An Academic Integrity-Based Framework for the Fair and Productive Use of AI at Wits

Version Control

Version	Description	Date
Version 0.1.	Foundational principles compiled by task team	
Version 0.2	***Consultation with Research Office, Academic Affairs, Registrar's Office, Legal office***	***18 June 2025***
Version 0.3	***Consultation with ADRs, ADT&Ls, ADPGs, Wits MIND, PG Association, SRC, CLTD, PG Affairs, eResearch, RECs, ORI, Steve Biko Bioethics Center, CSAM, IDORI, ICT, ISPO, WIC, Wits Plus, Library etc. Including***	***20 July 2025 – 13 August 2025***
Version 0.3	***Presented at UR & IC (Plenary) and approved***	***28 July 2025***
Version 1.1	***Consolidation of inputs from all stakeholders***	***20 August 2025***
Version 2.1	***Draft Prepared for SET Retreat and presented at SET Retreat***	***25 August 2025 / 04 September 2025***
Version 2.1	***Update given to UR&IC***	***30 September 2025***
Version 2.2	***Presented at Fourth Senate Teaching and Learning Committee Meeting and approved***	***07 October 2025***
Version 2.2	***Presented at Exco of Convocation***	***09 October 2025***
	Presented at SET, HOS & SMG Lekgotla	21 October 2025
	Presented at Council Strategic Planning Session	23 October 2025
	To be presented at Senate	06 November 2025

1. Purpose

The purpose of this framework is to provide academic and professional and support staff (staff), and students with contextually valued practices regarding the fair and productive use of AI in advancing research, innovation, learning, teaching, course design and assessment of student learning at the University. The framework has been developed to support staff and students at the University to engage with AI in each of these critical practices of the academic programme. In keeping with the *Wits Framework for Academic Integrity* (Wits, 2022c) and the University's statutes, rules, regulations, policies, procedures and standing orders, academic integrity is upheld through fair, transparent and productive participation across all academic practices. As found in the Wits Framework for Academic Integrity, "*the Third Edition of the ICAI's Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity (2021), ICAI defines academic integrity as a commitment to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. By embracing these fundamental values, instructors, students, staff, and administrators create effective scholarly communities where integrity is a touchstone. Without them, the work of teachers, learners, and researchers loses value and credibility. More than merely abstract principles, the fundamental values serve to inform and improve ethical decision-making capacities and behaviour. They enable academic communities to translate ideals into action. Scholarly communities flourish when community members "live" the fundamental values. To do this, these communities must invoke them, regularly inviting staff, students, faculty, and administrators to consider and discuss the role of ethical values and their*

ability to inform and improve various aspects of life on and off campus" which includes teaching, learning and research.

2. Background and Context

Guided by its *Strategic Plan for Research (2023 – 2027)* (Wits, 2022a), *Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training (2023 – 2027)* (Wits, 2022b) and *Wits Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan for 2025-2029* (Wits, 2024), the University aims to produce increasing amounts of translational, and innovation-based research with impact, encouraging and facilitating the development of socially engaged postgraduate thinkers, researchers and innovators equipped to use knowledge for change in the country, in Africa and across the world. In pursuing research, learning and teaching and assessment "for good", the University is providing opportunities for our staff and students to prepare themselves for the changing world of work. As an object, instrument and outcome of research, teaching and knowledge, technology represents a significant enabler of these overall aims. The global emergence of a range of such technologies in the form of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools over recent years offers new opportunities for reflecting on how and in what ways these can and should be used to advance the goals and aspirations of the University as a committed research-intensive institution.

Given the unprecedented pace of change in the form, functions, and capacity of AI recently witnessed, the University recognises that any approach to the relationship between AI and its overall academic programme needs to be responsive, agile and adaptive. As such, this framework represents a living document that will be updated to reflect the dynamically shifting terrain created as AI continues to shape and be shaped by the global academic landscape, technological developments, geopolitical issues and global governance frameworks.

