The AI Challenge

How College Faculty Assess the Present and Future of Higher Education in the Age of AI

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Foreword by Lynn Pasquerella

President, American Association of Colleges and Universities

Higher education is continually evolving alongside transformative technologies, from the printing press and the blackboard to calculators, computers, and the internet. Yet, few innovations have entered our classrooms with the speed, scale, and impact of generative artificial intelligence. ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, and Copilot—once novel tools—have quickly become woven into everyday academic life. The speed of this transition invites not only attention but also candor as we consider how these technologies are shaping teaching, learning, and understanding.

Results from AAC&U's latest national survey of 1,057 faculty members, conducted in partnership with Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center, offer insight into how colleges and universities are navigating this pivotal moment. Across disciplines and institutional types, faculty express deep concern about the consequences of widespread use of GenAI. An overwhelming 95 percent of respondents believe these tools will increase students' overreliance on artificial intelligence, with three-quarters saying that impact will be substantial. Ninety percent worry that GenAI will diminish students' critical thinking skills, and 83 percent anticipate decreased student attention spans. These are not peripheral anxieties; they go to the heart of what higher education exists to cultivate—habits of mind such as critical analysis, reflection, persistence, and judgment.

Faculty also see GenAI reshaping their own work. Eighty-six percent say it is likely or extremely likely that these technologies will alter the role of those who teach in higher education, and nearly four in five believe the typical teaching model in their departments will be affected, often significantly. At the same time, concerns about academic integrity loom large. Seventy-eight percent report that cheating on their campus has increased since GenAI tools became widely available, and nearly three-quarters say they have personally confronted integrity issues involving student use of these technologies.

Taken together, these findings explain why nearly half of surveyed faculty view the future impact of GenAI in their fields as more negative than positive, while only one in five see it as more positive than negative. Yet, this is not a story of simple resistance to change. It is, instead, a portrait of a profession grappling seriously with how to uphold educational values in a rapidly shifting technological landscape.

Faculty skepticism reflects a principled concern for student learning and for the public purposes of higher education. It also reflects the reality that institutions have often adopted new technologies without sufficient guidance, shared norms, or investment in professional development. GenAI raises crucial questions about assessment and authorship, equity, accessibility, data privacy, and the future of expertise itself. Faculty are right to insist that these questions be addressed deliberately rather than reactively.

Consequently, this report should be read as an invitation to engage in institution-wide conversations about the use of AI in relation to learning goals, curricular design, pedagogical innovation, and academic integrity; and to develop clear and transparent policies grounded in evidence and values. We are grateful to the faculty who shared their experiences and perspectives, and to our partners at Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center for their collaboration. We hope this report will inform campus dialogue, guide policy, and spur collective action. The challenge before us is not whether GenAI will shape higher education, but whether we will shape its use in ways that strengthen learning, integrity, and the common good.

Introduction by Connie Book

President, Elon University

In this second higher education survey on issues related to artificial intelligence, Elon University and AAC&U provide important data about the expanding impact of AI on teaching and learning. Our January 2025 release of a survey of higher education leaders provided an important first benchmark as AI technologies began to take hold in academia. This year's survey of more than a thousand faculty members offers fresh insights about the role and impact of AI on higher education from those on the front lines of teaching and learning in the age of AI.

Faculty express deep concerns about AI's negative impact on learning outcomes, along with longer-term effects of AI systems on young adults' attention spans and the prospect that these learners could develop an overreliance on AI tools. More than three-quarters predict that AI will increase academic integrity concerns, and two-thirds believe it will diminish students' critical thinking skills. In parallel, most respondents expect AI to have a mixed or negative influence on students' overall well-being and career prospects in the next five years, reflecting a broad apprehension about the technology's long-term developmental impacts on young adults.

At the same time, faculty views are not uniformly pessimistic. Significant numbers acknowledge AI's potential to improve aspects of teaching and learning, including the customization of instruction, efficiency in course preparation, and the quality of assignments and research support. Moreover, 69 percent of faculty say they now incorporate AI-literacy topics – such as ethics, hallucinations, bias, privacy and transparency – into their courses, demonstrating growing efforts to prepare students for a world in which AI fluency will be essential.

In disrupted environments like this, the best anchoring strategy is to remain steadfast on core values. We at Elon University launched a series of initiatives promoting higher education's essential role in preparing people for the AI revolution. We began that effort by working with 140 educators in 48 countries to develop six principles to guide institutions in advancing digital and information literacy.

At the practical and implementation level, we collaborated with AAC&U and more than 150 scholars to create two Student Guides to AI covering such topics as how to think about research and writing in the Age of AI, how to cultivate curiosity and how to think about using AI in the context of studying and learning.

As universities and colleges grapple with some new realities for learning and scholarship, this report offers some crucial grounding. I hope it helps you put the situation at your own institution in a wider, national context.

Key Data Takeaways

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center conducted a survey of 1,057 U.S. faculty in November 2025, asking questions about the impact of Generative AI (GenAI) tools on their teaching, their students, and the future of higher education.

95%

of the faculty in this survey said GenAI's impact will be to **increase students' overreliance on these artificial intelligence tools**, including 75% who said the tools will have a lot of impact.

90%

said the use of GenAI will diminish students' critical thinking skills, including 66% who think GenAI will have a lot of impact.

83%

said the use of GenAI will **decrease student attention spans**, including 62% who thought GenAI will have a lot of impact.

86%

said they believe it is likely or extremely likely that the emergence of GenAI tools will **impact the work and role of those who teach in higher education.**

79%

think the typical teaching model in their department will be affected by GenAI tools at least to some extent, including 43% who said they believe the impact will be significant.

78%

said cheating on their campus has increased since GenAI tools have become widely available, including 57% who said it has increased a lot.

And 73% said they have personally dealt with academic integrity issues involving their students' use of GenAI.

Note: The term "GenAI" is used throughout the report and refers to "generative artificial intelligence tools" such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Copilot. These findings are based on a non-scientific sample of faculty known to the American Association of Colleges & Universities. The Methodology section has details of the composition of the sample.

SECTION 1:

Executive Summary

College and university faculty nationwide express concern and skepticism about how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is affecting faculty teaching practices and student performance across academic disciplines.

A new survey of 1,057 faculty by the American Association of Colleges & Universities and Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center shows the breadth and depth of the disruption GenAI is causing on campuses of all sizes. The vast majority of these professors **(86%) think the impact of GenAI tools on those who teach will be significant and transformative** or at least noticeable. Just 4% believe it will not amount to much.

This is the second in a series of surveys related to AI and higher education. It follows a similar canvassing of higher education leaders last year.

Overall, how do you think the increased use of Generative AI tools in your field will most likely affect the future of your students' careers over the next five years? The impact of generative AI tools will be:

49%

More **negative than positive**

20%

More **positive than negative**

20%

Equally positive and negative

11%

Don't know

Life on campus today with GenAI

Cheating and academic integrity issues

- 78% of these teachers said **cheating on their campus has increased** since GenAI tools have become widely available, including 57% who said it has increased a lot. About a fifth (18%) said they don't know what has happened to cheating on campus.

- 33% said they personally have had a lot of **academic integrity** cases in their courses and another 40% reported having at least a few such cases.

Lack of preparedness

- 59% of these teachers said they feel **their schools are not very or not at all prepared to use GenAI tools effectively** for preparing students for the future.

- 68% said their schools have **not prepared faculty for using GenAI** for effective teaching and mentoring students and a similar share says their schools have not prepared their faculty to use GenAI tools in their scholarship.

- 57% said their schools have **not prepared their non-faculty** for using GenAI to perform their work.

- 55% said their schools have **not prepared their staff for using GenAI** in institutional operations such as student recruitment, student life activities, athletics, fundraising and alumni relations.

Asked about the readiness of last spring's graduates for an AI-infused environment:

- 63% said those students **were not very or not at all prepared to use GenAI in the world of work**.

- 62% said they believed those graduates **were not prepared in their overall understanding** and use of GenAI tools.

- 71% think those graduates **were not prepared in their understanding of the ethical issues** raised by GenAI systems.

Segments of these faculty reported they do not use GenAI personally or in teaching

There are noteworthy differences among faculty around their use of GenAI tools and their sense of whether it is appropriate to use the tools for teaching and learning.

- 26% of the faculty members in this survey **said they do not use GenAI tools at all** and a third said they **choose not to use the tools for teaching**. The non-users include 40% of those in this survey who teach arts and humanities subjects and 28% of those in the social sciences.

- 82% of these teachers **think faculty resistance to using GenAI tools is a challenge** to adopting the tools in the courses in their departments. Relatedly, 83% said faculty unfamiliarity with the tools is a challenge to adoption in the courses in their departments.

Majorities of these faculty members reported **they do not use GenAI** for syllabus or course development, for teaching, for locating course materials, to develop assignments or for basic communication with students.

Split verdicts on what is legitimate use of GenAI tools

One major issue that surfaces here **is that there is little consensus about whether some common uses of GenAI are cheating or not**.

Examples:

- 52% of these faculty said it is cheating for a student to follow a detailed AI-generated outline when writing a paper, while 47% said it is either a legitimate use of AI or they are not sure whether it was cheating.

- 45% think it is legitimate for a student to write a paper, feed it into a GenAI system and then make the recommended edits, while 55% said they believed it is illegitimate use of AI or said they aren't sure.

When it comes to faculty use, **these teachers were split on whether it is legitimate or not for faculty members to use GenAI** to create a first draft of a course syllabus, to use the AI tools to create PowerPoint slides for their teaching and to use GenAI to write responses to student emails. Still, they are clearer that they think it

is not legitimate to use GenAI to grade student essays or use the tools to write portions of an article that is submitted to a journal.

Importance of AI literacy

These professors have **mixed views about the value of AI literacy** and its importance to the future of today's students.

- 49% of these teachers said it is extremely or very important for their students to develop AI literacy skills prior to graduation, compared with 13% who said these skills are irrelevant to their students' success and another 11% said such literacy is only slightly important to their students.

