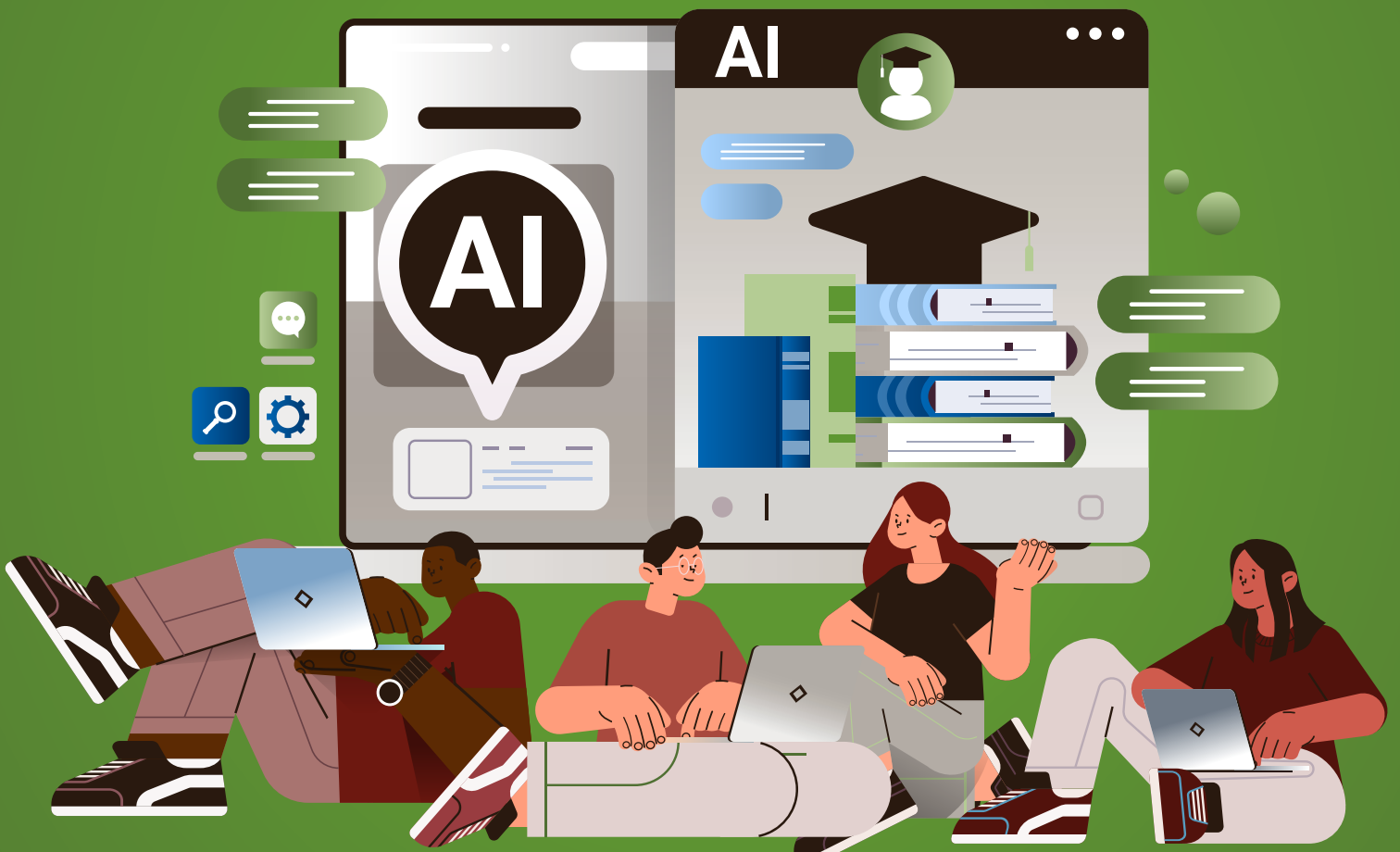




Education
Healthcare
Public Services

AFT Higher
Education

Key Principles for Using Artificial Intelligence





Randi Weingarten
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Our Mission

The **AFT** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Copyright © AFT, AFL-CIO (AFT 2025). Permission is hereby granted to AFT state and local affiliates to reproduce and distribute copies of the work for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that copies are distributed at or below cost, and that the author, source, and copyright notice are included on each copy. Any distribution of such materials to third parties who are outside of the AFT or its affiliates is prohibited without first receiving the express written permission of the AFT.

