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# AI and Course Work
## Figuring out Ethical Strategies

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See table of contents

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Article abstract

At John Abbott and Concordia, many departmental discussions have been started addressing the scary and very real situation pertaining to AI and student work. At Concordia, one department that I know of has already circulated a working document about AI, outlining problems and strategies—this is what we need more of for sure. The English Department at Concordia has started meetings, and many discussions are taking place at the Cegep level on both the departmental and administrative levels. Is there anything we can really do, is a major question that I feel, for now, might not have an answer. What we do need to do is figure out how to address AI, how to find it/spot-it, and via our pedagogies how to motivate students not to use AI. In short, yes, we can—solutions are popping up to detect AI and, most of all, we need to make sure we don't overload our own work schedules trying to outsmart students who use AI. This article presents an overview of obstacles that current course instructors face, be they tenured faculty, lecturers, non-permanent/part-time faculty, or teaching-assistants ; as well, this informal discussion of such problems and findings is the beginning to a discussion on how to manage course content and time without burning out as we navigate the often confusing realities associated with AI and the internet as a source where students can readily cheat and/or plagiarize.

# AI and Course Work
## Figuring out Ethical Strategies
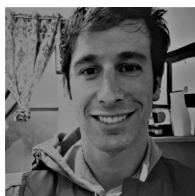
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Brian M. Peters, lectures at Concordia University and teaches at John Abbott College. His work at the university includes college writing, literature, creative writing, and theatre ; at Cegep, he teaches literature and comparative literature and film courses. With his doctorate in comparative literature, he has published extensively since the mid-1990s on topics from 20th century literature, vampires and the gothic, American literature, along with a series of essays in popular culture. These include musicology, masculinities, queer studies, the shifting spaces of urban geographies and youth culture. He has two novel manuscripts complete and one sits with a publisher currently, awaiting hopeful print. These novel projects embrace subjects of youth, coming of age, nostalgia, and music.

At John Abbott and Concordia, many departmental discussions have been started addressing the scary and very real situation pertaining to AI and student work. At Concordia, one department that I know of has already circulated a working document about AI, outlining problems and strategies– this is what we need more of for sure. The English Department at Concordia has started meetings, and many discussions are taking place at the Cegep level on both the departmental and administrative levels. Is there anything we can really do, is a major question that I feel, for now, might not have an answer. What we do need to do is figure out how to address AI, how to find it/spot-it, and via our pedagogies how to motivate students not to use AI. In short, yes, we can–solutions are popping up to detect AI and, most of all, we need to make sure we don't overload our own work schedules trying to outsmart students who use AI. This article presents an overview of obstacles that current course instructors face, be they tenured faculty, lecturers, non-permanent/ part-time faculty, or teaching-assistants ; as well, this informal discussion of such problems and findings is the beginning to a discussion on how to manage course content and time without burning out as we navigate the often confusing realities associated with AI and the internet as a source where students can readily cheat and/or plagiarize.

Technology has shaped our professional lives and evolved rather impressively over the past twenty years. This includes vocal commands for Siri or Alexa for music, timers, alarms, and whatnot—it seems strange to me when I can do it myself, but this is all part of our new technology. Doing research, submitting articles, creating dossiers, student submissions, marking, traveling for work and pleasure…these are simplified at an amazing level. Over time, I would say a healthy fifteen years, we've all been in situations where work comes in from our students and we know it isn't theirs—we know that the writing/thinking far surpasses the ability of a student we might be suspecting of cheating in some way. Now with AI databases, students have fine-tuned the once obvious. Depending on student doctoring and class size, let alone teacher workload, where do we draw the line and where do we just say no to torturing ourselves with detective work?

