgraduate	88	24%	33%
Coursework			

Table 1 - Demographics of respondents compared to ANU student load

The survey included a fairly even distribution between students from both HASS and STEM, as determined by College breakdown. Students were also asked for their primary School or institute of study, which would have afforded more precision with this categorisation, however, this section was not compulsory and often left blank.

	Count	Percentage
Total	378	100%
College of Arts and Social	94	25%
Sciences (CASS)		
College of Business and	37	10%
Economics (CBE)		
College of Asia Pacific (CAP)	47	13%
College of Law (CoL)	34	9%
Total HASS	212	57%
College of Science (CoS)	79	21%
College of Engineering	51	14%
Computer Science and		
Cybernetics (CECC)		
College of Health and Medicine	28	8%
(CHM)		
Total STEM	158	43%
'Other' or no response	2	<1%

Table 2 - Breakdown of respondents by ANU College

¹ Based on the second half 2024 census period provided as headcount by ANU Planning and Service Performance Division

Use of GenAl

Around 25% of respondents have never used GenAI tools, this is consistent with 26% of respondents saying that they do not use GenAI tools in another questions, and 33% responding 'never' to the question "to what extent do you use GenAI at University?". Of the GenAI tools used by respondents, ChatGPT was the most common, at 71%, followed by 15% who use Microsoft 365 CoPilot (CoPilot), a service paid for by the ANU. Of the 56 respondents who selected that they use CoPilot, 83% did not respond "Paid tools that ANU has licensed" to the next question.

Of those who selected 'Other' to "Which GenAl tools have you used", the most common response was Perplexity AI, a chatbot using various LLMs, which cites literature in its responses. The second most common 'Other' response was Grammarly AI, a tool for proofreading writing in English in real-time.

	Count	Percentage
Total	378	100%
ChatGPT	267	71%
I have never used GenAI tools	94	25%
Microsoft 365 CoPilot	56	15%
Gemini	48	13%
Claude	43	11%
Other	41	11%

Table 3 - Which GenAI tools have you used? – Selected Choice

	Count	Percentage
Total	378	100%
Free	242	64%
Paid tools not licensed by ANU	64	17%
Paid tools that ANU has	13	3%
licensed		
Other	1	$<\!\!1\%$

Table 4 - Do you use free or paid GenAI tools? – Selected Choice

	Count	Percentage
Total	378	100%
For everything	14	4%
Often	75	20%
Sometimes	84	22%
Rarely	81	21%
Never	123	33%
Prefer not to say	1	$<\!1\%$

Table 5 - To what extent do you use GenAI at University? – Selected Choice

Perspective on ANU Policy

Respondents were asked, "How would you characterise the general orientation that has been revised or created in response to GenAI?" To make this question applicable across program levels, a clarification was added: "This may include what has been stated by your lecturers, tutors or supervisors." To simplify analysis, the options 'very cautious' and 'cautious' were grouped together, as were 'very enthusiastic' and 'enthusiastic'.

A college-level breakdown showed that 46% of HASS students responded 'cautious', compared to 34% of STEM students. When broken down by program level, there was an increase from 16% to 36% in 'Don't know' responses from the HDR cohort for this question.

	Total		CASS	CASS		CBE		CAP			Total	
											HASS	
Cautious	153	41%	46	49%	18	49%	18	38%	16	47%	98	46%
Indifferent	28	8%	2	2%	4	11%	2	4%	3	9%	11	5%
Enthusiastic	35	9%	4	4%	6	16%	4	9%	2	6%	16	8%
Don't know	67	18%	22	23%	4	11%	9	19%	5	15%	40	19%
A mix of	89	24%	20	21%	5	14%	14	30%	8	24%	47	22%
caution and												
enthusiasm												
$Total^2$	378	100%	94	25%	37	10%	47	13%	34	9%	212	57%

Table 6 – "How would you characterise the general orientation of ANU policies that have been revised or created in response to GenAI" – breakdown by college, HASS