- 69% said they have addressed AI literacy issues in their instruction and overwhelming majorities of these faculty said they believed it very necessary for them to address issues related to GenAI, such as its potential for bias, hallucinations, capacity to generate misinformation and deepfakes, privacy implications, cybersecurity problems and environmental issues.

Guidelines and rules for using GenAI

Fully 87% of these teachers have **created policies for their students regarding the ways they should and should not use GenAI tools** for assignments, projects and tests. Yet only 35% said their department has written such guidelines. About half (48%) said their institution has created such policies.

Notable structural change at their institutions

These faculty members reported that their schools have taken a variety steps to tackle the opportunities and issues raised by GenAI.

- 55% said their institutions have empaneled a task force or other group to oversee and **manage the implementation** of GenAI tools across campus.

- 48% said their institutions have **written guidelines** about the appropriate and inappropriate use of GenAI in learning and teaching activities.

- 37% said their institutions have **created new classes** focused on AI.

- 17% said their institutions have **created a major or minor in AI**.

- 16% said their institutions have **created new academic leadership offices** to address the usage of GenAI tools and issues tied to the tools throughout their institution.

- 13% said their institutions have **adopted AI literacy as a general education learning outcome**.

Future AI impacts

These teachers were asked a battery of questions about the future impact of GenAI on some key aspects of their students' academic lives. Here is the academic balance sheet they constructed:

- One clear positive hope among these scholars about GenAI is that **it will enhance and customize learning in the future**. Some 61% of them said they believe the tools will improve that dimension of student lives, compared with 32% who think GenAI tools will have not much or no impact.

At the same time …

- 95% said GenAI's impact will be to **increase students' overreliance** on these artificial intelligence tools, including 75% who said the tools will have a lot of impact.

- 94% said GenAI's use will **increase concerns about academic integrity**, including 76% who said the tools will have a lot of impact.

- 90% said the use of GenAI will **diminish students' critical thinking skills**, including 66% who thought GenAI will have a lot of impact.

> "AI offers unforeseen growth and innovation. This is all good for education. If we look for ways to improve what we do, it can't help but be positive."

Throughout this report, including on this page, we have highlighted quotes from respondents to this survey to open-ended questions about AI and higher education.

- 83% said GenAI will **decrease student attention spans**, including 62% who thought GenAI will have a lot of impact.

- 81% said GenAI will **widen digital inequities**, including 58% who thought GenAI will have a lot of impact.

- 70% said the use of GenAI will affect students' creativity not much or not at all affect students' creativity, while 27% said the tools will increase student creativity a lot or some.

There were less stark differences on some other issues we queried about the future impact of GenAI on students' academic lives:

- 41% of these professors said the use of GenAI tools will improve **students' research skills**, while 53% said they thought GenAI will not have much or any impact.

- 40% said the use of GenAI tools will increase the **ability of students to write clearly** and persuasively, while 58% said they did not think GenAI will have much or any impact.

Looking at other issues that lie ahead, these faculty were generally more negative than positive about the future prospects of their students and institutions.

- **47%** fear that the long-term impact of AI on **employment opportunities in their disciplines will be very or somewhat negative**, compared with 25% who think their students' job prospects will be positive. Moreover, 49% said they believed increased use of GenAI tools over the next five years in their fields **will have a more negative than positive impact on their students' careers**. Among those who have the greatest fears are professors who teach arts and humanities (66%) and those who teach engineering (48%).

- **74%** said they believe GenAI tools **will affect the integrity and value of academic degrees for the worse**, including 36% who think the impact will be a lot for the worse.

- **62%** think the use of GenAI tools will impact student **learning outcomes for the worse** in the next five years, compared with 27% who said they believe those outcomes will be positively affected.

- **54% think GenAI will have a more negative than positive impact on the overall lives of students at their institution**, while 19% said the impact will be more positive than negative and 19% think it will be equally positive and negative.

In a broader context, 39% believe GenAI tools will diminish the role universities and colleges **play in society**, while just 13% think AI systems **will enhance** that role. About half (48%) think the tools will enhance some aspects of the role of higher education in society and diminish others.

Some other noteworthy data points from this survey:

- 9% of the higher education faculty in this sample said they have created their own language model or chatbot for students to use as they learn in classes.

- 43% say their institution has formed any partnerships with private industry and other outside organizations related to AI.

> "What higher ed should offer is a chance to use and think about AI critically, not rush in to integration. It may be useful for focused tasks, but it should have little to no place in the classroom *unless* the course is taught by someone with actual expertise in AI."

Note

The results reported here come from a non-scientific survey of college and university faculty known to the American Association of Colleges & Universities. In all, 1,057 college teachers responded to at least some portion of the survey. It was conducted between October 29 and November 26, 2025. It is a diverse sample in key respects, including by academic discipline, by the size of the undergraduate population of school and by faculty status (e.g. full professor, assistant professor). Still, the results are not generalizable. For further details about the sample and the questions, please see the Methodology section of this report.

The term "GenAI" is used throughout this report and refers to "generative artificial intelligence" tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Copilot.

SECTION 2:

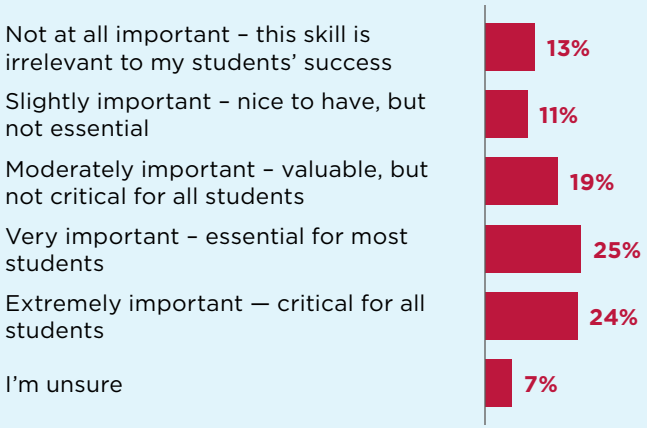
Life with AI on campus today

AI usage: Faculty divides

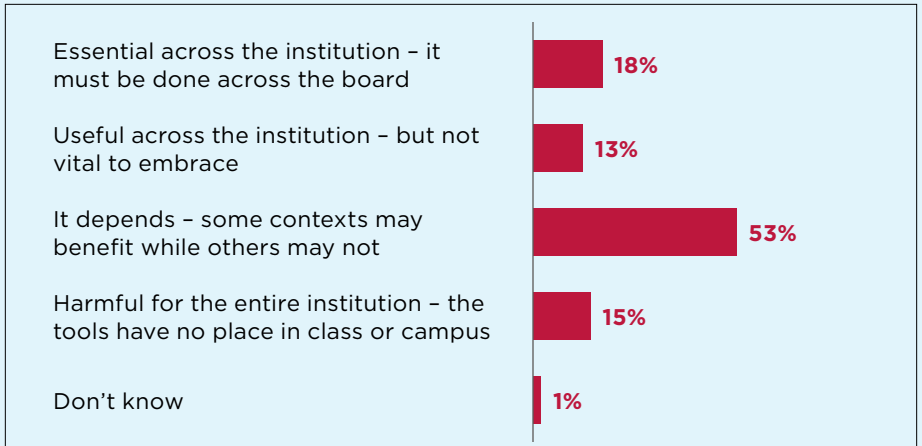
There are notable splits among students and faculty when it comes to general AI use at institutions of higher learning. The faculty responding in this survey believe that **the substantial majority of students at their schools use GenAI tools** like ChatGPT or Claude, **but most think half or less of the faculty use the systems**. About a third of these faculty members (31%) said they personally use GenAI tools at least daily, while a fifth (20%) use them several times a week and another 23% use them less frequently. A quarter (26%) reported never using any GenAI tool.

These usage differences play out in mixed ways. For instance, nearly half of these higher ed teachers (47%) report they are very or somewhat comfortable using GenAI tools for teaching and learning, while 19% said they are not very or not at all comfortable. And a third (32%) said they do not use GenAI for teaching and learning purposes. Those various views carry over into the views of faculty members about the value of AI literacy (see charts below).

How important is it that your students develop AI literacy skills prior to graduation?



How important is it, if at all, for colleges and universities to incorporate Generative AI tools into classroom activities and campus life?



