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Taking Ownership of Gen AI: Connecting AI and Ethics for Undergraduate Students

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Overview

This unit consists of two lessons and a corresponding assignment designed to help undergraduate students in an information literacy elective course to reflect on what ethical use of generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) means to them. Students participate in lectures and discussions about information ethics and Gen AI over the course of two weeks. Then, they complete a Personal AI Framework Assignment in which they reflect on their ethical beliefs, how AI is affecting their daily lives, and what they consider to be acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI in academic and professional contexts.

Topics: information ethics, artificial intelligence

Time: Two 75-minute class sessions and one written assignment that students complete outside of class.

Materials

- Projector
- Dry erase boards and markers
- Sticky notes
- Pens
- Personal AI Framework Assignment Description
- Information Ethics Session Slides
- AI Session Slides

Setup

Groups of 4-5 students sit at tables arranged to view the instructor station and a screen. Each group gets a small dry erase board for Lesson 1. In both lessons, the class accesses a rolling dry erase board to place sticky notes during the icebreaker. Five minutes before lessons, Instructors place supplies on tables.

Context-at-a-Glance

Setting
Large public university in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Modality
Face-to-face

Class Structure
Two 75-minute class sessions, with a corresponding reflection assignment. Students were seated in groups of four to five.

Organizational Norms
The course is an information literacy elective taught by library faculty that can be taken to fill a general education requirement. The library is a campus leader in teaching AI ethics.

Learner Characteristics
25 undergraduate students from a variety of majors with all class years represented.

Instructor Characteristics
Instructor 1 is a Research and Instruction Librarian with 3 years of experience. Instructor 2 is a Research and Instruction Librarian with 2.5 years of experience. Instructor 3 is the Head of Library Teaching with 7 years of experience.

Development Rationale
Instructors wanted students to critically reflect on the ethical use of AI and make informed decisions about how they will use (or not use) Gen AI in the course.

Design Framework
Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT); Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.

Standards

Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) (Winkelmes, 2026):

- Discuss assignments' learning goals and design rationale before students begin each assignment
- Gauge students' understanding during class via peer work on questions that require students to apply concepts you've taught

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (ACRL, 2016):

- Authority is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Has Value
- Information Creation as a Process

Context and Setting

The lessons and corresponding assessments took place in the context of a semester-long course: LIBR 300: The Information Experience. This course is an elective that students may take to fulfil a general education requirement relating to exploring ethical perspectives. The course is designed to help students explore the intersections of research and ethics and apply that understanding to a personalized research project that they complete throughout the semester.

The course was first offered in Fall 2022 and is offered every semester. The class usually has students from all class years and a variety of majors. In its most recent implementation, there were 25 students in the course: 10 freshmen, 5 sophomores, 6 juniors, and 4 seniors. The most common majors of enrolled students were pre-nursing, exercise science, and information technology.

The course underwent significant revision prior to the Fall 2025 semester to provide students with more opportunities to critically reflect on how artificial intelligence is affecting the library and information science field and academic research in all disciplines. Although the course only had one instructor of record in Fall 2025, three instructors took part in planning and delivering AI-related course content. Instructor 1 is the instructor of record. She taught the class session on information ethics and helped design the related assignment. Instructor 2 gave a guest lecture on AI ethics and helped design the assignment. Instructor 3 provided oversight for the course, helped design the assignment, and created the assignment grading rubric.

In prior semesters, LIBR 300 instructors raised concerns that some students did not properly document their Gen AI use on course assignments and that some students used Gen AI in ways that were unethical and/or counterproductive to their learning (eg: submitting assignments with confabulated sources). To address this concern, we developed new class activities and a new assignment to help students understand the advantages and disadvantages of using gen AI in academic contexts. Our goal was not to discourage Gen AI use outright, but rather to guide students to make informed choices about how to use Gen AI in ways that align with academic standards and their personal ethical beliefs. To that end, we moved class sessions on ethics and AI much earlier in the semester (now beginning in week 2) and created a Personal AI Framework Assignment in which students were asked to provide examples of what they believed to be acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI based on their personal ethical beliefs.