3. Definitions

3.1 What is AI?

"Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to computational methods and systems that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and decision-making." (NIST, 2023). "Coined by Stanford University Professor John McCarthy in 1956, AI refers to building machines that are capable of tasks typically associated with intelligent behaviour, such as problem-solving, decision-making, pattern recognition, natural language processing, and perception. The core of modern AI is driven by machine learning (ML), where algorithms learn from data to improve their performance over time." (Wits MIND, 2024, n.p) AI forms the outermost layer of a rapidly evolving ecosystem that encompasses machine learning, neural networks, deep learning and generative AI (GAI). This ecosystem can be harnessed to produce tools, which are software programmes that perform, solve tasks, communicate, interact, or act logically in ways that mimic human cognitive functions (Goyanes, de Zúñiga & Durotoye, 2023).

3.2 What is Generative AI (GAI)?

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) refers to "*ML* [Machine Learning] *models that can create new content, such as text, images, audio, video,* [music] *or code, by learning enough about the structure of the data used to train it to produce new examples.* [by learning from patterns in existing data. Instead of simply following pre-programmed instructions, GAI tools can generate what appears to be original material in response to prompts, simulating human-like creativity and communication]. *These models, like ChatGPT (OpenAI's Generative Pretrained Transformer chatbot), use deep learning techniques to generate content that mimics human-like creativity. ChatGPT has been trained on hundreds of gigabytes of text scraped from the internet, which gives it a good enough understanding of human text to respond to prompts it has never seen before."* (Wits MIND, 2024, n.p)

In a university context, GAI tools (like ChatGPT or image generators) can assist with a range of academic tasks, including brainstorming ideas, drafting or editing writing, analysing data, and generating learning materials. GAI tools are also available to assist researchers throughout the research life cycle. These range from securing funding, conducting the research project through to the dissemination of results.

While GAI can enhance productivity and support learning, its use also raises important questions about academic integrity, authorship, and critical engagement with knowledge. The potential misuse of GAI that does not conform to the values of academic integrity will invariably call into question the quality of a University degree or the validity or impact of research produced by its researchers.

Given the growing integration of GAI and other AI tools and techniques into academic and research environments, it is essential to provide clear ethical guidance that promotes both responsible use and innovative practice. As AI tools increasingly influence how knowledge is created, shared and evaluated, researchers and educators must navigate complex questions about authorship, fairness, originality and accountability. To support this, an integrity framework anchors the University's approach. The framework encourages staff and students to embrace reflective practice and critical engagement, helping staff, students, external stakeholders, government, industry and the extended network of the University's partners to consider not only what is productive but also what is fair, responsible, just and aligned with the values of academic integrity in their disciplines, sectors and beyond.

3.3 Related Definitions

3.3.1. Use of AI: Any interaction with an AI system, including the framing of prompts, provision of input data, configuration of the tool, and the subsequent application, storage, or dissemination of its output (Russel & Norvig,2020).

3.3.2 Disclosure: A formal, explicit declaration, made at the level of a specific assignment (or for a series of assignments), publication, or project, that reports if, how and to what extent AI was used. (Bekker, 2024; University of Sydney, 2025)

3.3.3. AI Hallucination: The phenomenon where a AI model generates outputs that are factually incorrect, nonsensical, or not grounded in its training data, presenting them as factual (Ji, 2023).

4. Principles for Maintaining Academic Integrity when Engaging with AI at the University

The University has established six broad principles that provide a common framework for the ethical use of AI, ensuring that academic integrity and research ethics are upheld. ***These principles are embedded in faculty specific guidelines across the university. Staff and students should therefore consult their faculty-specific guidelines for work undertaken within those faculties. This framework is not a policy document.***

4.1. Foster AI Literacy

All staff and students should be enabled to develop a foundational understanding of how AI tools work, including their capabilities, inherent limitations (e.g., bias, inaccuracy, hallucinations), and the ethical considerations of their use – acknowledging that AI access is not equitable in our context. This literacy will support an awareness of when to avoid AI and when it may be useful to use such tools (understanding their role in the academic landscape), as well as how to use it and how to evaluate AI-generated content (critical use).