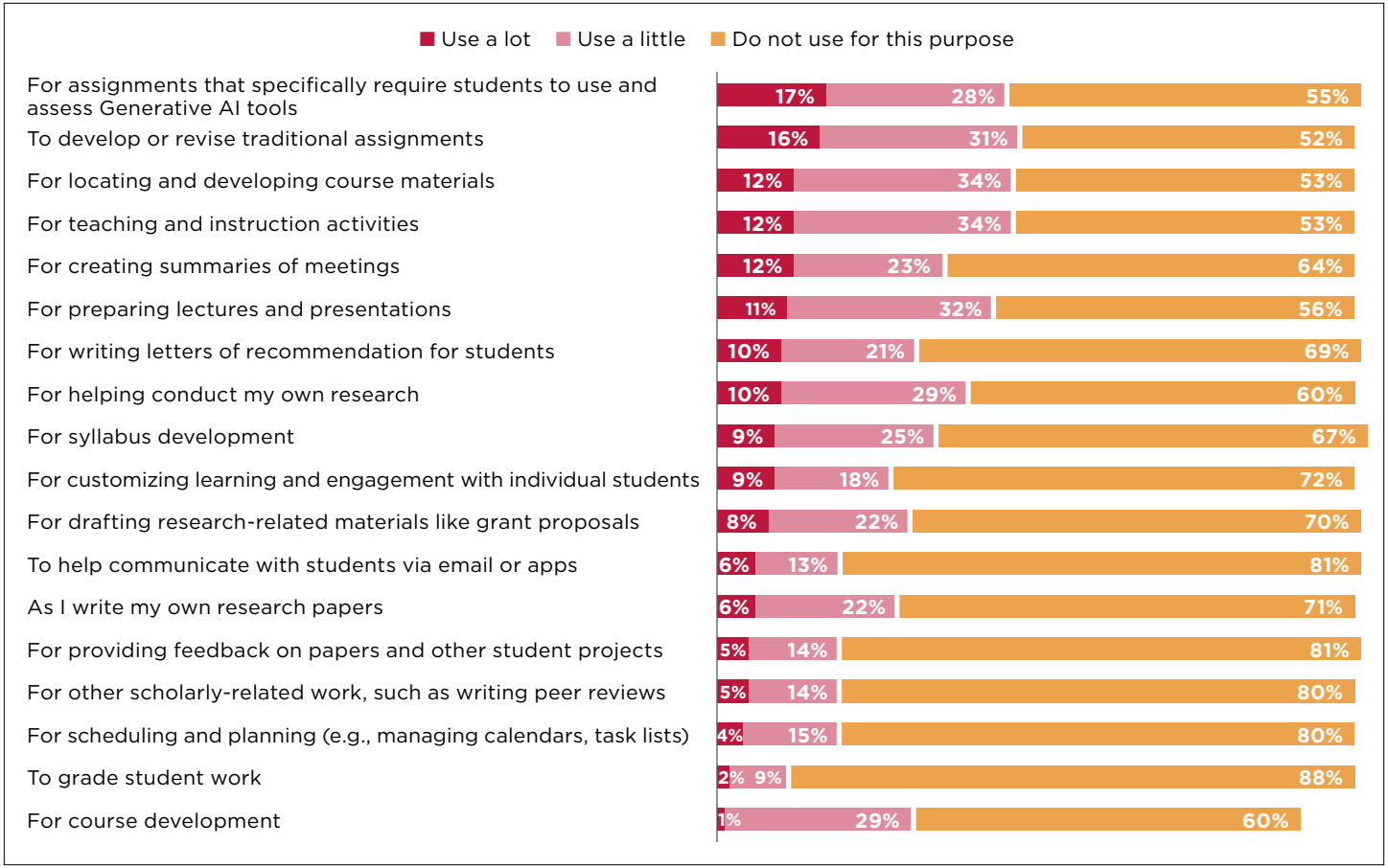
*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

Faculty activities with AI

The majority of the faculty members in this survey said they do not use GenAI tools for key teaching, learning and research. Still, a portion do exploit the tools for such things as generating assignments for use and assessment of GenAI tools and for more traditional assignments. Few use the tools for communication with students, grading or lecture preparation.

Modest shares of higher education faculty use AI tools for teaching, learning or research

% of faculty in this survey who use GenAI for these purposes



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Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

ANTI-AI VIEWS AMONG FACULTY

"I never use it. F*** AI. I have a brain and decades of training. I would only use it if I wanted to write like a B student who didn't do the reading and made up all their references, which is never."

"Never. AI diminishes human agency."

PRO-AI VIEWS AMONG FACULTY

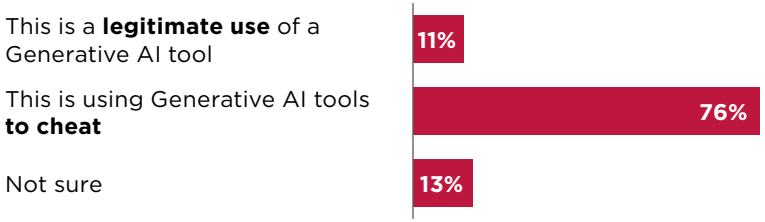
"I have used it to generate bad writing samples and bad computer code for students to practice fixing."

"I like to write so I wouldn't use it for a research paper. But I'd consider using it to create any of the endless and mindless reports that our admin wants us to create."

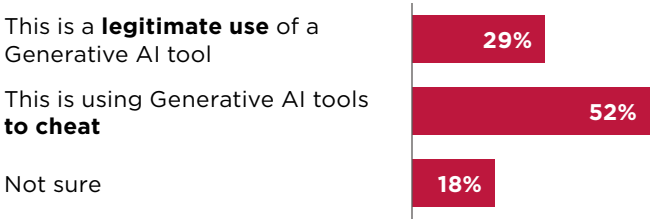
Ethics: Disagreement about legitimate and illegitimate uses of GenAI

In this survey, we asked faculty members to react to some scenarios of possible GenAI use by students. These faculty are split about whether these examples show legitimate use or are cheating. In each case, a notable share said they were not sure whether the scenario constituted cheating or not.

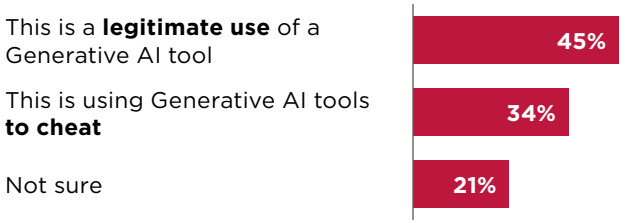
A student uses Generative AI tools to write the first draft of a paper. The student then makes edits to the paper to further refine it for accuracy and audience before turning it in.



A student receives a writing assignment and asks AI to provide a detailed outline of an appropriate response. The student then follows the outline to write the paper.

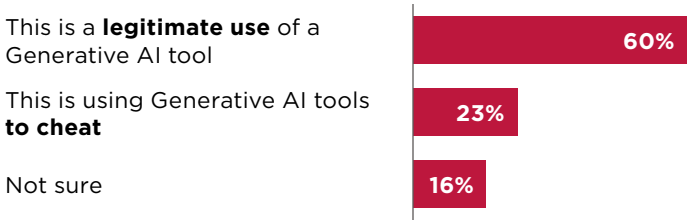


A student writes a paper and provides a Generative AI tool with their draft, the writing assignment, and the grading rubric. The student asks for feedback on their paper specifically seeking guidance that, based on the rubric, would result in an A on the assignment. The student then makes the recommended edits.

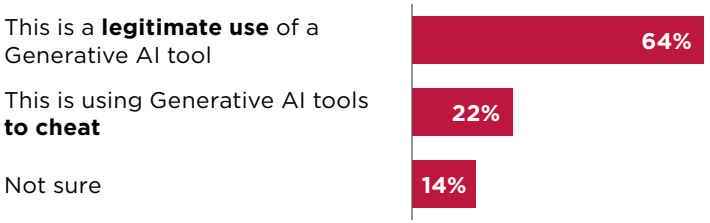


"The misconception that generative AI is actually generating novel intellectual contributions will likely further diminish the value placed on expertise."

A student uses Generative AI tools to make improvements to their work. This might include fact-checking claims, fixing citation formatting, and adjusting a paper's structure.



A student uses Generative AI tools to help brainstorm and refine project ideas that she/he then adopts for the assignment.



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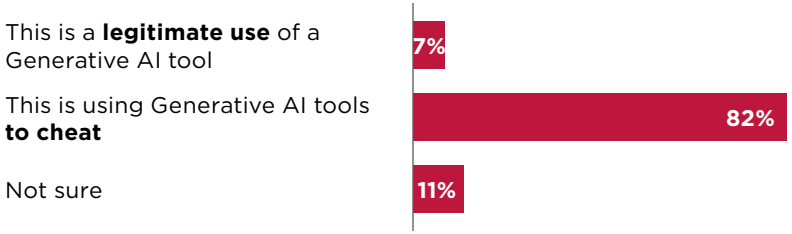
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

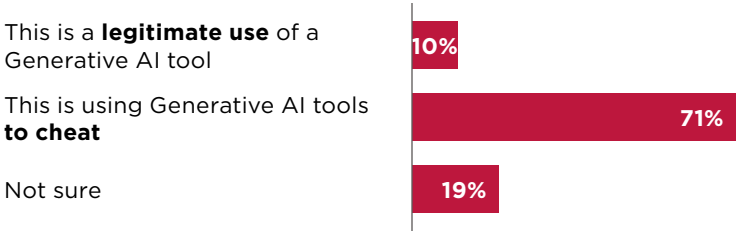
Ethics: Varying views about faculty uses of GenAI

We asked faculty members to react to scenarios of possible GenAI use by teachers. These faculty have mixed views about whether these examples show legitimate use or are cheating.

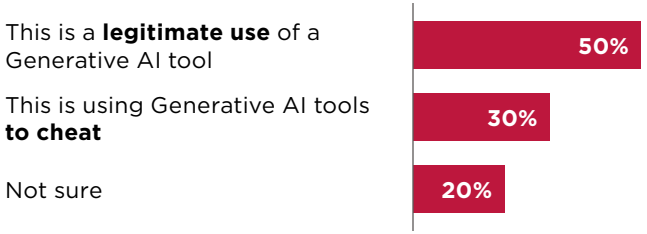
A faculty member uses AI to write portions of an article that they then submit to a journal.



A faculty member uses Generative AI tools to grade essays in their course.

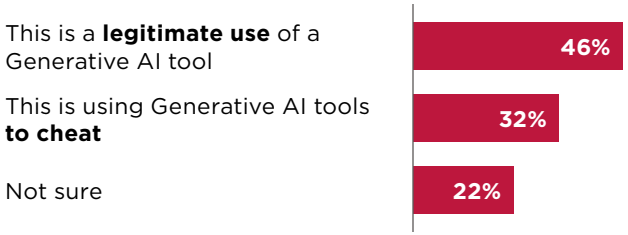


A faculty member uses Generative AI tools to create a first draft of their syllabus that he/she then edits and refines.

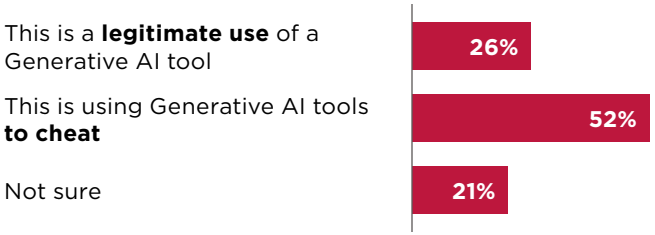


"Ethics precludes other considerations, since current AI is built on intellectual theft and non-transparent, non-innocent algorithms."