The Personal AI Framework Assignment was designed using principles from the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) framework (Winkelmes, 2026). We wanted to make sure that students understood not only how the skills they practiced and developed through this assignment would help them succeed in this course but also how they could apply them in future academic, professional, and personal contexts. We made this goal explicit in the assignment description: "This assignment will help you think about your personal ethics and prepare you to make informed decisions about using AI in your personal and professional life." We also followed TILT guidelines by setting clear expectations, using a detailed grading rubric that was shared in advance, and providing an example assignment.

In addition, we aligned the goals of our class sessions and the corresponding assignments with three threshold concepts from the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Association of College and Research Libraries,

2016). The ACRL Framework is a guiding document used by academic libraries to facilitate student growth in fundamental skills relating to information literacy. Our lessons approached the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame by asking students to reflect on questions of authorship for AI generated work and consider how Gen AI use affects perceptions of source credibility. We addressed the Information Has Value frame by discussing the costs of Gen AI use, including economic and environmental effects. Finally, we had students explore the Information Creation as a Process frame by prompting them to consider how Gen AI might fit into their own research process.

Learning Representation

The learning representation began in Week 2 of the semester with Lesson 1: Information Ethics. This lesson consists of an introduction to information ethics and a discussion about the rationale and guidelines for the Personal AI Framework assignment. The following week, Instructor 2 led Lesson 2: AI Ethics. This lesson was designed to explain how Gen AI works and help students think through the ethical issues associated with Gen AI. Students submitted their Personal AI Framework assignment at the end of Week 5. The class sessions between the AI ethics lesson and when the assignment was due did not directly relate to the assignment, but we made the assignment due in Week 5 to ensure students had time to reflect and process their thoughts before submitting. The two lessons and one assignment align with two of the course's learning outcomes:

1. Students will explore ethical issues in the library and information science field and reflect on how their own ethical perspectives affect their information seeking behavior
2. Students will develop, implement, and revise a personalized research process to address an information need.

Personal AI Framework Assignment

The assignment (Personal AI Framework Assignment Description) was designed to have students think about their ethical perspectives and beliefs about AI, especially generative AI, to guide how they will use it in the course. The assignment consisted of three sections and there was no minimum or maximum word count because we wanted to give students the space to make their framework true to them.

The first section asked students to discuss their personal ethical beliefs by thinking about their identities, upbringing, and morals. This section was intended to have students reflect on who they are and how they decide what is ethical.

Next, students were asked to address the ways that AI showed up in their daily life and how they used it in their day-to-day work. They also shared something positive about AI and an ethical concern about AI.

For the last section, they created their Personal AI Framework by connecting their ethical reflection and perspectives on AI. Their framework included a summary of their ethical beliefs about AI and two examples of acceptable AI use and unacceptable AI use in school. They were asked to explain why they deemed their examples acceptable or unacceptable as well.

Students were also required to submit a Gen AI statement with every assignment. In the statement, students either indicated how they used Gen AI (and the prompts they used to get their results) or stated that they did not use Gen AI at all. Guidelines for the Gen AI statement also listed ways that students were not permitted to use Gen AI in the course, including:

- AI hallucinations, false information, or fake sources in your assignment.
- Pasting assignment descriptions and class content into AI tools.
- Presenting AI generated work as solely your own.
- Prompting an AI tool to complete an entire assignment for you.

Lesson 1: Information Ethics (75 minutes)

Lesson 1: Information Ethics was designed to contextualize the entire course and prepare students to complete Section 1: Personal Ethical Reflection and Section 3: Personal AI Framework of the Personal AI Framework assignment. By introducing ethical frameworks and concepts in information ethics (Information Ethics Session Slides), students were equipped with the ability to reflect on and articulate their ethical perspective.