	Total		CECO	CECC		CHM			Total	
									STEM	1
Cautious	153	41%	16	31%	12	43%	25	32%	53	34%
Indifferent	28	8%	5	10%	6	21%	6	8%	17	11%
Enthusiastic	35	9%	9	18%	1	4%	9	11%	19	12%
Don't know	67	18%	5	10%	4	14%	18	23%	27	17%
A mix of	89	24%	16	31%	5	18%	21	27%	42	27%
caution and										
enthusiasm										
$Total^2$	378	100%	51	14%	28	8%	79	21%	158	43%

Table 7 - "How would you characterise the general orientation of ANU policies that have been revised or created in response to GenAI" – breakdown by college, STEM

	Total		UG	UG		PG CW		
Cautious	153	41%	105	43%	38	43%	14	33%
Indifferent	28	8%	22	9%	4	5%	2	5%
Enthusiastic	35	9%	21	9%	12	14%	2	5%
Don't know	67	18%	39	16%	14	16%	15	36%
A mix of	89	24%	60	24%	21	24%	9	21%
caution and								
enthusiasm								
$Total^2$	378	100%	247	65%	89	24%	42	11%

Table 8 – "How would you characterise the general orientation of ANU policies that have been revised or created in response to GenAl" – breakdown by program level

² 'Total' in this row is represented as the percentage of this group of the whole population

Likert Scales

A three-point Likert scale was used to gauge agreement with several statements, presented to respondents as a question matrix. Three sets of statements were shown on separate pages. Options were also provided for 'prefer not to say' and 'N/A'. The number of responses selecting these options varied significantly across the questions. Reponses for each value are expressed here as a simple percentage of the total number of responses for a given question. The question matrices were not required for survey completion, so the total number of responses for a given question my vary by up to 20.

Learning

The first set of questions were intended to gauge student agreement with statements about using GenAI tools in learning. These questions were designed to match the most common use cases for these tools at university, as well as to explore any direction a student may have from the University when it comes to the use of these tools.



Survey Responses - GenAl for Learning

Figure 1 - Summary of responses to statements about GenAl for learning

Between HASS and STEM disciplines, the responses to the question "I have concerns about whether GenAI responses give accurate information" were relatively consistent. 85% of HASS students responded 'agree', compared to 88% of STEM students. A clear distinction between responses can be found between program level, where 10% of HDR students responded 'disagree', compared to 0% of Postgraduate Coursework and 3% of Undergraduate students.

	Total		HASS		STEM		UG		PG CW		HDR	
Agree	310	86%	170	85%	135	88%	208	87%	71	87%	31	76%
Neutral	38	11%	24	12%	14	9%	24	10%	8	10%	6	15%
Disagree	10	3%	4	2%	4	3%	6	3%	0	0%	4	10%
Prefer not to	1	$<\!\!1\%$	1	$<\!\!1\%$	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
say												
N/A	3	< 1%	1	$<\!1\%$	0	0%	1	$<\!\!1\%$	2	2%	0	0%
$Total^3$	362	100%	200	55%	153	42%	239	66%	82	23%	41	11%

Table 9 – Likert responses to "I have concerns about whether GenAI responses give accurate information", breakdown by discipline, program level

There are clear differences in responses to the question "I know what ANU expects of me when it comes to using GenAI in learning". 34% of students from HASS colleges responded 'disagree', as opposed to 19% in STEM colleges. There was also a clear difference between HDR students and the whole population, with 40% responding 'disagree', compared to 28% for the whole population.

	Total		HASS		STEM		UG		PG CW		HDR	
Agree	133	37%	67	34%	65	42%	94	40%	33	40%	6	15%
Neutral	107	30%	54	27%	52	34%	71	30%	24	30%	12	30%
Disagree	99	28%	67	34%	29	19%	64	27%	19	23%	16	40%
Prefer not to	4	$<\!\!1\%$	2	1%	0	0%	2	$<\!1\%$	2	2%	0	0%
say												
N/A	17	3%	9	5%	7	5%	7	3%	4	5%	6	15%
$Total^4$	360	100%	199	55%	153	42%	238	$\overline{66\%}$	82	23%	40	11%

Table 10 – Likert responses to "I know what ANU expects of me when it comes to using GenAI in learning", breakdown by discipline, program level

³ 'Total' in this row is represented as the percentage of this group of the whole population

⁴ 'Total' in this row is represented as the percentage of this group of the whole population

Writing



Survey Responses - GenAl for Writing

Figure 2 - Summary of responses to statements about GenAI for writing

The responses to the question "I know what ANU expects of me when it comes to using GenAI for writing" had an overall 'agree' response rate of 45%, however, only 23% of HDR students responded 'agree' to this question. Further, the proportion of respondents saying 'disagree' or 'neutral' in response to this question, differed significantly, between groups.