Efforts to enhance AI literacy are underway. Faculties have workshops and seminars on AI, including the Faculty of Humanities position paper and subsequent workshops titled "*Demystifying AI for the Humanities: Promoting Responsible Engagement with AI Matters in Teaching and Learning*". Its purpose is to advance the academic mission within the Humanities by clarifying the concept of AI, thereby steering clear of extreme attitudes such as excessive enthusiasm or fear of the technology. Faculties, ICT, CLTD and others will continue to offer guidance and develop training opportunities for all staff and students.

Both the Strategic Plan for Research (2023 – 2027) and the Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training (2023 – 2027) commit to providing cutting-edge equipment and digital resources to the University's researchers. However, the procurement of AI tools to enable research productivity must be twinned with a commensurate understanding of the promises and limitations of them. The library, Center for Teaching and Learning Development (CLTD) and the Educational Technologies Committee continue to be partners in both screening and evaluating the tools on offer and providing training for their fair and productive use, thereby enabling meaningful AI literacy across the University.

4.2. Uphold Unwavering Academic Integrity and Personal Accountability.

The University underscores that the individual scholar (or human team) remains fully responsible for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of their work. The use of AI must be transparently disclosed and appropriately acknowledged in line with university policy. The use of a tool does not absolve the user of responsibility for any academic misconduct, including but not limited to plagiarism, falsification, fabrication or improper attribution. In line with good research practice, researchers should commit to describing their use of AI tools transparently to facilitate the reproducibility of their methods and findings in dedicated sections in the final write up of the study as a matter of course (University of Oxford, 2025), remembering that AI cannot be an author on any work.

To this end, we are revising the Senate Standing Orders on Assessment, the Plagiarism Policy and the Student-Supervisor Agreement for research reports for postgraduate students. In these and other guidelines, policies and frameworks, the need for AI declarations and transparency will be highlighted. Just as you would cite a book, article, or dataset, acknowledging AI tools respects intellectual property and gives credit to the sources that contributed to your work. Further, when AI is used, it's crucial that the author understands the content and can take responsibility for it. Declaring AI use helps educators and reviewers assess whether the student or researcher truly grasps the material. Such declarations are to be made to the University through the comprehensive template provided as in appendix 1 attached hereto. Finally, openly discussing AI use encourages conversations about its role in academia, helping us to further refine policies and better understand how staff and students learn how to use these tools effectively and ethically.

4.3. Adapt Research, Pedagogical and Assessment Practices

Research, teaching, learning, and assessment methods must be strategically adapted to the AI landscape to create valid and reliable learning outcomes and / or research outputs in order to protect the reputation of the University.

This may involve redesigning curricula, learning outcomes and assessments accordingly; to consider whether and how AI tools and capabilities may be used to enhance educational goals while clearly defining the permissible and impermissible uses of AI within specific academic tasks without compromising outcomes or the development of key skills that are considered a hallmark of a University graduate. To assist staff in this design the Centre for Learning and Teaching Development ("CLTD") offers a "*Digital Tools for Assessment*" workshop which covers how to use assessment tools on the learning management system, Ulwazi and how to grade assessments using AI such as *SpeedGrader* and others.

Learning outcomes and assessments may need to be designed to prioritise originality, critical thinking, and staff and student engagement in an environment where AI is present. Assessment structures may need to be rebalanced to reduce opportunities for misuse of AI

(see the University's Student Academic Misconduct Policy) and thus academic misconduct, while encouraging transparent and reflective use where appropriate.

Faculties, Schools, Departments and Institutes should compile best-practice guides for AI-resilient assessment and AI-empowered assessment ideas, customisable rubric language, and successful case studies. The University encourages assessments that mirror real-world professional tasks and are inherently difficult for AI to complete generically.

4.4. Prioritise Human Oversight and Augmentative Use

AI should be positioned and used as an augmentative and consultative tool that supports human intellect, not as a substitute for it, if the quality and integrity of a University degree is to be maintained. The final judgment, critical interpretation, creative insight, and ethical decision-making must remain in the hands of the human user, who should use the tool to enhance, not supersede, their academic responsibilities.