This lesson was connected to the course's first learning outcome: Students will explore ethical issues in the library and information science field and reflect on how their own ethical perspectives affect their information seeking behavior. In addition to the course learning outcome, Lesson 1's learning outcomes were as follows:

1. Students will explore ethical issues related to information creation, access, and use.
2. Students will reflect on their own ethical perspectives as it relates to information.
3. Students will create an Information Code of Ethics to ground their approach to research in the course.

Lecture & Class Discussion (45 minutes)

Instructor 1 began the lesson with a lecture about information, various information formats, and information literacy. Next, the instructor discussed various ethical frameworks (e.g. utilitarianism, care ethics). Remaining time was spent exploring issues in information ethics. Burgess (2019) writes that "information ethics is the story of the good that can be accomplished with information, and all the ways it may be used to harm." The instructor shared this definition then asked students to think about the ways information may help or harm people.

Next, the instructor provided an overview of some major themes in information ethics (e.g., access, ownership, privacy, and security) and shared examples from the news to help explain the themes. To discuss information access, the instructor used TikTok's content moderation policies and the suppression of Black creators and content about racial injustice as an example (Rosenblatt, 2021). Then the instructor posed a discussion question for the group to discuss: Are there any instances where limiting one's access to information is appropriate?

Group Activity: Information Code of Ethics (30 minutes)

Following the discussion about various ethical issues related to information, students worked in their small groups to create an Information Code of Ethics. This group activity was created to support students' abilities to complete the Personal AI Framework assignment by asking students to think about what ethical information and AI use look like.

Students were given the following prompt:

Imagine you have to create standards for ethical information creation and use today. What would you include? Consider the following questions:

- What does it mean to ethically engage with information?
- What are the ways that information is used for good? What about harm?
- What ethical issues related to information come up during research? What about your day-to-day?
- How does information impact society?

They were also given a list of ideas to help them get started. This included topics such as artificial intelligence, plagiarism, misinformation, and more. The instructor provided each group with a dry erase board and markers to write their Code of Ethics.

After completing the activity, each group took turns sharing their Information Code of Ethics with the rest of the class. The larger class then worked together to identify similarities and points they agreed with to create a Code of Information Ethics to guide them for the rest of the semester. Below is the Code of Information Ethics that the class came up with for the Fall 2025 semester:

1. The way we interact with information should be responsible, honest, and respectful.
2. We will aim to use and create credible information and avoid spreading misinformation.
3. We want to protect people's privacy and be transparent about data collection and use.
4. We want to lower barriers to accessing information to ensure that information is available to all.
5. We will always give credit to others for their work and ideas.

Lesson 2: AI Ethics (75 minutes)

Lesson 2: AI Ethics took place the following week. This lesson was developed to introduce students to ethical issues connected to AI and prepare students to complete Section 2: AI Use and Section 3: Personal AI Framework of the Personal AI Framework assignment. The second lesson supported the first course learning outcome:

Students will explore ethical issues in the library and information science field and reflect on how their own ethical perspectives affect their information seeking behavior. The following were the learning outcomes for Lesson 2:

1. Students will explain their personal perspectives relating to the ethical concerns associated with each stage of development for AI technologies.
2. Students will describe how algorithmic bias can emerge from an AI system's data and learned patterns.
3. Students will identify guiding questions that inform their ethical use of AI in the context of their academic work.

This lesson featured a debate, guest lecture, and group discussion. Once again, students sat in small groups of five, which they chose.

Group Activity: Information Ethics Debate (30 minutes)

Throughout the semester, students participated in mini debates about an issue related to information ethics. These debates were intended to help students speak persuasively about an issue and introduce a concept to their classmates. For this class, debate participants argued whether professors should be allowed to use Gen AI tools to design lessons and grade assignments.