	Total		HASS		STEM		UG		PG CW		HDR	
Agree	155	45%	83	44%	70	47%	105	46%	41	52%	9	23%
Neutral	90	26%	41	22%	46	31%	59	26%	17	22%	14	35%
Disagree	88	26%	59	31%	27	18%	54	24%	19	24%	15	38%
Prefer not to	4	$<\!\!1\%$	1	$<\!\!1\%$	0	0%	1	$<\!\!1\%$	0	0%	0	0%
say												
N/A	11	3%	5	3%	6	4%	7	3%	2	3%	2	5%
$Total^5$	348	100%	189	54%	149	43%	226	65%	82	23%	40	11%

Table 11 – Likert responses to "I know what ANU expects of me when it comes to using GenAI in writing", breakdown by discipline, program level

⁵ 'Total' in this row is represented as the percentage of this group of the whole population

Research

Survey Responses - GenAl for Research



Figure 3 - Summary of responses to statements about GenAI for writing

Responses to the question "I can tell when I am reading text written by GenAI" were almost identical when comparing HASS and STEM respondent groups. Differences between groups separated by program level are not statistically significant for this question.

	Total		HASS		STEM		UG		PG CW		HDR	
Agree	140	41%	77	41%	61	41%	95	42%	29	37%	16	41%
Neutral	126	37%	66	36%	57	38%	88	39%	24	31%	14	36%
Disagree	66	20%	36	20%	29	19%	37	16%	19	27%	8	21%
Prefer not to	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
say												
N/A	10	3%	7	4%	2	1%	5	2%	4	5%	1	3%
Total ⁶	342	100%	186	54%	149	43%	225	66%	76	22%	39	11%

Table 12 – Likert responses to "I can tell when I am reading text written by GenAI", breakdown by discipline, program level

⁶ 'Total' in this row is represented as the percentage of this group of the whole population

Long-Response Questions

The last three questions of the survey asked respondents three long-response questions: "What do you think is most valuable about using GenAI at university?", "What do you think is most problematic about using GenAI at University?" and "Is there any other comment you might like to add?". We will refer to these sections as "valuable", "problematic", and "other comment" for the rest of this report. Some of the responses were short statements, while others were quite extensive responses. Table 13 summarises the length of responses to each question. This table illustrates that around 15% of the responses to each of these questions were two sentences or more.

	Valuable		Probl	ematic	Other comment		
Any length response	249	$100\% \ (66\%)$	257	100%~(68%)	132	100%~(35%)	
Response above 10 words	137	55%	163	63%	97	73%	
Response above 25 words	51	20%	67	26%	62	47%	

Table 13 – Response word count to long-response questions. The number in brackets represents the percentage of any length response as a proportion of total respondents

How Students Are Using GenAl to Support Learning

Responses were categorised into four overarching themes. Some responses were placed into multiple categories, as respondents often included multiple statements in a single response, or certain statements contained keywords applicable to different themes. Table 14 provides a summary of the number of responses in each theme and their corresponding percentage of the total responses to this question.

Theme		
Learning and language support	134	56%
Research enhancement and technical assistance	66	27%
Administrative support and task efficiency	46	18%
Idea generation and discussion	46	18%

Table 14 – Response summary to 'What do you think is most valuable about using GenAI at university'. Percent values are percentages of comments under this theme relative to the total number of responses. Some comments are coded to multiple themes.

Learning and Language Support

Learning and language support is the most common theme for this question. GenAI is cited as a support to students that fills perceived gaps in teaching or supports students who are hesitant to seek help. Respondents referred to using GenAI to summarise complex concepts from their lectures or readings, particularly when time-pressed or when support from educators isn't immediately available.

"Summarising readings when time-pressed, providing immediate, personally tailored answers to questions when lecturers aren't available or whilst watching recorded lectures."