A Message from AFT President Randi Weingarten

It's a tumultuous time in U.S. higher education. Alongside political attacks and intrusion into what scholars can study and students can learn, higher ed has been grappling with the rapid development and broad-scale deployment of advanced artificial intelligence technologies. As in many other sectors, AI has had a huge and immediate impact, touching core working conditions, the nature of teaching and learning, and the very foundation of the relationship between teacher and student.

As educators confront AI's effects on higher ed, the AFT is here to help. The following "Key Principles for Using Artificial Intelligence" is a resource for those seeking to capitalize on the benefits of AI, thwart the problems it can cause, and—through their unions and campus governance bodies—have a strong and vital voice in crafting policy, protecting student and worker privacy, safeguarding intellectual property and ensuring accessibility for all.

At the core of the AFT's "Key Principles" is a fundamental conviction: that learning is something that takes place between human beings. AI technologies, no matter how advanced and impressive, can never replace the expertise, curiosity and intelligence of human teachers, researchers and learners. The integration of AI into the educational process must always be in the service of that core concept, never a replacement for it.

In higher ed, the deployment of AI raises particular concerns for the intellectual property of faculty, which is often the product of laborious research work. AI technologies must come with robust safeguards against the unlicensed use of instructional materials, research results and published works they encounter, especially given the industry's track record of building its core tools using uncompensated copyrighted work.

Equally important is the protection of user privacy and equitable access to AI technologies. Advanced technologies have the potential to be a great boon to learning and accessibility, but educator unions and governance groups must have a seat at the table to ensure that these new tools lift students up rather than deepening existing divides.

Finally, it's crucial that educators and students gain AI literacy, to spot AI hallucinations (falsehoods or inaccurate or illogical information) and understand the biases that can propagate through automated, generative systems. Through education, we can build good digital citizenship and promote democratic values for the next generation.

These key principles embody core values that educators can bring to their teaching, their students and the bargaining table. Higher ed has faced disruptive technological changes before, and we will come through like we always do: together, united, in shared service to each other and our students.

AFT Higher Education: Key Principles for Using Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is transforming how faculty teach and how students learn. And as AI becomes embedded in educational institutions, its influence extends beyond the classroom to impact assessment, research, accreditation, student support services and institutional management. Administrators, faculty and academic staff, through their unions and shared governance bodies, must take proactive steps to maintain control over the use of AI in all aspects of the institutional mission in order to safeguard academic integrity, protect intellectual property and ensure workers' rights. Colleges and universities must adopt and govern these technologies ethically and effectively, ensuring they uphold the rights, protections and privacy of faculty, staff and students. The following recommendations outline concrete actions affiliates can take to achieve these goals.

This document will be updated on a regular basis in response to technological change and related developments. What follows is a set of core guidelines that affiliates may use as a basis for their specific cases.

Definitions

Artificial intelligence refers to technologies that perform tasks usually thought to require human cognitive processes and decision-making capabilities (from Educause). This includes but is not limited to generative AI that is capable of producing text, images, audio, video and other forms of media, often on the basis of training sets that include unlicensed and uncompensated intellectual property.

Key Principles

Protect intellectual property and human work.