Pre-Guest Lecture Icebreaker Activity (10 minutes)

Following the in-class debate, Instructor 2 conducted an icebreaker activity to lead into the guest lecture as well as to gauge students' knowledge and beliefs around the topic of Gen AI. The instructor asked two questions:

1. What is one thing you already know about AI & Ethics?
2. What is one thing you want to know about AI & Ethics?

Students chose which question to answer, wrote their response on a sticky note, and attached it to one of two sections of the dry erase board at the front of the room (corresponding to the correct question). Regardless of which question students chose to answer, their responses shaped the direction of the lecture and class discussion to reflect their areas of interest. Their responses were read aloud in class, but student's names were not attached to their answers.

There were fifteen responses in total (two students chose to respond to both questions). One out of every three responses approached the topic of AI and ethics as a question of individuals' personal use of Gen AI tools. Of those, two framed ethical AI use in a classroom context, one framed it in a workplace context, and two discussed potential inaccuracy as a point of concern in personal Gen AI use.

The other two thirds of responses approached AI and ethics on a broader level than individuals' use of this technology:

- Five students identified specific ethical concerns related to AI: bias, copyright, environmental impact, AI in healthcare, and trust/safety.
- Two students talked about the popularity of Gen AI tools in the current moment.
- Three students responded with broad requests for more context around AI technologies. Of those responses, one framed the request in terms of forming their personal opinion about AI; one wanted to know about "the dark side" of AI, and one had questions about how machine learning worked.

Guest Lecture & Class Discussion (35 Minutes)

After the icebreaker, Instructor 2 used slides to present a guest lecture and class discussion (AI Session Slides). This portion of the lesson began with a brief explanation of how Gen AI tools generate new content mirroring patterns found in training data and facilitated small-group discussions about how various ethical issues arise at each stage of a tool's development (e.g., copyright concerns tied to where and how training data is collected, concerns about bias tied to which patterns emerge during training). This discussion was structured as a pair-share activity.

The lecture included additional sections for student discussion. The first was a comparison of two case studies where a machine learning system used or developed for the medical field replicated a harmful bias in its conclusions/output. Context was given explaining the difference between predictive and

generative AI models. As a class, students were asked to theorize about what pattern in the training data could have resulted in that biased output, discuss the risks of using biased models, and share their thoughts on human oversight in automated decision-making.

At the end of the session, students were asked to participate in small-group discussions about what ethical concerns they would want to address before they would be comfortable using a Gen AI tool in their academic practice. Students shared their conclusions with the group. Many of the students brought up environmental concerns and privacy, and one student said they would not be comfortable using Gen AI in their academic work at all. These small-group discussions were intended to prepare students to further explore these concepts in their Personal AI Framework Assignment.

Critical Reflection

Our goal with the two lessons and the Personal AI Framework assignment was to encourage students to make informed decisions about Gen AI after becoming concerned with how students were using it in previous semesters. We wanted to give them the ability to explain their views on Gen AI instead of prohibiting all uses in the course. We also wanted students to reflect on how their ethical perspectives impact not only their Gen AI use, but their approach to research overall.

The learning representation met two of the course's learning outcomes. With the lessons and assignment, students explored ethical issues in the library and information science field and reflected on how their own ethical perspectives affect their information seeking behavior. They also began to develop, implement, and revise a personalized research process to address an information need by considering how they might use Gen AI to support their research in future course assignments.

Students also engaged with threshold concepts from the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016) during the class sessions and through the assignment. For example, students grappled with the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame when students reflected on how Gen AI can present false information as fact and when they consider the bias that is present in large language models. Students approached the Information Has Value frame when they considered how AI relates to copyright protections and when they discussed some of the "dark sides" of AI, such as the environmental cost of Gen AI systems. Finally, students explored the Information Creation as a Process frame through the Personal AI Framework assignment, where they shared ways in which Gen AI use might help or hinder their research process.

