

University of Cape Town

Faculty of Commerce

Framework for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research Dissertations

1. Introduction

This Faculty framework is based on the *UCT Framework for Artificial Intelligence in Education: Generative and Other AI in Teaching, Learning and Assessment* (June 2025). It provides Faculty-wide standards for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in postgraduate research dissertations.

The framework applies to all **Honours, Masters and PhD dissertations** (major and minor) submitted in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Cape Town.

2. Faculty-Wide Standards

2.1 Transparency and Originality of Work

- Dissertations must reflect the student's own intellectual work. AI use is only permitted where explicitly authorised and must be acknowledged.
- In line with UCT's AI Framework, spelling and grammar software is permissible. Any broader use of AI must be specified in departmental guidelines. If no such guidelines exist, students should assume AI use, beyond what is indicated in this broad guideline document, is not permitted.
- If a department authorises limited AI assistance, it must clearly state which tools and activities are acceptable, and how use must be acknowledged.
- Supervisors may provide guidance on applying departmental policies but are not authorised to independently permit AI use beyond what is indicated in this broad guideline document. The authoritative rules are those set out in departmental guidelines. Departmental guidelines should be communicated through official course outlines and/or degree dissertation guidance materials, and/or departmental or section policies as explicitly endorsed by the degree convenor and/or Head of Department.
- Where AI use is authorised, students remain fully responsible for verifying the accuracy, reliability, and originality of their work.

2.2 Marking Principle

- Marks are awarded on the basis of the student's own demonstrated understanding, reasoning, and argumentation.
- No marks will be awarded for AI-generated content per se.

2.3 Evidence of Compliant Use

- All students must declare any use of AI and keep a record or portfolio of prompts and outputs for accountability.
- Every dissertation submitted in the Faculty must include a **front-matter disclosure** of AI use (see Appendix A), stating the tool, version, and purpose.

- Students must make efforts to retain and save process evidence, which may be requested by supervisors, Heads of Department, or Faculty committees. Suitable forms of process evidence may include:
 - Original draft(s)
 - AI prompts
 - AI outputs
 - Verification steps undertaken

2.4 Detection

- AI detection tools (e.g., Turnitin AI score) are unreliable and may not be used as the sole evidence of misconduct. UCT will discontinue the AI score function from 1 October 2025.
- Concerns about potential misconduct must instead be investigated through draft reviews, AI records, supervision records, and/or oral explanations.

3. Phase-by-Phase Guidance

This guidance is provided for inclusion in dissertation handbooks. Departments may introduce stricter conditions, but not looser ones.

3.1 Conceptualisation & Literature Review

- Permitted with disclosure (if authorised): idea-generation prompts; search-term brainstorming; drafting reading plans; generating outlines, titles, or summary labels as starting points.
- Not permitted for credit: inserting AI-generated summaries or citations directly into dissertations; using fabricated or unverified references (misconduct).
- Required practice: all students must keep prompt logs. Any permitted AI-assisted text must be rewritten in the student's own voice and fact-checked against source materials.

3.2 Data Collection / Transcription

- **Permitted (where also approved by ethics clearance):**
 - Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) tools for student-owned data.
 - Non-AI automation tools (Excel macros / VBA scripts, Form-to-database scripts, Survey exports (Qualtrics, REDCap, SurveyMonkey)).
- **Permitted only with explicit departmental approval and disclosure:**
 - OCR (Optical Character Recognition) with AI enhancement, for example, scanning paper surveys or consent forms into digital datasets.
 - Smart data capture apps that use machine learning to classify, tag, or clean entries while importing them.
 - Voice-to-form tools (i.e. ASR input is directly inputted into structured fields).

- Further guidance: Departments and/or the Commerce Faculty Ethics Committee will specify approved tools and privacy conditions.

3.3 Data Analysis

Permitted with disclosure (if authorised by department):

- AI-generated suggestions for syntax or debugging.
 - Code linting (use of tools to check code quality and highlight errors).
 - Automation of routine coding tasks (e.g., recoding variables, generating descriptive statistics, or plotting graphs).
 - Plotting and visualisation assistance.
 - Exploratory summaries of data, provided the student can explain, reproduce, and validate the results.
 - Use of AI to propose preliminary themes in qualitative data, provided the student critically reviews, revises, and interprets these themes independently.
 - Synthetic quantitative data generation may only be used where methodologically justified, explicitly declared, and formally approved in writing by departmental guidelines. All use of synthetic data is additionally subject to prior ethics approval and oversight.
- **Not permitted:**
 - Outsourcing analysis or interpretation entirely to AI without verification.
 - Submitting AI-generated analyses, interpretations, or conclusions as if they were the student's own.
 - Using AI to fabricate data, statistical results, or references.

3.4 Write-up

- **Always permitted:** copy-editing for grammar and spelling.
- **Permitted with disclosure (if authorised by department):** clarity/conciseness editing of author-written text; formatting references and figures; general language polishing.
- **Not permitted:** drafting substantive sections that introduce new claims or synthesis in place of the student's own writing.

4. Compliance and Misconduct

- Undeclared or inappropriate AI use constitutes academic or research misconduct.
- Allegations raised during any phase of the dissertation (proposal, report, publication or examination) will follow Faculty procedures: any concerns must first be investigated by the Head of Department, in consultation with the supervisor, before

any referral to the Faculty Academic Misconduct Committee (for suspected Masters misconduct) or Faculty Research Committee (for suspect PhD misconduct).

- Degree awards will be deferred pending the outcome of such reviews.

Drafted by Sarah Chapman: DDPG – 11 August 2025

Approved by the Commerce Higher Degrees Committee – August 2025

Approved by the Commerce Dean's Advisory Committee – September 2025

Revised by the Commerce Dean's Advisory Committee – December 2025

Appendix A

Compulsory Declaration of Generative AI Use

This declaration must appear at the front of all Faculty of Commerce dissertations and research reports, in accordance with the Faculty of Commerce Policy on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Research Dissertations (August 2025) and the UCT Framework for Artificial Intelligence in Education (June 2025).

Student Name: _____

Student Number: _____

Degree Programme: _____

Title of Dissertation/Research Report: _____

1. Declaration of AI Use

☐ **No use of generative AI tools** was made in the preparation of this dissertation/research report, other than standard spelling and grammar checkers.

☐ **Generative AI tools were used**, as permitted, for the following purposes (please complete all applicable fields):

- **Tool(s) used (name and version):** _____
 - **Purpose of use (e.g., grammar correction, clarity editing, outline generation, figure formatting):** _____
 - **Extent of use (brief description):** _____
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2. Student Responsibility Statement

I confirm that:

- The intellectual content, analysis, and arguments in this dissertation are my own work.
 - Where generative AI tools were used, I retained full responsibility for verifying accuracy, originality, and correct referencing.
 - Records of AI prompts and outputs have been retained and will be provided on request to the supervisor, Head of Department, or Faculty.
 - I understand that undeclared or inappropriate use of AI tools constitutes academic or research misconduct.
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Signature of Student: _____

Date: _____