Students mentioned alternate explanations for complex ideas as especially helpful for neurodivergent learners, or those working in a second language. These responses illustrate how GenAI has provided them with an accessible and adaptive means of support, addressing specific barriers that are not overcome otherwise.

"It is incredibly responsive to your own circumstances and needs in learning and understanding concepts, and far more individualized than most other learning options ... even if it is sometimes wrong or can't answer complicated things."

"...being able to interrogate it and ask questions to clarify my understanding of something has been invaluable, especially as someone with ADHD who struggles with written/lecture content."

Second language learners also framed GenAI as a valuable tool when producing written work, bridging existing skills and knowledge with the academic expectations in English:

"Students who have English as their second language cannot compete with Aussie students when it comes to writing. Using GenAI has helped me in communicating the points I had in my head, in a cohesive manner."

Research Enhancement and Technical assistance

Students highlighted how GenAl supports the research process in the early stages. Many described using it to find, filter, and summarise large amounts of academic material, especially when starting literature reviews or essay planning.

"It could be used to help with searching articles and help you to decide if they are worth reading. There is so much literature out there that is hard to cope with."

These responses do not suggest GenAI is replacing research tasks, but rather helping students manage the scale of academic reading; these tools are used to prioritise resources, clarify scope and save time so that reading can be more targeted and purposeful.

Several respondents also referenced GenAI's utility for planning and initiating tasks, particularly when overcoming writer's block or managing multiple deadlines.

"Time saving and task prioritisation! So useful for beginning assignments and getting over the initial hump of starting assignments."

Finally, students cited the tools' usefulness for technical tasks, including coding and data formatting. These uses were framed as practical and efficiency oriented.

"It's amazing for writing simple code. I use it frequently to remind myself of the correct syntax for a particular coding task"

"It is a good tool for sorting through tedious data and reformatting long documents"

Administrative Support and Task Efficiency

This theme captures how students find GenAI valuable for routine, low-stake tasks with a focus on improving productivity. 21 out of 46 responses specifically mention "efficiency", often in relation to menial or administrative tasks. While some uses are clearly non-academic such as composing emails, social media content, job applications, others blue the line between administrative and academic work, particularly where GenAI is used for formatting, citation, or task structuring.

"As a person that struggles immensely with organising my thoughts I find it very useful to ask for essay plans or an overview of my chosen topic."

"It helps a lot with matching referencing requirements. I always get confused between APA and Chicago"

Several students specifically noted their hesitation around using GenAI in academic contexts, citing a lack of clarity on institutional expectations.

"I think it would also be great for summarising literature but haven't used it because I am uncertain of how ANU views this use."

Idea Generation and Discussion

Students described GenAI as a tool for facilitating the discussion and development of their ideas, both at the beginning of a task and during the writing process. Responses suggest that GenAI acts as a brainstorming partner or sounding board, especially when students feel unsure or lack access to immediate feedback.

"It's a platform to bounce off. Can stimulate more nuanced ideas and bring in perspectives not thought of before."

Many respondents described using GenAI to test their understanding of course material or to help them selfevaluate the quality and direction of their work.

"I use ChatGPT to ask questions I wouldn't want to ask my supervisor due to a) using up too much of their time and b) looking like I don't know what I'm doing!"

"Most of the time, GenAI gives me more detailed feedback than my teachers can. I always get negatively commented on for grammar and being concise. I also learn new words from it. I am more thorough with my assignments"

In some cases, students positioned GenAI as an accessible, judgment-free counterpart to traditional feedback mechanisms:

"It's a non-judgemental reader of my work."

"In an age where we are less inclined to collaborate with our peers beyond those we know, GenAI can act as a spring board for your ideas that lives in your pocket."

These comments reinforce a subtle nuance to why students may be using these tools. While the tools may be more accessible or instantaneous, there also seems to be a sense in which the tools provide feedback in a way that is less intimidating than interactions with peers or educators.

Together, these responses highlight the diverse and often constructive ways students are integrating GenAI into their academic practice. For many of the respondents, these tools offer a way to engage more confidently with the tasks set at university.

Concerns About GenAl's Impact on Learning and Integrity

Responses were categorised into four overarching themes. Some responses were placed into multiple categories, as respondents often included multiple statements in a single response, or certain statements contained keywords applicable to different themes. Table 15 provides a summary of the number of responses in each theme and their corresponding percentage of the total responses to this question.