We also learned a lot about the ways current college students think about and use Gen AI in their classes. Across assignments and class discussions, students balanced the ideas of "ethics as personal choices" and "ethics as technology in society" in conversation with one another. Students indicated that they are using Gen AI to assist with generating ideas, summarizing information, and breaking down large tasks. It was interesting to see that there was consensus surrounding unacceptable Gen AI use, which included citing false information in assignments, submitting Gen AI generated work, and not disclosing Gen AI use. This also aligns with the course's policy on Gen AI.

Student responses to the icebreaker question during Lesson 2 highlighted a potential distinction in how students are thinking about the ethical concerns surrounding Gen AI. When presented with two open-ended questions about Gen AI ethics, one third of student responses approached the issue in terms of how individuals use these tools. The rest looked beyond individual use and considered the broader social, legal, and ethical dimensions of these technologies.

One student response in the former category that stood out to Instructor 2 was, "I would like to know if there something specific you would have to put into AI for it to give you false information on a topic." This question of framing (should Gen AI misinformation be addressed as an individual issue or a social issue) went on to shape later in-class discussions about how the process of a technology's development can influence the impact it has once it is deployed.

Three students indicated that they used Gen AI to assist with editing their framework. One student stated that they used ChatGPT to answer the questions outlined in the assignment description. This was concerning because the Personal AI Framework asks students to reflect on their own personal experiences. Another student's assignment

stood out because they argued that any use of Gen AI was unethical because of environmental racism. We did not anticipate this kind of perspective but appreciated the student's justification for their stance.

While implementing the lessons was a success, Instructor 1's perspective about Gen AI changed, particularly around using Gen AI to come up with ideas or brainstorm research topics. Prior to grading the assignment, she supported the use of Gen AI to assist with generating ideas. Gen AI can help one overcome writer's block or view a topic from another perspective, but it can also limit what students can imagine as possible. This became apparent with the research topics for later assignments. The students who used Gen AI throughout the course chose research topics that were similar to one another. Using Gen AI to generate ideas can inhibit unique thoughts and creativity so it is important to equip students with the skills to interrogate the outputs and incorporate their original views.

There are a few ways that this lesson could be adapted to fit different contexts. When we implemented the lesson, we had students from all class years with a variety of majors. If the class had primarily first-years, the two class sessions could be changed to focus more attention on how university policies such as academic integrity or the student code of conduct relate to ethical frameworks and the use of artificial intelligence. Students could also be asked to reflect on how their university's expectations differ from what they experienced in high school. This approach would help newer students gain a better understanding of what rules they are bound by and why. In contrast, for a class of primarily juniors and seniors, the lessons and assignment could prompt students to reflect more on what they believe ethical AI use looks like in their future careers. In a class where most students are from the same major, an instructor could ask more pointed reflection questions and present different examples of AI-related controversies that are connected to their discipline.

The lessons could also be altered to fit time constraints. If an instructor only had a single class session to devote to these topics, they could omit the code of ethics activity in the first lesson and the debate about professors and AI from the second lesson. They could also teach only the ethics lesson or the AI lesson, depending on the needs of the course, although the assignment would need to be revised to omit content and concepts that students would not be exposed to in class. The lessons could also be run without the accompanying Personal AI Framework assignment. Although that assignment is a great way to encourage thoughtful reflection, students would still benefit from the class activities alone. Alternatively, the assignment could be replaced with a smaller scale in-class journaling exercise.

We do believe that the lessons will help shape future approaches to Gen AI in our class. As students learn about Gen AI, they can connect this learning with their own personal values and can better make informed decisions about what uses of Gen AI they consider to be ethical and appropriate. We plan to make this the first assignment so that students immediately think about Gen AI when the class starts. In addition, we plan to adjust the Personal AI framework assignment description to be specific to Gen AI. Some students reflected on simpler forms of AI such as spell-check or citation management software like Zotero. Although these responses fit the criteria for the assignment, they did not match our original intent. We also want to aim for more discussions about Gen AI throughout the semester and have students refer to their Personal AI Framework periodically so that they can make changes to it as they develop an informed perspective on Gen AI.

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