A faculty member uses Generative AI tools to create PowerPoint presentations that they use in class to teach their students.



A faculty member uses Generative AI tools to respond to student e-mails.



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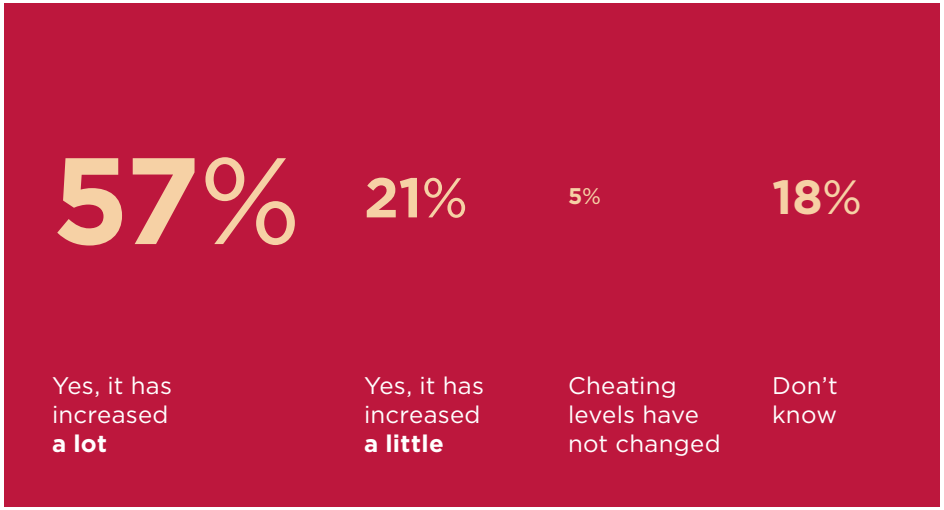
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

Incidence of cheating and academic integrity issues

Many of these faculty report that cheating has increased at their schools and that they have personally dealt with academic integrity issues tied to their students' use of GenAI.

Has cheating increased on your campus since Generative AI tools have become widely available?



Have you had academic integrity cases in your courses that involved student usage of Generative AI tools?

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*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

How faculty members have dealt with academic integrity issues tied to student GenAI use in their classes

"It's been made clear that the use of Generative AI tools can't be 'proven' and that any academic integrity cases involving its use won't be pursued by the administration."

"I just assign a zero and ask the student to redo the assignment."

"I try to use it as a teaching moment for students to understand the drawbacks of AI. To know what it can help with and what it isn't that great at doing. I explain the issues with the work and allow students to redo the assignments. My hope is to create a greater awareness of how AI tools work."

AI detection and its deficiencies

Most of these professors do not use AI-detection tools. A majority believe their own skills at detecting AI-generated content are adequate, but they are not as confident about their colleagues' skills. In addition, they are not confident in the capacity of the detection tools.

10% of faculty said they are very effective in recognizing content created by GenAI tools

56%

said they are somewhat effective

30%

said they are not very or not at all effective

4% of faculty said their faculty colleagues are very effective in recognizing content created by GenAI tools

42%

said their colleagues are somewhat effective

39%

said their colleagues are not very or not at all effective

31%

of faculty said they use AI detection tools

34%

of faculty said their university provides a subscription to an AI detection tool for faculty to use

23%

of faculty said AI detection tools are very or somewhat effective in identifying content created by GenAI

33%

said the tools are not very effective

22%

said the tools are not effective at all

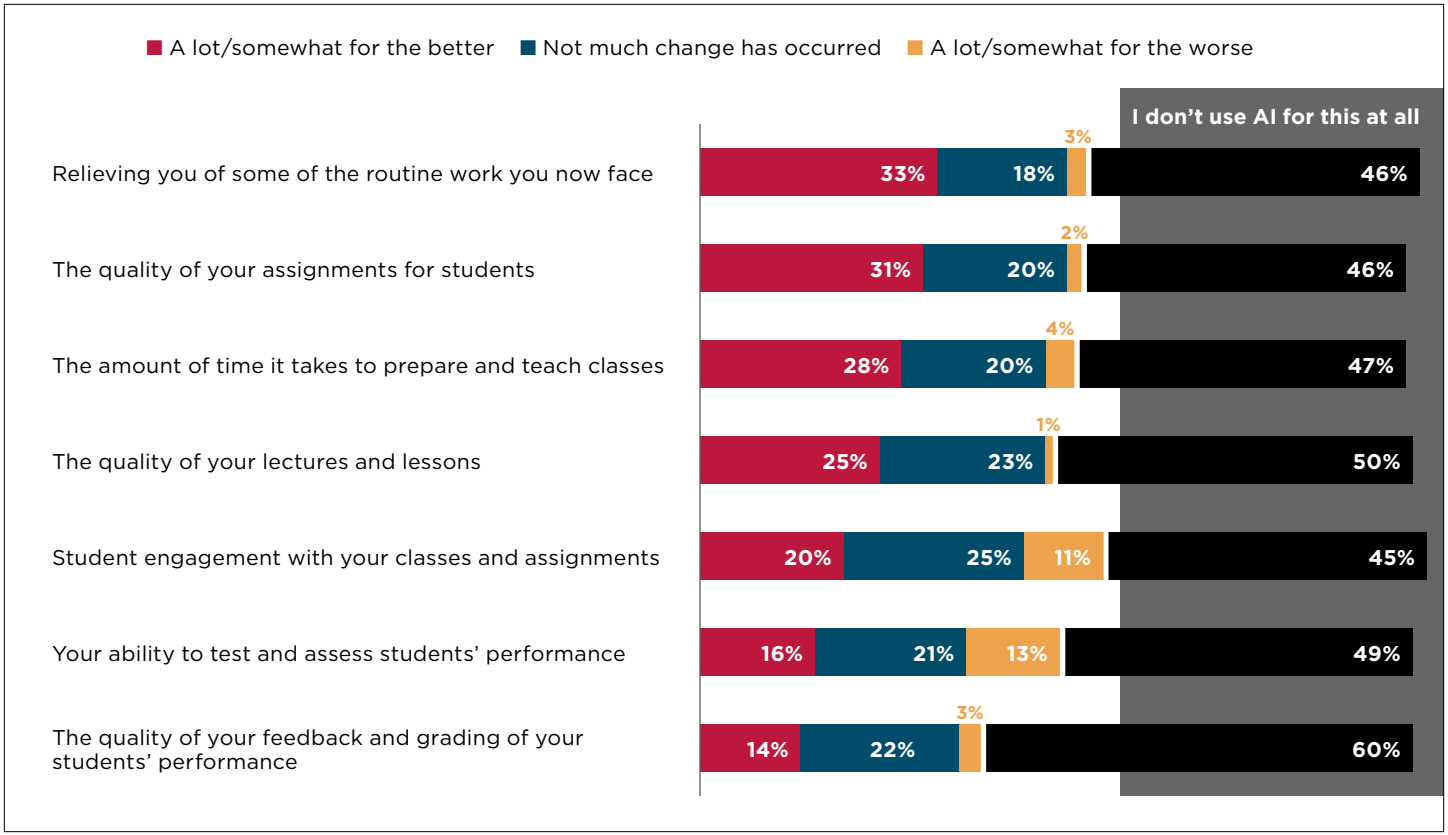
"Students are giving over their thinking power every time they rely on AI. They are giving away their futures every time they rely on AI."

How the use of GenAI tools has changed professors' activities

Some faculty are noticing improvements in some of their basic work practices, but many do not use GenAI tools at all..

How AI use has – or has not – changed professors' work

% of faculty who say GenAI tools have changed these activities in the following ways



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Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

65%

of these teachers said GenAI tools have had no impact for the better or worse on their own research. About a quarter (27%) said the impact of GenAI tools on their research is been a lot or somewhat for the better, while 6% reported the impact has been for the worse on their research.

48%

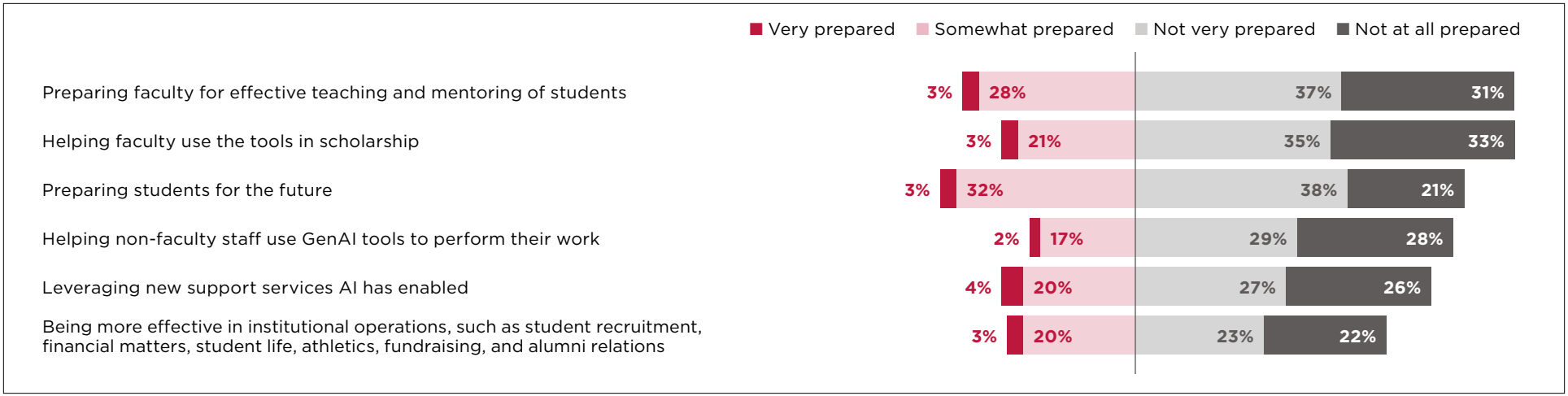
of these teachers said the impact of GenAI on their students' research has been for the worse, compared with 20% think the impact has been for the better. Roughly a third (31%) said GenAI tools have not had an impact for good or ill when it comes to their students' research.