### Features of AI :

Databases that sell students essays are, for me, obvious—or have been in the past (this year is a mystery as it has yet to start). An AI generated essay is trickier than a clearly bought/tailored essay, and often includes trigger words that either don't fit course content and don't fit student abilities that signal a paper is not the student's real work. I can usually find an internet paper easily by searching for a phrase that doesn't sound like the student in question or a given student in the level of the course I am teaching. Turnitin makes life fairly easy for us, or easier, and I do believe most colleges and universities provide course instructors with direct access to this resource. With AI, things get sticky, and our current nemesis appears to be CHAT GPT. Students can type in words, key words we use when we lecture and from our documents, and often the result is decent. However, and I can't stress this more, a paper generated via AI has a particular tone, a cadence even, that gives it away. What can we expect course instructors to do with huge classes and myriad assignments? Imagining we can police/mitigate

what we feel is AI generated is shaky ground to stand on. AI is, indeed, very slippery, and tricky to navigate a lot of the time while at other times it is detectable. Without policies in place at our institutions, we are in an awkward position right now.

### Current trends in pedagogy and assessment :

Current trends are not ethical, nor sane for the course instructor, as they instantly lead to teacher frustration and in time burn-out. Many Cegep profs have been shifting assignments to in-class, even complete essay writing in class, weekly quizzes and tests that involve constant marking. Gegep teaching involves a heavy contact hour contract, a good 120 students per term, and a lot of marking already as formative works are part of the process. I've watched teachers become exhausted from assignments worth negligible percentages and constant, non-stop marking. Such teachers, filled with heart and integrity, go on leaves as they burn out eventually. Their intentions reveal an exceptional level of professional dedication, but at what cost? Getting sick is not worth it.

Moreover, cutting away materials for in-class time, of which we do quite a bit based on the ministerial division of time in given courses and the related abilities we face with incoming students, hinders the student's knowledge : the less we get them to read and explore, the fewer areas and texts used in a given course, disenfranchise the student and their acquisition of knowledge. Veering away from canonical or older texts and using recently published texts require a lot of prep work on the part of the course instructor and could diminish AI realities, however the workload required is a lot. These strategies are exhausting and time consuming and can lead to fatigue and eventual burn-out. Also, filing down a course to a couple of short stories, a few poems and a film isn't a fabulous nor dynamic curriculum. We need to be able to have a course that moves forward with a series of important material, not just a limited few.

**En bref** | De nombreuses discussions ont été entamées à l'Université Concordia pour aborder la situation très particulière de l'IA et des productions des étudiants. Malgré une certaine inquiétude, comprendre comment aborder l'IA, comment l'identifier et la repérer, comment motiver les étudiants à ne pas utiliser l'IA sont des stratégies pédagogiques à développer. Cet article présente un aperçu des obstacles auxquels sont confrontés les enseignants actuels, qu'il s'agisse de professeurs titulaires, de chargés de cours, de professeurs non permanents/à temps partiel ou d'assistants d'enseignement. Ce texte est une réflexion sur la façon de gérer le contenu et le temps des cours sans s'épuiser alors qu'on navigue dans les réalités souvent déroutantes associées à l'IA et à l'Internet en tant que source où les étudiants peuvent facilement tricher et /ou plagier.

An example to help solidify numbers and marking is from my own experience: when I started at Cegep, echoing the assessments I had as a student, we had three essays totaling 90 % of our grade, or thereabouts, and a participation mark for the remainder. Many Cegeps do not allow participation points and a given evaluation plan might be a reading exam, two essays, formative work throughout the term, and a presentation with options. You can clearly see a lot more marking at hand in the current reality we live as Cegep teachers. Implementing tons of tiny assignments only makes our lives difficult.

At university, where the syllabi are content based, we often have a lot of ground to cover at the undergraduate level, so AI is a lot harder to navigate. In a standard class of roughly fifty students, it seems unlikely that anyone would have time to police submissions unless a submission is blatantly obvious. With AI, submissions are far less obvious than the once bought internet essay. Smaller classes don't fall at risk, whereas the larger classes with mass marking divided between faculty and assistants are, I feel, at most risk. However, between AI and other related databases, a 200-level course like Shakespeare or a canon survey will for sure have essay areas that can lead to such forms of cheating. What can we do to tailor our courses and assignments to diminish successful cheating via AI and the like?