Theme		
Education, academic integrity, and plagiarism	122	47%
Dependency, loss of critical thinking and skill development	114	44%
Misinformation and inaccuracy	63	25%
Ethical consideration and fairness	41	16%

Table 15 – Response summary to 'What do you think is most problematic about using GenAI at university'. Percent values are percentages of comments under this theme relative to the total number of responses. Some comments are coded to multiple themes.

Education, Academic Integrity, and Plagiarism

Plagiarism and academic integrity were the most frequently mentioned concerns. Many students were concerned that GenAI was being used by their peers to generate assignments in full or in part, raising fairness issues and threatening the perceived value of their own work.

"I worry that people will submit assessments partially or wholly written by AI."

"Short term, obviously undergrads will just use it to plagiarise assignments."

"It is destroying the integrity of student work. So many people use it for work I would put time and effort into, and I worry that these trends reflect poorly on my own work."

"If you subordinate knowledge creation to AI, why study at all?"

Some students viewed the tools themselves as inherently dishonest, citing the nature of LLM training as problematic:

"GenAI is inherently dishonest in both its use and its content."

"It is by nature a plagiaristic tool."

"The plagiarism concerns are obvious."

Several responses also pointed to institutional uncertainty or inconsistency as part of the problem. Students described educators who were either overly fearful or uninformed and a general lack of consistent guidance from the university.

"Concerns around academic integrity and lack of literacy surrounding GenAI from both students and teachers... I see this especially in CASS from my professors who see it as a complete threat to the system and disregard it rather than an asset to be used wisely"

"Most professors view the use of generative AI as a threat... I believe universities should focus on educating students on how to use generative AI to boost their productivity, rather than banning its use."

Dependency, Loss of Critical Thinking and Skill Development

Students were very clear that they were concerned about the use of GenAI at university degrading the quality of their own education and the education of their peers. This was both about the objective and the perceived quality of their degree.

"GenAI makes students less 'grad-ready', potentially weaking ANU and other institutions brand"

"I don't want my degree to hold less value because employers perceive GenAI to be commonly used at ANU, and I also don't want to be in classes with people who heavily rely on GenAI."

These concerns often centred around the idea of *skill atrophy*-that students may stop developing critical thinking or writing abilities if they overuse these tools:

"People stop learning how to think and they stop learning how to do the skills they came to uni to learn."

"It disables people from thinking or having agency over their words."

Some students framed a similar concern in broader philosophical terms, describing GenAI as eroding human expression and intellectual agency:

"It undermines art, it will destroy jobs, it saps our humanity from us. If the people who will become professional academics or artists or lawyers cannot write, who in our society can?"

"GenAI sweeps up and simplifies the richness and complexity of human communication, experience and knowledge. When we use it, we surrender a chance to think independently and critically. Uni is a place to push our knowledge, not to copy past summaries of other people's knowledge."

Even among students who acknowledged the benefits of GenAI, many expressed concerns that misuse could displace more legitimate learning practices:

"Using AI to write entire assignments is incredibly disingenuous and counterproductive to learning, and I worry it takes away from (to me) more legitimate uses such as proofreading..."

"People who are under pressure do not have the luxury of thinking about the skills they are sacrificing by delegating their thinking and creative process to something else."

Misinformation and Inaccuracy

Respondents raised doubts about the quality of the information that GenAI outputs. They pointed to the lack of source attribution, inaccuracies in generated responses, and confusion about how to verify information.

"It doesn't tell you where it learnt it's information so could be giving false or misleading information."

"It confidently gives incorrect information and a lot of students just repeat that information without fact checking it, or they get AI to fact check it."

Others raised concerns about its inability to accurately cite sources, which subsequently prevents students from properly referencing information in their work:

"GenAI is based on so much learning that it cannot attribute the sources of its though in such a way that students relying on that information would be able to fairly cite the source of the intellectual property (ideas)."

Ethical Consideration and Fairness

Numerous ethical concerns were shared by students, particularly in relation to the origin of training data and fairness. Concerns about the environment were present, but minimally cited compared to the significant focus on the ethics surrounding the training data and fairness of use. Several students described GenAI as amplifying existing inequalities between those with and without access, and between students confident in using the tools and those unsure.

"Any reliance on GenAI in this way [is] effectively compound plagiarism."

"I have had many lectures on the responsible use of AI in terms of acknowledging it to avoid plagiarism, but the fact that large language model (LLM) GenAIs like ChatGPT is fed off of material that is often stolen from real writers and thus IS plagiarism has never been mentioned."

Many respondents expressed frustration over GenAI creating an unfair academic environment where students with access to or knowledge about how to use these tools gain an advantage over those who do not.

"It creates an unfair playing field that doesn't assess students for their knowledge or abilities but instead their ability to manipulate software. It further creates a barrier, as some tools are paid."

Reflections on the Future of GenAl in University Education

The responses to this question were categorised into five overarching themes. There were fewer responses to this prompt, however a much larger proportion of these responses were two sentences or more. Some responses were placed into multiple categories, as respondents often included multiple statements in a single response, or certain statements contained keywords applicable to different themes. Table 15 provides a summary of the number of responses in each theme and their corresponding percentage of the total responses to this question.

Theme		
Educational policy and integration	49	37%
Resistance and cautious adoption	22	17%
GenAI as a tool for productivity	18	14%
Ethical concerns and environmental impact	17	13%
Skill development and learning	15	11%

Table 16 – Response summary to 'Is there any other comment that you might like to add?'. Percent values are percentages of comments under this theme relative to the total number of responses. Some comments are coded to multiple themes.

Educational Policy and Integration

Many responses recognised the rapid development of GenAI and the need for policies that not only address current challenges but also prepare for future advancements.

"I think the university really needs to be on it, because GenAI is going to develop fast and we need to not just have good policies but make sure students and academics know how to interact with it in a critical manner."

Several responses identified a mismatch between traditional assessments and the integration of GenAI. Some students viewed this as an opportunity to reimagine university testing methods:

"There should be more exploring different ways of doing assessment–not just making rules for how to do the same old assessment process. A lot of assessment, particularly essays and reports, are mechanical parroting. I'm not convinced they're an effective way of learning."

Additionally, many participants indicated a preference for education over regulation, emphasizing the importance of teaching students how to use GenAI effectively.

"Education in proper use of AI will be very important, so that people don't blindly trust it or use it as the lazy way out..."

"I'd love for my course tutors and lecturers to incorporate GenAl into the coursework so that I know how to utilise GenAl in a way that benefits my learning."

Resistance and Cautious Adoption

Some participants voiced hesitancy or discomfort about using GenAI due to potential repercussions, or unease with the opaqueness of its integration in technology:

"I'm scared to try using GenAl–I've avoided using it for anything in my life so I can't be accused of plagiarism."

"While I don't knowingly use AI, I realise that it is infiltrating all areas of technology and so I may be using it unknowingly."

Others described a sense of resignation–acknowledging that GenAI may become unavoidable, even if they were critical of the implications.

"A university exists not just for job-readiness but for intellectual development. While GenAI may increase productivity, it only worsens the intellectual enfeeblement of our students."

"I'm going to have to acquiesce eventually to using GenAI and LLMs, but not today."

GenAl as a Tool for Productivity

Like the 'valuable' question, students highlighted GenAI as a tool for efficiency and productivity but were more specific about the services they used. These were for coding, proofreading and grammar checks.

"I sometimes use ChatGPT to remind me of something I've forgotten. This is much better than searching Google."

"I support using AI to proofread my work. I consider this no different to using tools already in software like Microsoft Word".

Ethical Concerns and Environmental Impact

More students chose to highlight environmental concerns here, being critical of the high energy and resource consumption associated with GenAI.

"GenAI is developed highly unethically and is ravaging the planet. I don't believe it should be promoted ... without being transparent about the ongoing exploitation of labour and environmental resources"

"I really like the limited application of AI ... which helps me as a neurodivergent student to scaffold executive function-heavy tasks ... But I'm also really concerned about the environmental impact of GenAI in terms of energy and water usage."

Skill Development and Learning Impact

Students expressed frustration with peers who, in their view, relied too heavily on GenAI–potentially undermining learning outcomes and academic culture.