The majority of faculty believe their schools are not very prepared for using GenAI tools effectively

More than half of these professors think that most of their colleagues in their departments are not well prepared to use GenAI tools in their teaching. In several other contexts, these scholars think their schools are not ready for using GenAI tools for key institutional purposes. They also believe spring 2025 graduates were not very well prepared for the world they face after college.

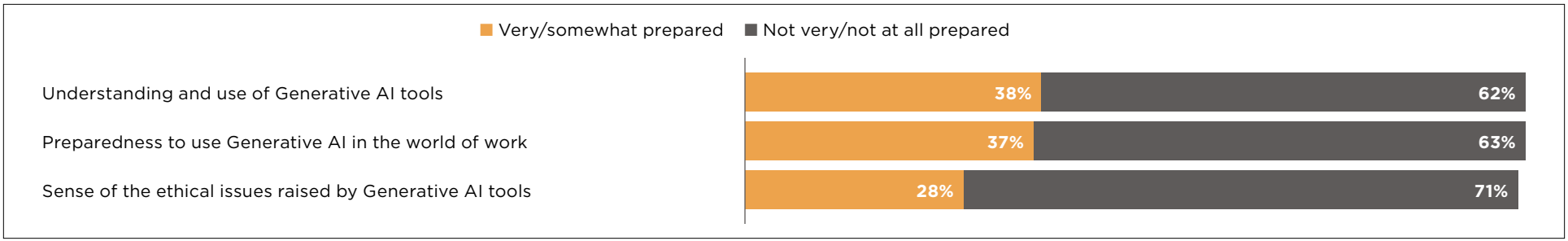
Teachers say their schools are generally not prepared for using AI tools very effectively

% of faculty who say their institution is prepared to use GenAI tools effectivity for these purposes



Most faculty believe spring 2025 graduates were not prepared for the AI-infused world that awaited them

% who believe last spring's graduates were when it comes to their overall …



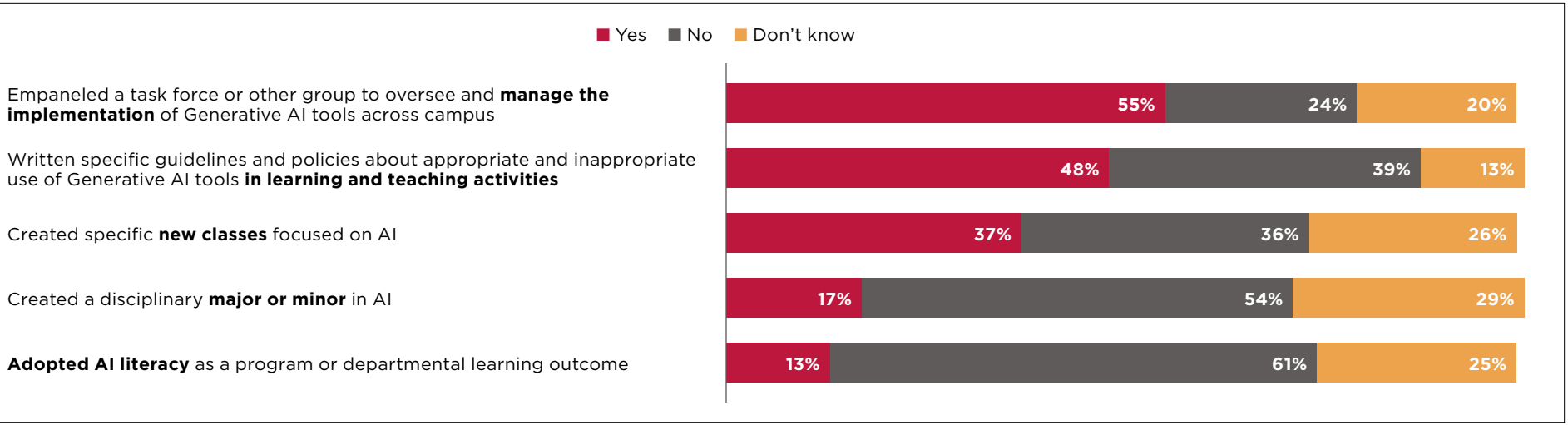
*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

Schools have done a variety of things to restructure and adjust to GenAI

Here are some of the steps these faculty say their institutions have taken in response to the rise of GenAI tools. Still, notable numbers of these teachers do not know if their school has made any change to tackle this new disruption to education.

Many colleges have taken steps to respond in some ways to the rise of AI

% who say their institution has done the following in response to the rise of GenAI tools



*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

87%

of these faculty said they have created guidelines or policies for your students regarding the ways they should and should not use Generative AI tools

69%

said there are parts of their instruction where they specifically address AI literacy issues – such as teaching about AI capabilities and limitations, prompt engineering, and ethics?

35%

said their academic departments had written guidelines and policies for using GenAI tools

24%

said their academic departments had created a task force to oversee the implementation of GenAI tools in their discipline

20%

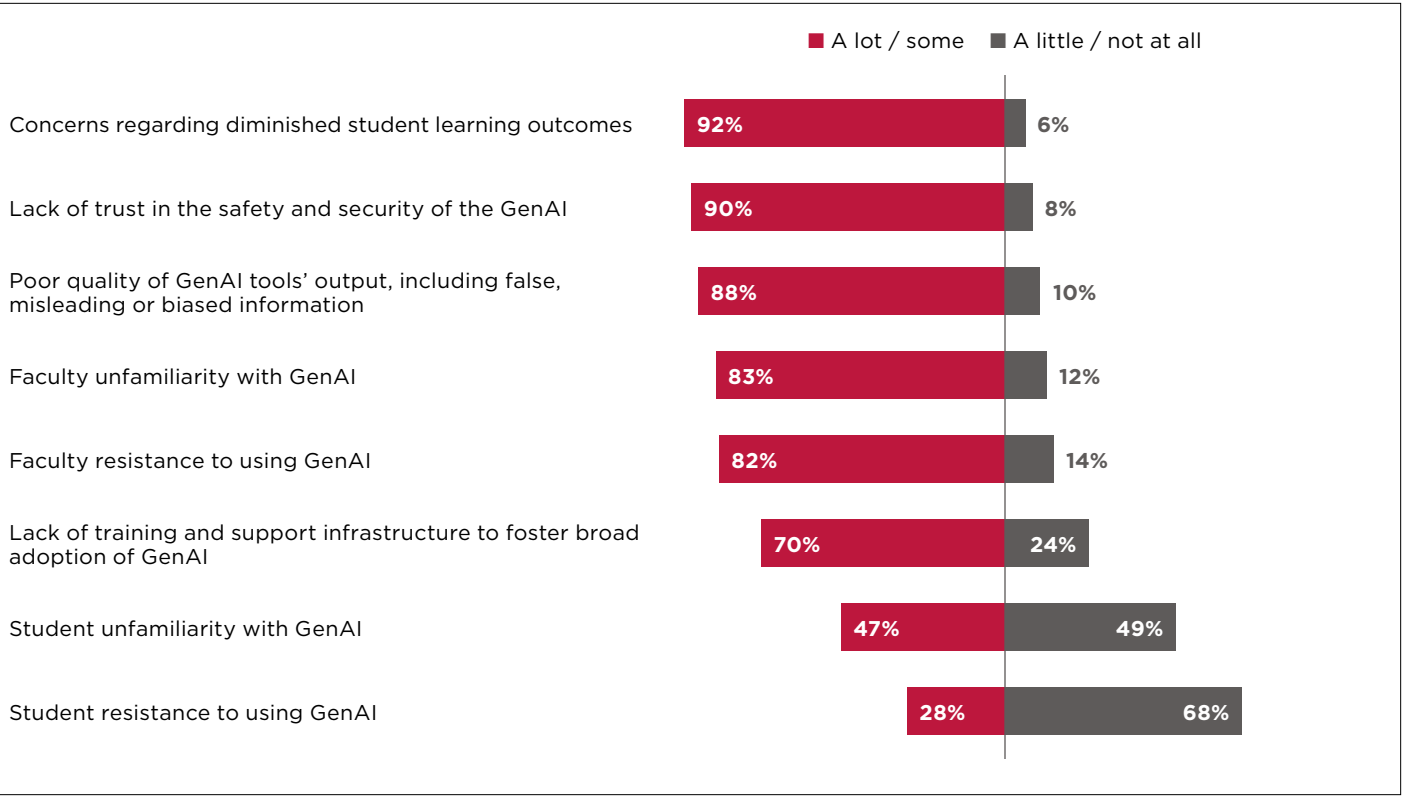
said their department had created new classes focused on AI

Faculty cite several challenges to adopting GenAI tools in courses

These professors overwhelmingly believe that a host of GenAI issues are problems that should be covered in the courses in their departments. Their concerns range from a general lack of trust in the safety and security of GenAI tools, the quality of GenAI outputs, faculty unfamiliarity with GenAI and outright faculty resistance to using GenAI.