### Suggestions:

So far, some suggestions for diminishing the possibility of AI include specific essay or exam questions; questions and wording that reflect instructor individuality; writing workshops for outline and draft work in-class (Cegep and university writing classes lend well to this, but other kinds of university courses do not); and submissions of in-class writing (same as above) can all discourage students from using AI. Or one can hope.

At the start of the term, going over the syllabus and stressing the plagiarism and cheating policies of the institution will also help. Be firm. Do mention internet essays, AI, college, or university penalties for being caught, as well as instructor diligence. If you have a large class with assistants, make sure your students know that there are three or five of you working together to ensure students who use AI or buy essays from the net are reported. It's important that students know that most course instructors are competent with technology—our jobs call for such knowledge. Make sure they know that you are in-the-know and perhaps, just perhaps, this can help them realize that they are best to keep up with the work and submit legitimate work. Moreover, go over, in detail, resources for students who might be developing skills to help them do well.

### Student assignments:

Throughout the term, my Cegep students submit formative assignments. These could be in the form of term paper preps for Universe of the Arts, which asks for, departmentally, an annotated bibliography, outline, and draft work, and then a final version. For my Cegep English classes, a portfolio submitted toward the end of the term that includes a variety of formative work creates a very good indicator of how a student writes, thinks, and develops ideas. Upon submission of such a portfolio, an instructor can see the progression and evaluate if an essay matches the portfolio. Such a formative portfolio also keeps us from targeting weaker students who often, I am told, bear the brunt of AI accusations. A portfolio is a good way to assess if the work belongs to the student you might think is using AI. AI cannot copy writing style or writing quirks, as far as I can gather. Weaker students will improve throughout the portfolio, even marginally, and any essay they write would match the tone/style of the portfolio. If they improve dramatically, as many do, everything will match and hinder us from making them feel like they are being accused of pilfering work from the internet, a problem that does exist as a knee jerk reaction to AI.

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### The reality of AI and detection :

There are programs that do detect AI. Do an internet search and find a program that works best for you. They are, according to my web search, effective—or effective enough and developing. By the time this comes to print, more databases will become AI sensitive and help us when we feel a student is cheating. Colleges and universities are helping faculty by making such databases, like Turnitin, available. I think, eventually, something that works well will be in effect.

### Tips for staying sane :

Don't spend your leisure time policing students. You will burn yourself out. If I think a student hasn't been honest and can't prove it, I have a catch phrase in my comments : "don't forget to cite all your sources." I also don't give As or high Bs to work I feel isn't honestly done. If I find the work on the internet, or even in part, I then follow institutional protocol. When I can't, and I use my catch phrase, I've yet to be challenged which probably means I was right in my assumption, and the student I might have thought cheated was thrilled they didn't fail or get caught. Most of all, remember not to target a less engaged or weak student. Some students need to do poorly in a major assignment or two before they buckle-down. A portfolio of formative work can help assess if a student is cheating or not—and easily. I also make sure not to work myself to the bone trying to figure out who found what where. This is not part of my contract and yes, a bit of detective work when in doubt is fine, however, I have a job to do. Giving a great course is my priority, not policing submissions.

My closing remark is simple : if students are cheating, they are cheating only themselves. They will fail out of graduate school or a series of jobs if they truly cannot write properly or think critically. The skills we give them are also life skills. I highlight honesty and integrity, and help students navigate the internet during writing workshops to show them databases that can reinforce course material and essay topics, opposed to generating essays that are a definitive form of cheating. Most of all, databases to detect AI are out there and, supposedly, fairly accurate. Discuss obstacles with your department chairs and administrators about making such databases available (as they are probably already trying to do now). When uncertain, ask questions, seek departmental support, and ask your administration to provide instructors with platforms and programs that can help detect an assignment suspected of being AI generated.