"Use of AI among my peers causes me angst... I'm suffering the consequences because I'm the one who uses their brain but no one cares if you do or don't"

"GenAI is useful for limited purposes, and I believe uncontrolled use in society will seriously erode one's ability to think"

Students are using GenAI in a variety of ways, with varying levels of confidence, understanding, and support. These patterns raise important questions about how learning can be shaped by these tools–what is being gained, what may be lost, and where the boundaries of responsible use lie. In the following discussion, we examine how students describe their engagement with GenAI. This may guide ways that ANU can respond constructively.

The results in this report reveal not only how students are using GenAI but also the concerns shaping that use. Students are navigating new tools with a clear focus on learning, whether that means seeking clarification, improving expression, or managing workload. The following discussion explores three interconnected aspects of this: how students describe their use of GenAI, what distinguishes reflective use from misuse, and how these tools can be used to contribute to higher-order thinking.

Discussion

Understanding How Students Use GenAl

This survey captures a broad range of student perspectives on GenAI, spanning disciplines and levels of study. While the extent and nature of use vary, students are commonly turning to GenAI to supplement rather than replace their learning. Many describe using these tools to clarify complex concepts, improve written expression, or act as a source of immediate feedback. In these cases, GenAI functions not as a shortcut but an accessible point of support-particularly for students navigating second-language learning or unfamiliar academic conventions.

However, this uptake is not without concern. A significant number of students expressed anxiety about fairness, skill development, and academic integrity. There is a perceived risk that GenAI could erode the value of individual learning, especially when used to complete assessments that rely on independent writing or critical reasoning. These tensions are compounded by uneven levels of awareness about which tools are available, how to use them effectively, and what constitutes appropriate use.

Critical Engagement as a Mode of Learning with GenAI

The most interesting difference in student responses is not about whether GenAI should be used, but *how*. What distinguishes constructive use from concerning use is not the tool itself but the student's mode of engaging with it. When students approach GenAI as a tool to test ideas, interrogate content, or refine their arguments, it becomes integrated into the academic process. These students describe GenAI as a peer or tutor-something that supports thinking, rather than replaces it. In contrast, when outputs are accepted passively and submitted for assessment with little modification, GenAI becomes a shortcut that bypasses meaningful academic effort.

This distinction is not always visible when looking from the outside, but it is evident in how students describe their practices. Critical engagement involves questioning the tool's suggestions, cross-checking information, and weaving outputs into their own thinking. Yet, this kind of engagement is not evenly distributed. Students with higher confidence or prior experience are more likely to take this reflective approach, while others express uncertainty or fear-especially in the absence of clear institutional guidance. In this way, critical engagement is not only a skill, but a product of broader conditions: cultural norms, peer behaviours, and educator messaging which shape whether students see GenAI as a legitimate part of their academic toolkit or a source of risk.

Higher-Order Thinking and the Enhancement of Learning

At its most productive, GenAI supports deeper learning. Rather than replacing student effort, it can create space for higher-order thinking by helping students explore concepts, organise thoughts, and rehearse their ideas. When used this way GenAI can enable students to think more broadly and ambitiously, especially when their use of the tools is intentional and self-aware.

Problems arise when GenAI is used to replace core academic tasks, drafting essays, constructing arguments, and solving problems without critical engagement. In such cases, foundational skills are displaced, and learning is diminished. However, many students already distinguish cognitive and mechanical labour. Tasks like formatting references or checking grammar are frequently cited as appropriate uses of GenAI, and some students also use it to navigate large volumes of reading. While there's a strong argument that students should engage directly with texts, GenAI can be used to prioritise and triage, pointing students toward the most pertinent sources to read, rather than replacing the need to read them. More significantly, students describe using GenAI as a kind of sounding board, posing questions, testing interpretations, or iterating through drafts. In these moments, GenAI does not replace thinking but facilitates it.

These results indicate that there is a model use case for using GenAI that navigates the concerns of institutions and students alike. Our following recommendations indicate how we think ANU can guide its students towards using these tools in a way that only enhances learning, not replaces it.

Recommendations

Short term

Educators should explore GenAI tools in the context of their own discipline.

Even brief experimentation can help educators better understand what these tools can and cannot do, and how students might already be using them.