Several factors pose challenges to embracing GenAI tools in their courses

% of faculty who say these are challenges to adopting GenAI tools in existing courses in their departments



*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

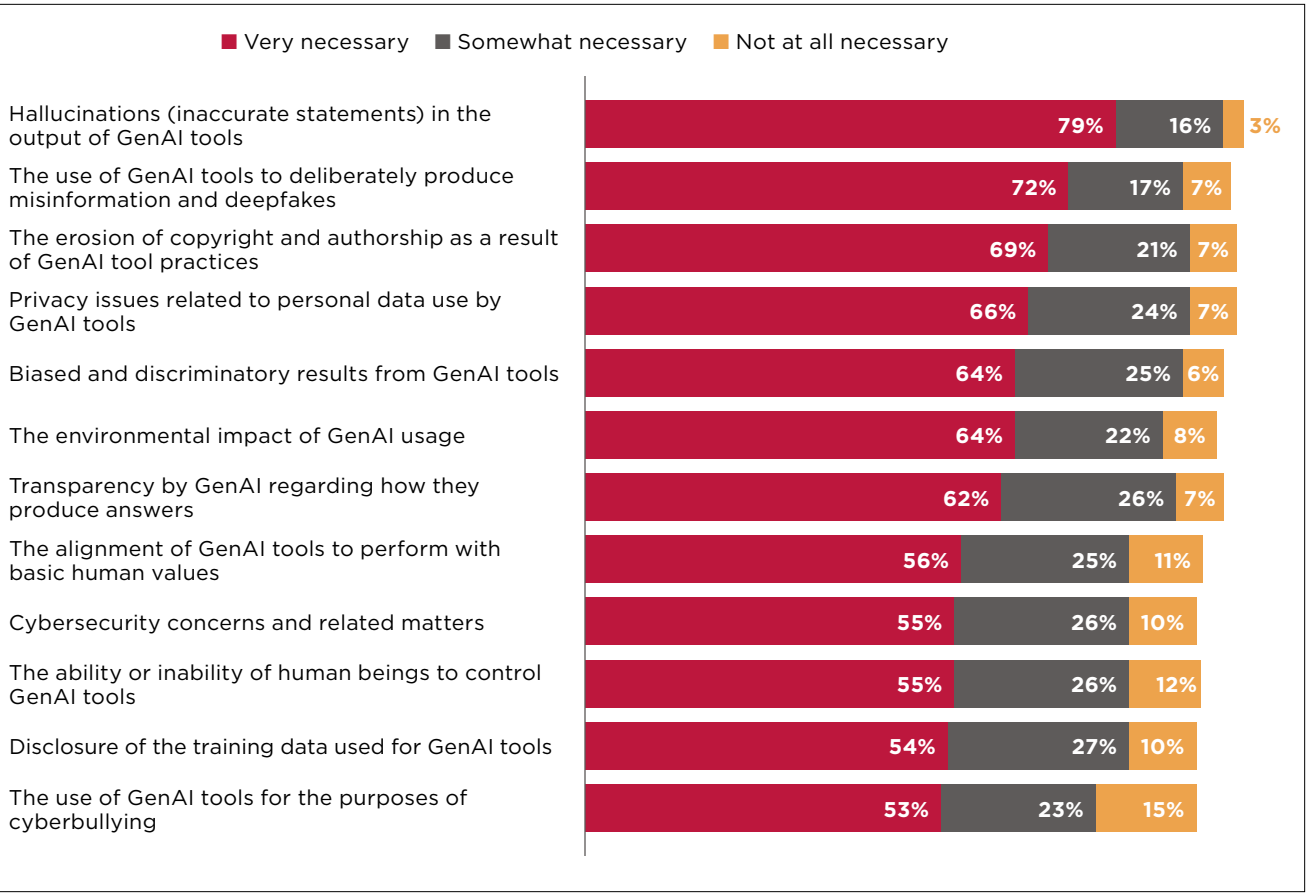
"AI tools will be helpful if they are used correctly, to supplement learning and instruction, rather than replace it. Students must be taught to use discretion about what they see in AI and learn how to utilize it effectively."

The vital issues about AI that faculty members think should be addressed

Overwhelming majorities of these professors believe that controversial matters involving GenAI are necessary to teach in their classes. Those include the unreliable answers GenAI systems generate, the capacity of bad actors to use the tools to create deepfakes and other misinformation, issues related to copyright, privacy issues and bias and discrimination in GenAI systems.

Large majorities of faculty feel it is necessary to teach about challenging issues related to AI

% who say these issues are necessary to address in their classes



*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

ANALYSIS OF KEY OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES TO THIS SURVEY

Asked an open-ended question about what human skills schools should teach, the most dominant theme by far was that critical thinking becomes more important in an AI-saturated world. Respondents repeatedly frame AI as increasing the need for skepticism, verification, reasoning, judgment, and discernment. Many argue that without these skills, AI accelerates misinformation, intellectual passivity, and epistemic collapse.

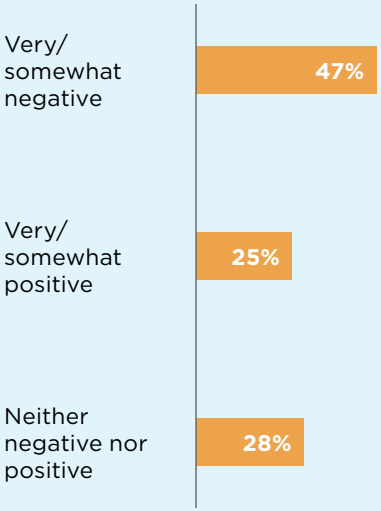
A closely related theme was anxiety that foundational literacies—deep reading, sustained attention, writing as thinking, and independent analysis—are actively undermined by AI.

SECTION 3:

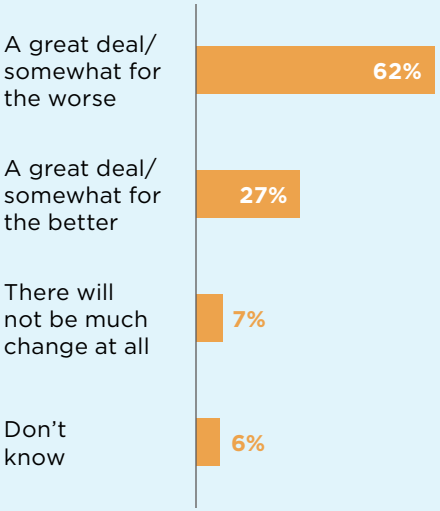
Future AI impacts

This survey contained some future-oriented questions about the potential longer-term impacts of GenAI on campuses and in the larger role of colleges and universities in the U.S. Some of the major insights from these questions:

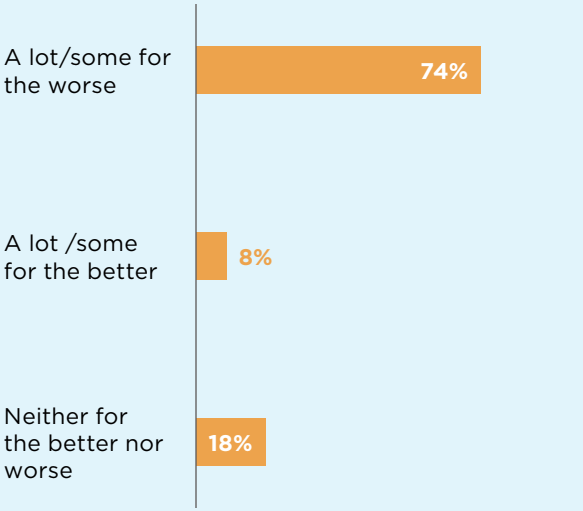
Employment opportunities
What will be the long-term impact of artificial intelligence on employment opportunities for students who major in your discipline?



Student learning outcomes
Considering the positives and negatives of Generative AI tools, in the next five years, how much do you think the use of these tools is most likely to impact student learning outcomes at your institution?

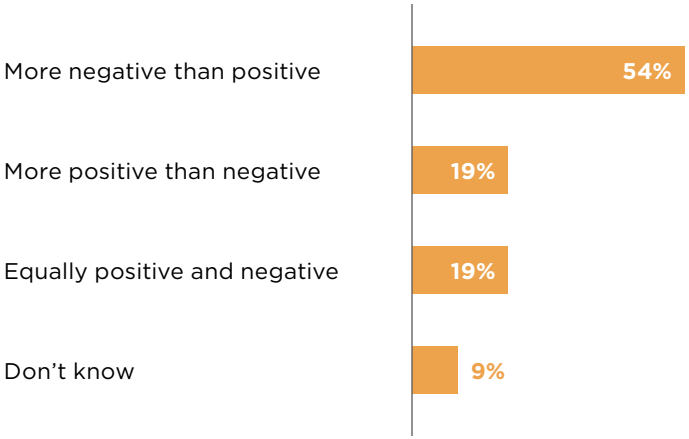


The value of college degrees
How do you think Generative AI tools will impact the integrity and value of academic degrees?



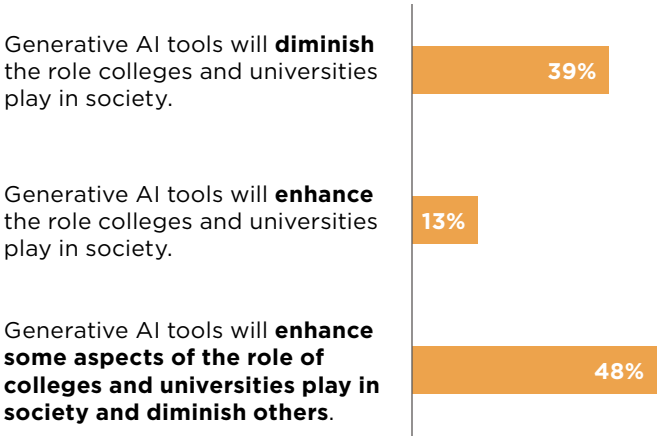
The lives of students

Overall, how do you think the increased use of Generative AI tools in the next five years is most likely to affect the overall lives of students at your institution? The impact of generative AI tools will be …



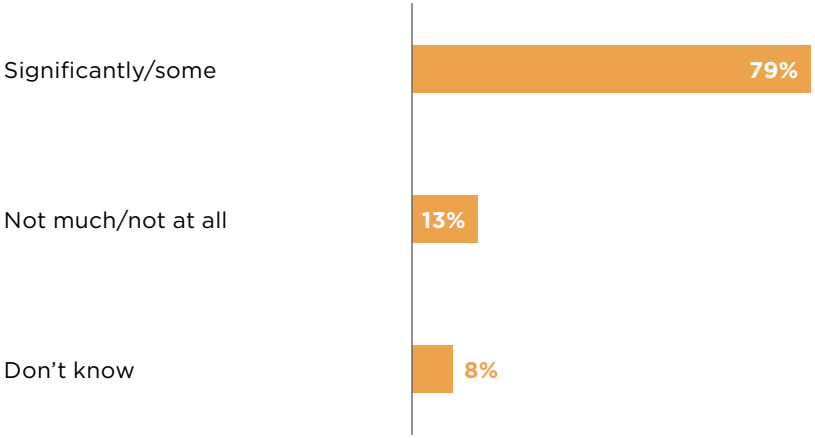
Colleges' role in society

What impact do you expect Generative AI tools will have in affecting the role of colleges and universities in society over the next few years?