A focus area of the Wits Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan (2025-2029) is to empower students to take control of their learning journeys and success within a supportive teaching environment. The focus is on equipping students with key academic skills, including digital literacy, self-regulation, and metacognitive abilities, along with qualities that support their success at university and in their future careers. Encouraging student agency empowers learners to critically engage with AI tools, making informed decisions about their use in academic and personal contexts. By fostering ethical awareness and responsible practices, students can harness AI to enhance learning while upholding integrity and accountability.

4.5. Manage Institutional Risks and Promote Responsible Implementation

The University community must proactively engage with the broader risks of AI, including data security, user privacy, and intellectual property rights. This requires providing clear guidance and training to equip staff and students to safeguard sensitive data and use these tools in a manner that aligns with institutional values and legal standards.

Staff and students engaging with AI must be mindful of the risks relating to data security, confidentiality, privacy, and intellectual property. Sensitive and / or personal data should not be entered into public AI systems, as this may compromise research participants, or intellectual property. Disclosure of confidential data may also destroy novelty or originality, placing intellectual property in the public domain.

The Protection of Personal Information Act No. 04 of 2013 (POPIA) imposes obligations regarding the collection and processing of personal information, including informed consent, minimal data collection, and lawful, specific purposes. Use of AI with identifiable sensitive and / or personal data, without anonymisation or pseudonymisation, may result in non-compliance with POPIA.

Content generated entirely by AI, without meaningful human creative input, will not attract copyright protection. Where AI is used as an assistive tool, the human contributor must exercise genuine creative judgment and skill for copyright to vest which would full under the Copyright Act No. 98 of 1978 in which protection applies only to original works authored by natural persons.

For any research or major administrative task/s where AI has played a meaningful role, it is recommended that staff and students make an honest declaration by recording how and where AI was used. This "decision provenance" helps ensure transparency and accountability in the process. Examples of such declarations are available in Faculty documents and can be accessed at [link].

4.6 Equitable, Inclusive and Socially Just AI practices

The University is committed to ensuring that the integration of AI into teaching and learning, research, and administration promotes fairness and inclusivity. The implementation of AI must, as far as is reasonably possible, avoid reinforcing or worsening existing social, economic, and / or educational inequalities.

The University recognises that unequal access to digital infrastructure, affordable data, and reliable devices may disadvantage some members of our University community. To address this, the University will actively work to mitigate challenges associated with the digital divide, data costs, and accessibility. Where AI is permitted, equitable alternatives and pathways will be made available to students and staff who encounter barriers to access.

In addition, the University commits to a critical and ongoing examination of AI tools for inherent biases, including those related to race, gender, language, culture, and other markers of identity. The University will prioritise the responsible and ethical use of tools that are sensitive to the needs of our diverse, multilingual community that align with the University's broader transformation goals. By embedding equity into AI adoption, the University seeks to ensure that these technologies are used in ways that expand opportunities, foster inclusion, and contribute positively to the academic and social environment.

An acknowledgement of an understanding of the above principles as they relate to the productive and fair use of AI for all academic work should be declared in all formal submissions for assessment at the University through the comprehensive template provided as in appendix 1 attached hereto.

References

Bekker, M.(2024). Large language Models and Academic Writing: Five Tiers of Engagement. *South African Journal of Science*, *120*(1/2), 1 – 5.

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Goyanes, M., & Durotoye, T. (2023). A scholarly definition of artificial intelligence (AI): Advancing AI as a conceptual framework in communication research. Political Communication, 41(2), 317–334. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2290497

Ji, Z., et al. (2023). "Survey of Hallucination in Natural Language Generation." *ACM Computing Surveys*, 55(12), 1-38.

POPI Act 04 of 2013, The Republic of South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act 04 of 2013

Russell, S., & Norvig, P. (2020). Artificial intelligence: A modern approach (4th ed.). Pearson.