- Faculty must always maintain ownership of their intellectual property, including their syllabus and course materials, their research and their publications. Clear policies that explicitly recognize faculty as the creators and rightful owners of their work must be established, regardless of whether AI tools were used in their development. Even if AI tools are part of the development process, the end product remains the faculty member's intellectual property.
- AI tools cannot replace the expertise of faculty and staff. Quality of instruction, assessment of student learning outcomes, and the value of a degree all depend fundamentally on the knowledge, work and judgment of professional instructors. While AI tools may be used in the service of teaching and learning, any AI usage must start and end with a human decision-maker.
- Employers must ensure that any use of faculty-created materials by the institution or third parties (e.g., for learning management platforms for online courses, training programs or commercial ventures) is subject to proper licensing agreements with AI companies, with the faculty member retaining the right to approve or deny such uses.
- In cases where the institution retains ownership of the intellectual property produced by instructional or other academic staff, the institution must not sell or license the use of the instructor's work to third parties, including for training of AI tools, without the approval of the relevant staff governance bodies and/or unions.
- Institutions of higher education must provide faculty and staff with training and resources to understand their intellectual property rights, especially in relation to AI-generated content. This could include workshops, legal consultations and guides on how to protect their work.
- Institutions must implement safeguards to prevent unauthorized use or reproduction of faculty- and staff-generated materials, including watermarking digital content, access controls and robust copyright enforcement mechanisms.

Ensure collective responsibility and shared decision-making.

- **Union and shared governance involvement:**
 - » Campuswide adoption or procurement of AI must be transparent and conducted in full consultation with faculty and staff unions, as well as shared governance bodies. These collective entities must have a binding, formative role in shaping policies governing AI across all areas of higher education—including curriculum,

instruction, research, hiring and promotion practices, student assessment, and institutional decision-making tools.

- **Mandatory collective bargaining:**

- » When AI intersects with terms and conditions of employment (e.g., workload, intellectual property or evaluation protocols), these issues must be negotiated with the appropriate union(s). Even when the implementation of AI is not a mandatory subject of collective bargaining, faculty and staff unions must have the ability to bargain impact. Faculty and staff unions must also have a voice when it comes to the identification, procurement and administration of AI products and platforms that intersect with faculty and staff work assignments.
- » The use of AI must not lead to workload increases without appropriate compensation or workload adjustment.
- » Faculty and staff must have autonomy over the implementation and administration of AI in teaching, research and publishing. In instances of mandatory subjects of bargaining, any use of an AI product must be negotiated before its procurement.
- » Faculty and instructional staff have the right to decide if, when and how to implement and administer AI in their own teaching, research and academic work.

Promote transparent and fair practices.

- **Hiring processes:**

- » Faculty and staff, through their unions and/or shared governance bodies, must have a voice when it comes to the implementation of AI in hiring processes. AI tools must never supplant faculty and staff judgment and expertise in hiring.
- » Institutions of higher education must guard against AI being used for racial profiling, discrimination in hiring or bias against other protected classes, including but not limited to race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.
- » When AI policies touch on mandatory subjects of bargaining, it is essential that employers and unions negotiate to ensure that human judgment, expertise and labor remain central to educational processes. Clear contract language or memorandums of understanding must affirm the irreplaceable value of faculty and staff by protecting their roles in teaching, assessment and decision-making.
- » When state laws govern the use of AI in hiring and employment, legislators must ensure that faculty and staff have a formal role—through their unions or shared governance bodies—in shaping workplace policies.

- **Promotion, tenure and termination:**

- » Using AI in promotion, tenure and termination decisions is not acceptable. While tenure and promotion dossiers may include materials produced through the use of AI tools (e.g., evaluation summaries or citation analyses), determinations about the disposition of individual cases must be made exclusively by human evaluators.
- » Collective bargaining agreements, faculty and staff handbooks, and other documents governing employment must explicitly prohibit the use of AI as the basis for promotion, tenure or termination decisions.

- **Disclosure:**

- » Institutions must disclose the procurement and use of AI systems to faculty, staff and students.
- » Students must be informed when AI is used in assessments or when their performance is evaluated by AI, such as through time-on-task analysis or teacher-student interaction metrics.
- » AI systems used by the employer must be audited annually to ensure transparency, ethical use, data privacy, bias mitigation and intellectual property compliance. The results of these audits must be shared with the appropriate union or shared governance body.
- » If an institution contemplates using AI tools in faculty and staff hiring, the technology must undergo thorough bias testing, and faculty/staff unions must have a formal role in setting guidelines.

- **Privacy:**

- » The protection of student and employee data must be paramount.
- » Any use of AI in conducting or administering research with human subjects must comport with applicable

institutional review board regulations and state and federal laws regarding subject privacy.

- » Administrations, unions and governance bodies must work together with vendors to ensure that personal data remains private, is not inappropriately shared and is not used to train AI models.
- » Colleges and universities must codify privacy regulations for faculty through collective bargaining agreements and/or shared governance policies.

Provide equitable access to technology, training and infrastructure.

- Faculty, staff and students must have equitable and inclusive access to AI tools and resources.
- To uphold commitments to disability equity and avoid creating barriers for faculty, staff or students with disabilities, colleges and universities must confirm that any AI technology they plan to adopt meets legal requirements and institutional standards for user accessibility. Any assistive technology incorporating AI functionalities that is provided to students, faculty or staff as a reasonable accommodation must serve the purpose of mitigating barriers faced by individuals with disabilities and must protect individuals' data privacy.
- AI tools must empower users to enhance their educational experience, cultivate critical skills and foster innovation, regardless of socioeconomic background, institutional resources or technical expertise.
- Employers (colleges and universities) must ensure full access to necessary hardware, high-speed internet and software licenses, particularly for those working or learning remotely or off campus. They must also ensure all campus facilities—including libraries, labs and workspaces—are equipped with necessary tools and internet connectivity to use AI resources effectively, and must establish cloud-based access for AI tools, allowing students, faculty and staff to use them remotely, especially for those who may not have access to high-performance devices at home.
- If employers contract with vendors to provide AI products or services, those technologies must be made available to all members of the college or university community who could benefit from them in their teaching, learning or other educational work.
- Faculty and staff tasked with integrating AI into their research and teaching must be compensated for increased workloads, in particular contingent faculty and staff.
- Robust, ongoing professional development must be provided to faculty and staff regarding AI best practices, data privacy and intellectual property rights.

Teach ethical and responsible usage and promote democracy.

- Faculty and staff must educate students on the ethical and responsible use of AI tools as these tools become increasingly present in our lives, and this educational work must be accounted for and compensated appropriately.
- Faculty and staff must teach and instill the values of good digital citizenship, in the interest of promoting and maintaining democracy and democratic values.
- Students must ethically distinguish their own intellectual effort and development from the assistance of a machine.
- Students, staff and faculty must be provided with the resources and skills to critically evaluate information, recognizing and addressing potential misinformation or disinformation that may arise from AI.
- Students, staff and faculty must be taught how to look for and correct AI “hallucinations,” biases or misinformation in AI outputs, and how to determine when the use of AI may be inappropriate, given its limitations.
- Through a commitment to information literacy and “AI literacy,” all educational stakeholders must be empowered to discern fact from fiction, fostering a culture of informed, analytical engagement with AI-generated content.

Augment, not replace, human expertise.

- AI must be used only to augment faculty and staff expertise, never to replace it.
- Human judgment must come first and last when it comes to the development of expertise, production of new knowledge and effective instruction.
- Final assessments of student performance must be conducted by a qualified instructor.

AFT Higher Education AI Task Force

Greg Bachar, AFT Seattle Community Colleges

Joe Cirio, Stockton Federation of Teachers

David Conrad, University Professionals of Illinois

Tim Haresign, AFT New Jersey

Amalia Herrmann, University Council-American Federation of Teachers

Alissa Karl, United University Professions

Rebecca Nesvet, AFT-Wisconsin

Russell Newman, Affiliated Faculty of Emerson College, AAUP/AFT

Eric Rader, Henry Ford Community College Federation of Teachers

Troy Swanson, Cook County College Teachers Union



Education | Healthcare | Public Services

AFT, AFL-CIO | 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W. | Washington, DC 20001 | www.aft.org



aft.org



[@aft.org](https://twitter.com/aft.org)



[AFTunion](https://www.facebook.com/AFTunion)



[@AFTunion](https://www.soundcloud.com/AFTunion)



[@AFTunion](https://www.instagram.com/AFTunion)



09/25