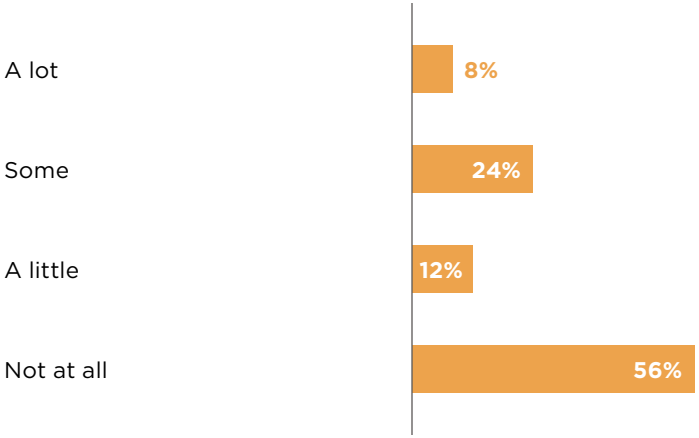
Typical teaching model

In the next five years, how much do you think Generative AI tools will affect the typical teaching model in your department?



Personalized instruction

In the next five years, how much, if at all, will you offer self-paced and personalized instruction to students at your institution that is built upon Generative AI tools?

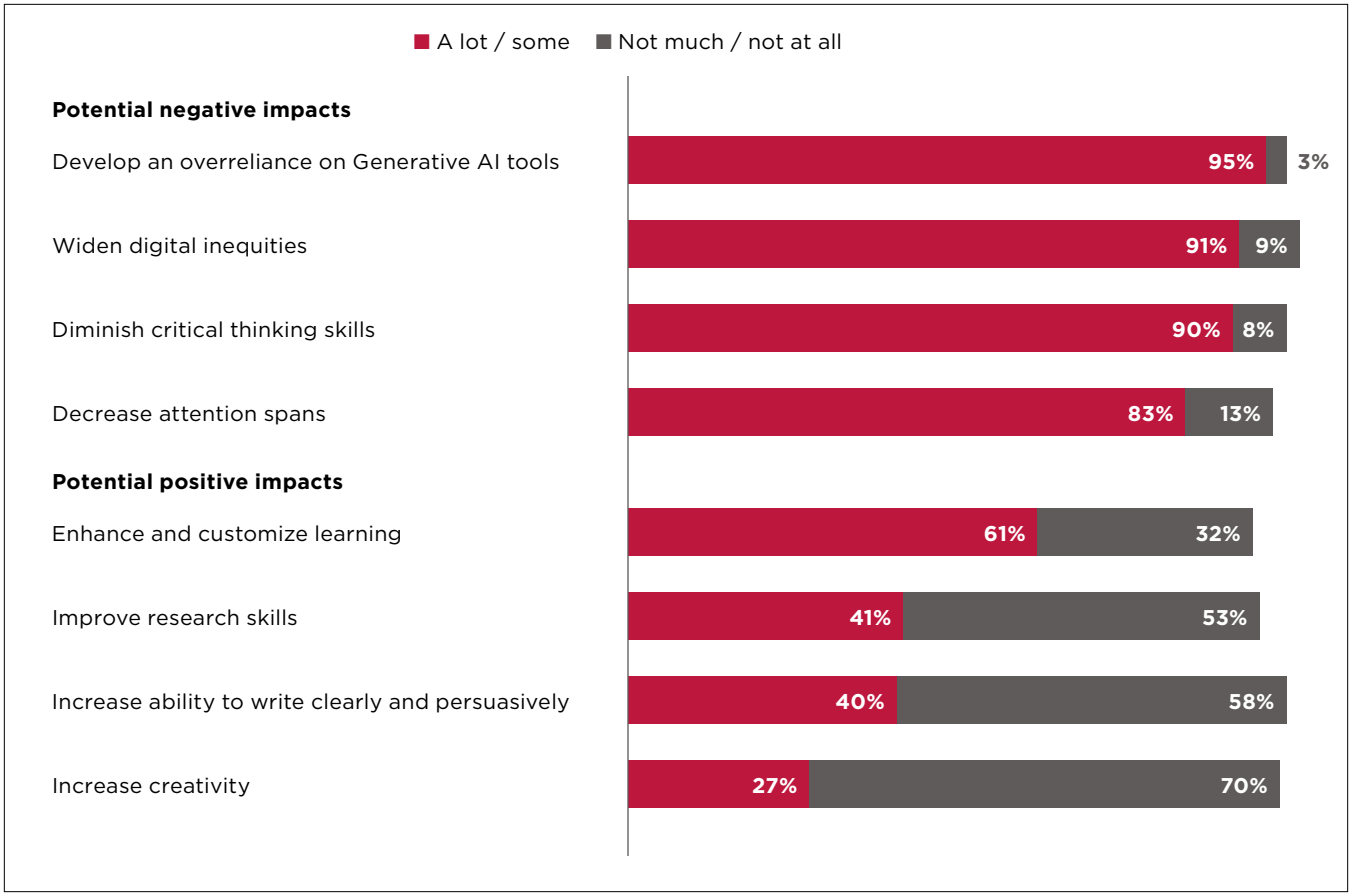


Professors expect student performance to worsen in the future due to GenAI

As they think about the future impact of GenAI, these higher education teachers foresee problems across a variety of issues. Huge majorities fear students will develop an overreliance on GenAI tools, and that the tools will hurt students' critical thinking skills and their attention spans. More than not think the tools will not improve student research or writing skills, nor do they expect the tools increase student productivity. The one bright note is that a majority of these teachers think GenAI will enhance and customize learning.

Faculty think the future impact of AI will mostly be harmful in key student performance areas

% who say they believe GenAI tools will have these impacts on students in the future



"Learning and mastery should be hard. Doing hard stuff is what makes you learn. Why are we outsourcing thought to an amalgamated, hollow regurgitation?"

*Those who did not answer are not shown
*Numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Survey by AAC&U and Elon University, Oct. 29-Nov. 26, 2025

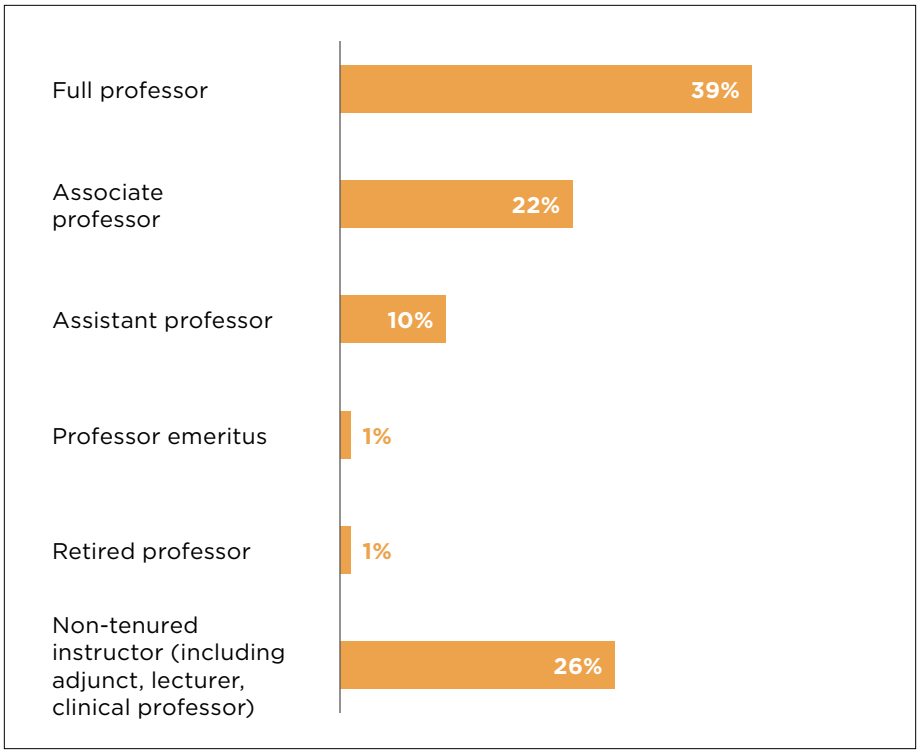
SECTION 4:

Methodology

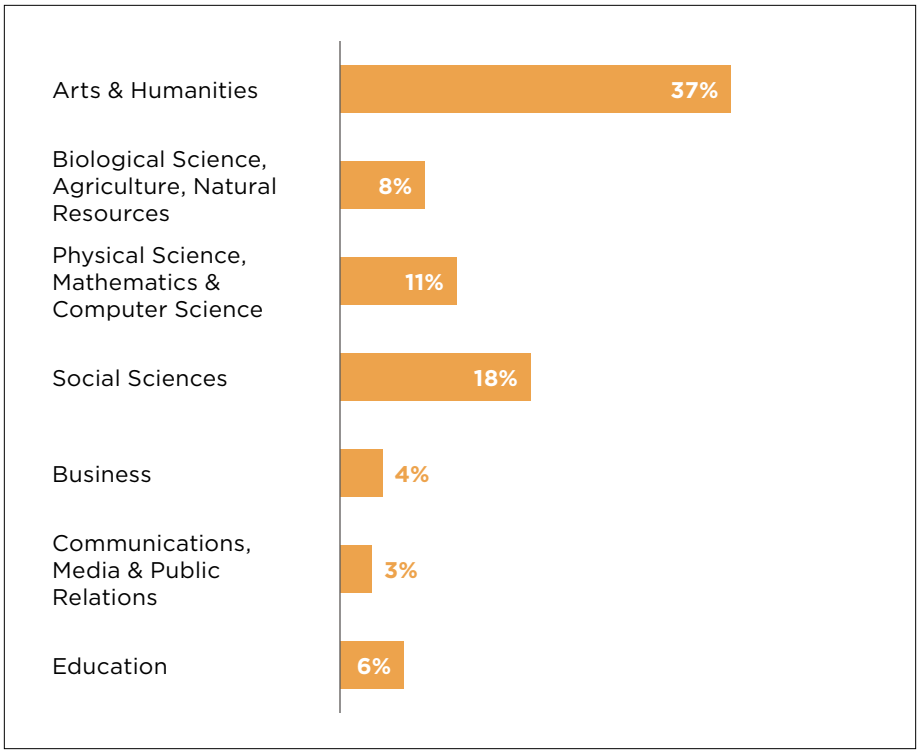
This report covers a survey of college and university professors who are known to the American Association of Colleges & Universities and Elon University. An invitation was sent to participate on October 29, 2025, and the survey was closed on November 26, 2025.

In all, 1,057 teachers in higher education responded to at least some of the questions on the survey and the profile of respondents looks as follows:

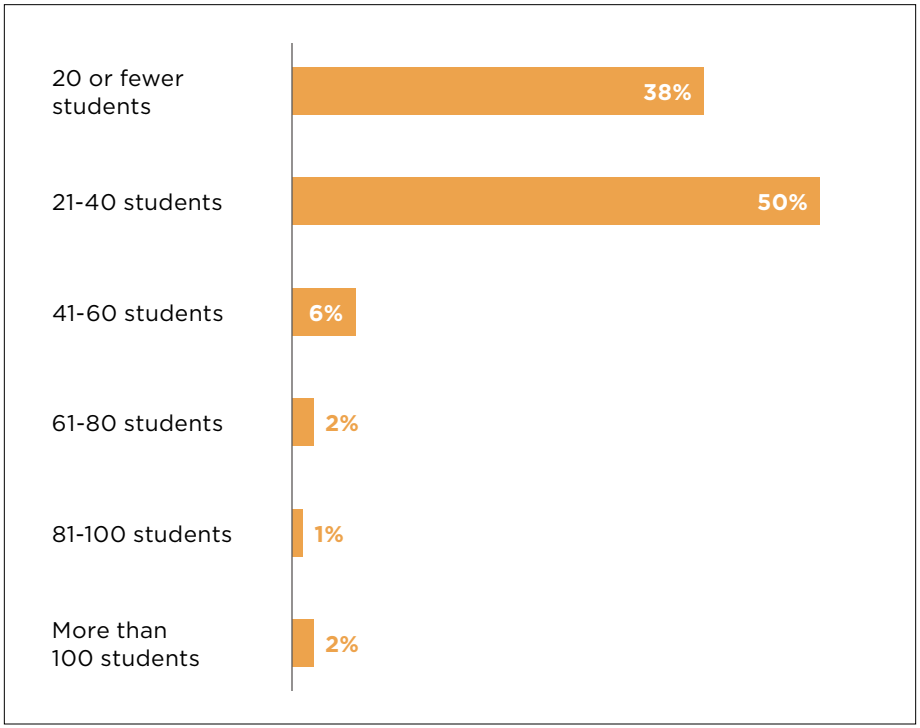
Job title



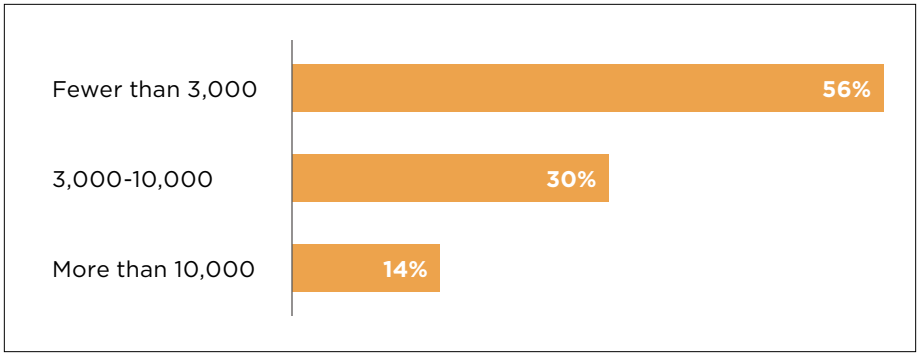
General academic discipline



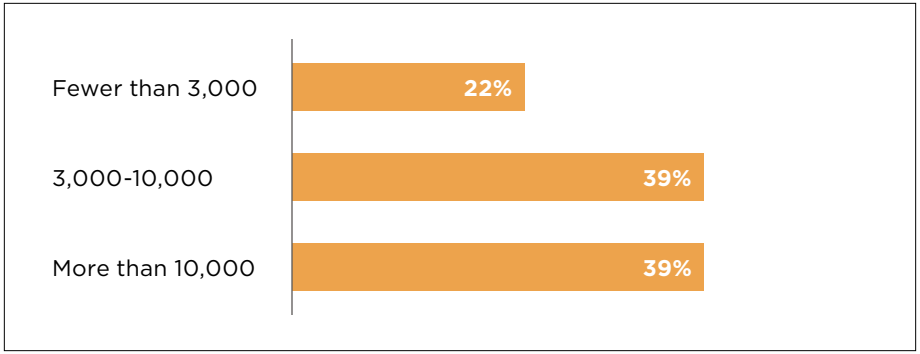
Class size that the respondent most often teaches



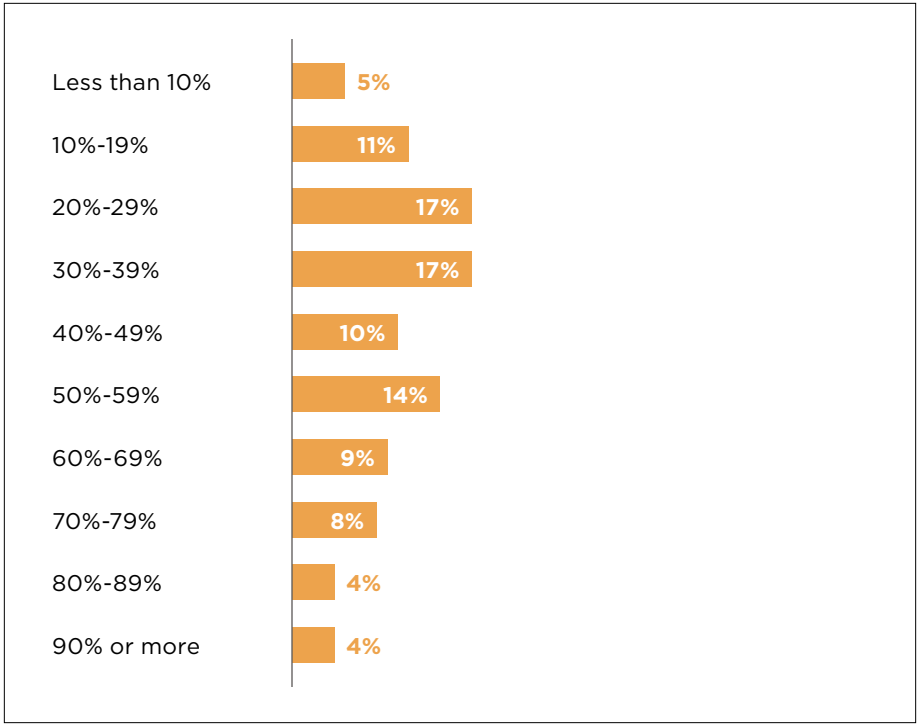
Number of part-time students at their school



Number of full-time students at their school



Percentage of study body eligible for Pell grants



Topline findings for the survey questions can be found here

About AAC&U

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is a global membership organization dedicated to advancing the democratic purposes of higher education by promoting equity, innovation, and excellence in liberal education. Through our programs and events, publications and research, public advocacy, and campus-based projects, AAC&U serves as a catalyst and facilitator for innovations that improve educational quality and equity and that support the success of all students. In addition to accredited public and private, two-year, and four-year colleges and universities and state higher education systems and agencies throughout the United States, our membership includes degree-granting higher education institutions around the world as well as other organizations and individuals. To learn more, visit www.aacu.org.

C. Edward Watson
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C. Edward Watson is the Vice President for Digital Innovation at the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and formerly Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Georgia. He is the founding director of AAC&U's Institute on AI, Pedagogy, and the Curriculum. His most recent book is the second edition of *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2025).

About Elon University's Imagining the Digital Future Center

Imagining the Digital Future is an interdisciplinary research center focused on the human impact of accelerating digital change and the socio-technical challenges that lie ahead. The center's mission is to discover and broadly share a diverse range of opinions, ideas and original research about the likely evolution of digital change, informing important conversations and policy formation. The center was established in 2000 as Imagining the Internet and renamed Imagining the Digital Future with an expanded research agenda in 2024. It is funded and operated by Elon University, a nationally ranked private university in central North Carolina.

Lee Rainie
lrainie@elon.edu

Lee Rainie is Director of the Imagining the Digital Future Center at Elon University. He joined the university after serving for 24 years as the founding Director of the Pew Research Center's internet and technology research team. While at PRC, he and his colleagues produced more than 850 reports about the social impact of the internet, mobile connectivity, social media, and artificial intelligence. He co-authored *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (MIT Press).

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