Test a past exam or essay prompt into a GenAI tool and evaluate what it gets right and what it misses.

Conversations between students and educators about GenAI need to happen now.

Uncertainty gets in the way of productive engagement. Shared dialogue builds clarity faster than policy alone. Open a discussion in lectures or tutorials about how students are using GenAI and what guidance they need.

Institutional guidance should distinguish between critical engagement and inappropriate use.

Rather than simply listing what is allowed, policies should focus on what responsible, thoughtful use looks like.

Create a simple flowchart or one-page guide that distinguishes between appropriate support (e.g. grammar checks, discussion) and unacceptable substitution (e.g. generating and submitting full answers).

Medium term

Support should be provided to help students use GenAI critically and effectively.

Workshops, courses, or embedded resources that can help students develop the skills to use GenAI in ways that support learning rather than substitute it.

A Course, Wattle site or Pulse module that introduces students to GenAI's limitations, strengths, and good practices.

Develop discipline-specific exemplars of good GenAI use.

Concrete examples help to make informed decisions, illustrate what critical engagement looks like in specific disciplines.

One-page case study of GenAI per School, highlighting when it supports learning and when it undermines it.

Create space for peer-led learning and shared resource development.

Platforms or forums where students share strategies for ethical and effective use of GenAI can foster a healthy culture of experimentation and accountability.

A student-led wiki about how to use GenAI effectively and responsibly, similar to USyd's canvas site.

Long term

Policy needs to remain adaptable and aligned with evolving practice.

Rigid policies will quickly become outdated. Guidelines should be in step with how students and staff are appropriately using the tools.

Establish a GenAl advisory group with rotating student and staff membership to review emerging practices and how they match guidelines.

Treat GenAI as a practical set of tools, not a paradigm shift.

GenAI doesn't inherently pose a risk to education-but it does change things.

Existing frameworks around authorship, academic integrity, and the value of learning, remain relevant. They don't need reinvention, but they may need to be recontextualised.

Embed equity, transparency, and trust into the institutional GenAI strategy.

Equitable access to tools, clear communication, and shared responsibility will help ensure that GenAI improves the academic experience. ANU must lead by providing trusted, accessible platforms so students aren't forced to rely on opaque, third-party tools that may compromise their privacy or access. *Commit to building university-hosted resources that prioritise equity, student privacy and data sovereignty.*

Conclusion

This survey reflects a student body that is actively negotiating the role of GenAI in their education. Students are not uniformly for or against its use but are instead engaging with GenAI in diverse ways that range from reflective and productive, to passive or uncertain. What emerges is not necessarily a question of whether GenAI should be used, but under what conditions it meaningfully contributes to learning. GenAI is already embedded in some students' practice, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes effectively, but almost always with intention. The diversity of use we observed highlights not just a need for policy, but for shared understanding. Students are looking for guidance, not prohibition, and for tools that support learning without undermining its purpose. This report offers a foundation for institutional action rooted in student perspectives.

Author biographies

Edan Habel

Edan is a PhD candidate at the Research School of Chemistry and lives in Ngunnawal country. His research focuses on expanding computational and experimental tools to design proteins with novel functionality. He completed a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science in 2020 at the ANU. During his undergraduate studies, Edan was a member of the ANUSA SRC in 2017 as a General Representative and returned to the SRC as HDR Officer in 2023 after ANUSA began representing postgraduate students. He was the Postgraduate Member of ANU Council in 2024.

Charlotte Carnes

Charlotte is an honours student in the School of Philosophy living in Ngunnawal country. Her research concerns how national anxieties of citizenship and sovereignty are vested in the pregnant body and fetus. She completed a Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Languages in 2024 at the ANU. In 2024, Charlotte was Vice President of the ANU Students Association and a member of the ANUSA SRC. In her time as Vice President, she was also the undergraduate representative on ANU Academic Board.

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Glossary

ANU – Australian National University ANUSA – ANU Student's Association GenAI – Generative Artificial Intelligence LLM – Large Language Model HASS – Humanities and Social Sciences STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths HDR – Higher Degree by Research PG CW – Postgraduate Coursework UG – Undergraduate CoPilot – Microsoft 365 Copilot PSP – Planning, Service and Performance