ScienceDirect. (2021). AI tools. https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/ai-tools?utm_source=chatgpt.com#definition

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, the Writing Center. (2025). Academic Integrity 2025 https://writingcenter.unc.edu/esl/resources/academic-integrity/

University of Sydney, Academic Integrity 2025 https://www.sydney.edu.au/students/academic-integrity/artificial-intelligence.html

University of Oxford. (2025). *Policy for using Generative AI in Research: guidelines for researchers and professional staff.* https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-practice/policy-generative-ai-research

Wits. (2022a). *Strategic Plan for Research (2023 – 2027).* https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/research/innovation/documents/strategic-plan-for-research_ver3-0.pdf

Wits. (2022b). *Strategic Plan for Postgraduate Research Training (2023 – 2027).* https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/students/postgraduate-hub/documents/Strategic-plan-for-postgraduate-research.pdf

Wits. (2022c). Wits Framework for Academic Integrity. https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/learning-and-teaching/documents/wits-academic-integrity-framework.pdf

Wits. (2024). Wits Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan for 2025-2029. https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/learning-and-teaching/documents/WIts-Learning-and_Teaching-Strategic-Plan-2025-2029.pdf

Wits MIND *Educational Explainer 2024* https://www.wits.ac.za/mind/educational-explainer/

Appendix 1: *Draft Sample* Plagiarism and Artificial Intelligence Declaration (To be amended according to Faculty Guidelines)

I, [Name and Surname], Student number: [Student number], declare that I understand and accept that plagiarism, improper Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage and other misconduct, as defined in the **University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg's Student Academic Misconduct Policy**, is a serious academic offence. Furthermore, I acknowledge the importance of ethical and transparent use of AI in academic work (including but not limited to research and / or innovation).

Accordingly, I confirm the following:

General Academic Integrity

- This assignment/essay/proposal/research report is **my own original work**.
- I am familiar with the **University's Student Academic Misconduct Policy** and its **Academic Integrity Framework** for **The Fair and Productive Use of AI,** and I understand the definitions and consequences of plagiarism and improper use of AI tools.
- I have **appropriately cited** and referenced all sources, whether human- or AI-generated, in accordance with the required specific referencing styles.
- I understand that using text, ideas, or outputs from any source—**including AI tools**—without proper attribution constitutes academic misconduct.
- I have not asked or paid any third party (human and / or AI service provider) to complete this work on my behalf.
- I have not allowed and will not allow anyone to copy my work or pass it off as their own.

Specific Use of AI

- If I used **AI tools,** I confirm that I have done so **responsibly** and in accordance with the University's fair use framework and the instructions given for any academic task or assignment.
- All AI-generated content has been:
    - **Reviewed and critically assessed** by me,
    - **Properly acknowledged and cited**, and
    - **Clearly contextualised** as part of my own scholarly work.
- If AI was used in the **design, analysis, writing, or execution** of research or assignments, I have disclosed this usage in the relevant sections (e.g., methodology or acknowledgements) of my work.

- I understand that I remain **fully accountable** for the academic integrity, accuracy, and originality of all submitted work, even if any AI tools were used.

Declaration of Use:

Please select one:

☐ I confirm that **I did not make use** of AI tools.

☐ I confirm that **I did make use** of AI tools as part of this work (please complete the section below):

AI Use in terms of Academic Activities Disclosure Table

Purpose of Use	**Tick (✓)**	**Tool(s) Used**	**Description of Use** *(How and why did you use it)*
Idea Generation (e.g., research problem, hypothesis etc.)	☐		
Sourcing Related Work (e.g., summarising, identifying literature etc.)	☐		
Method and Experiment Design	☐		
Data Analysis (e.g., coding, visualisation, interpretation etc.)	☐		
Theoretical Development (e.g., modelling, concept clarification etc.)	☐		
Code Development (e.g., writing or testing scripts etc.)	☐		
Presentation (e.g., graphics, visuals, layout etc.)	☐		
Editing (e.g., grammar, clarity, language)	☐		
Writing (e.g., generating or structural suggestions or rephrasing (vis-a-viz) or content suggestion or expansion etc.)	☐		
Citation Formatting (e.g., organising references etc.)	☐		

If applicable, describe how you ensured responsible use of AI:

If other uses were involved, please specify below:

AI Tool used (list all)	**Used for?**

If generative AI tools were used as an integral part of the experimental design or in the direct execution of my research, I confirm that details of this use are clearly outlined in the relevant experimental/methodology chapters of my thesis/dissertation/research report.

Signature:
Date: