

Spotlight on Student Use of Generative AI

Summer Sessions 2025



During Summer Sessions 2025, Learning Designer Lissa Shaman partnered with instructor Jorge González Casanova to integrate generative AI into SPAN 206: Oaxaca: Histories, Cultures, and Movements of Resistance.

Generative AI tools such as Google LM “Deep Dives” with AI Hosts and two required “Coach Conversations” were used to supplement readings and expand weekly discussions.

Integrating AI in SPAN 206



Clear guidelines for using generative AI ethically and responsibly were built into this course from the outset. When completing course projects, students were asked to describe how they used generative AI and to reflect critically on their use of AI tools. Thirty-three of the 34 enrolled students responded to the multiple choice and open-ended questions about AI use for both course projects.

Student responses indicate that many online learners are thinking critically about their own use of AI and how it impacts learning, the environment, and time it takes to complete their work. This overview highlights the tasks where students found AI tools most helpful and discusses the reasons some students chose not to use them.

Data is drawn from 33 students who reflected on their use of generative AI tools while completing course projects.

53%

Students used AI tools for the first project

30%

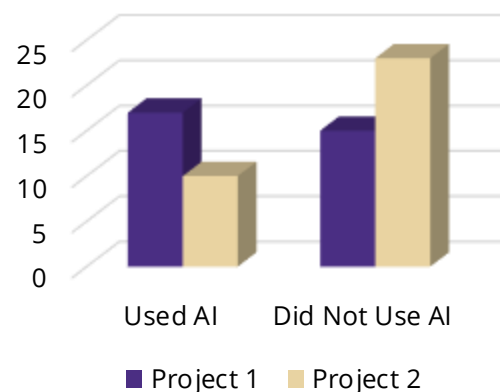
Students used AI tools for the second project

Student Perspectives on Using AI in the Course

“I think AI should be used in class as a tool since it is not going away anytime soon. I believe it can help expand ideas and give new insights.”

“I like that this project allowed the help of AI tools because I was initially against using AI for anything, but after this project, I understand that it is a helpful tool that can be used in many different ways.”

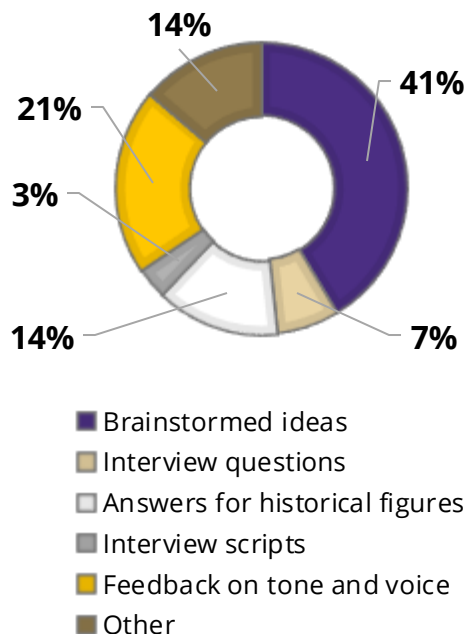
Number of Students Who Chose to Use AI on Course Projects



How Our Summer Session Students Used AI

SPAN 206 students were asked to describe how they used AI on two course projects through multiple choice questions and open-ended reflections.

Project 1: Historical Figure Interview



Across both course projects, students were most likely to report using AI tools for brainstorming. In Project 1, which involved creating materials for a mock interview with a historical figure, 41% of students reported using AI to brainstorm ideas and 21% used it to ask for feedback on the tone and voice of the historical figure.

For Project 2 where students designed a poster or multi-media presentation on an aspect of Oaxacan culture, 46% of students reported using AI tools for brainstorming ideas while 27% used AI for research and 20% for fact-checking.

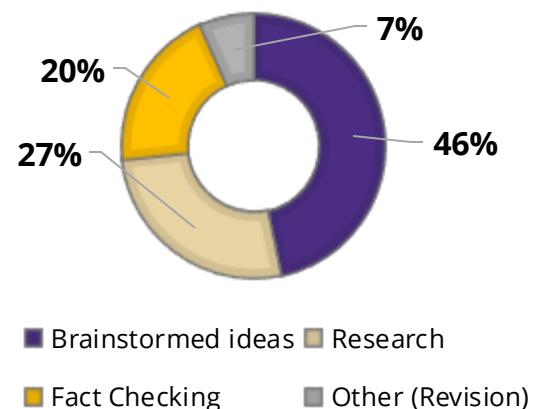
Notably, AI usage declined from 53% in Project 1 to 30% in Project 2. In many cases, this was due to students' strategic use of AI for different types of tasks, and greater confidence in their mastery of course materials by the end of the quarter.

Students Engaged Critically with AI

"Initially, the AI's tone for Juarez was a bit generic and overly heroic. It didn't fully capture the complexity of his legacy. For example, it glossed over the negative consequences of his reform laws on indigenous people.

I had to improve the content by specifically asking the AI to address the harmful effects of the Ley Lerdo, which led to a more nuanced and historically honest response."

Project 2: Culture Presentation



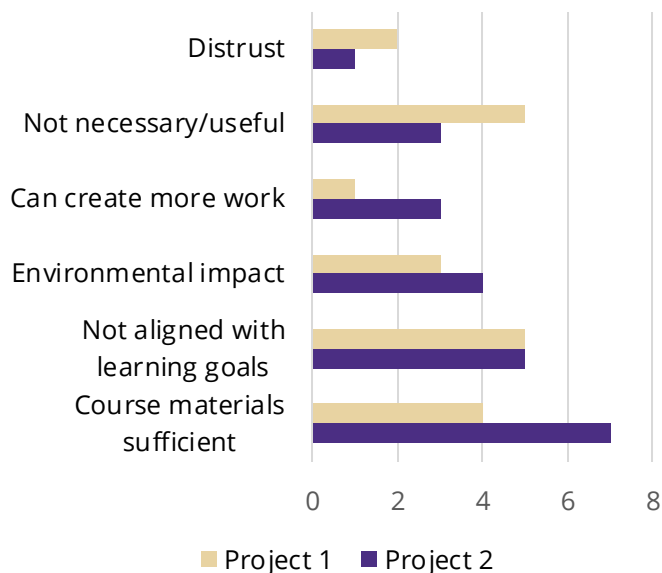
Student Decisions Not to Use AI

Some of the most compelling insights from this case study came from questions regarding why students chose not to use AI tools. Student reflections shed light on their attitudes toward AI usage, and their strategic decision-making around how and when to use it.

The most common reasons students provided for completing projects without AI were that course materials were sufficient, and that using AI tools would undermine their own learning objectives. Several students felt AI was unnecessary for their projects, while others worried it might create additional work due to the need to verify outputs.

A smaller number of students expressed broader concerns, citing environmental impacts or general distrust of AI. In the words of one student, “I’m not using that crap!”

Reasons for Not Using AI



The chart above shows reasons students gave for not using AI on Project 1 and Project 2 in response to open-ended questions. Some students gave multiple reasons. Qualitative responses were coded inductively and grouped by theme.

Student Reflections On Their Learning Objectives

“I chose not to use AI—not because I am opposed to it—in fact, it’s extremely helpful in certain cases—but because I wanted to really build my own perspective on our [historical] figure.”

“I believe that as students, depending on AI can hinder us from fully using our own knowledge, creativity, and originality, which are important skills to practice and develop, especially in college.”

This exploratory case study underscores the value of providing students with structured opportunities to engage with AI tools in their coursework and reflect critically on those experiences. When prompted, students shared nuanced perspectives on generative AI, shaped by their learning goals, ethical considerations, and practical concerns about completing assignments efficiently.

Our findings highlight the importance of continued collaboration with instructors and learning designers to collect data on how students use and perceive generative AI at the University of Washington.