

Navigating an AI World in the Humanities Classroom: A Personal Reflection on Teaching MUS 330 Korean Music and Culture

Okon Hwang

Eastern Connecticut University

In January 2023, shortly after the release of ChatGPT and before most faculty had recognized the implications of AI for teaching and learning, I joined a university-wide discussion by sharing examples of ChatGPT-generated responses. Though I rarely use the faculty distribution list, I was compelled to raise awareness of generative AI's capabilities because these examples alarmed me and made me deeply wary of its potential impact on higher education. Since then, I have attended numerous workshops—from campus sessions to international webinars—to explore AI's implications for teaching and learning.

Motivated by a pedagogical responsibility to prepare students for what appears to be an increasingly AI-shaped future, I applied for and was accepted into the National Endowment for the Humanities Spotlight grant, *Developing a Public Liberal Arts Humanities Curriculum: Empowering Students to Navigate an A.I. World*. This grant was coordinated across five regional Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) institutions, with the support of COPLAC's central office. As a participant, I received a copy of *Teaching with AI: A Practical Guide to a New Era of Human Learning* (Bowen & Watson, 2024) and took part in both campus-based and inter-institutional virtual learning communities throughout the 2024–2025 academic year. I was also required to develop a course unit, module, or assignment that engaged students in working with generative AI from a humanistic perspective. The project culminated in a final in-person two-day workshop and charrette, where we presented our work and proposed future directions at the Innovate Springfield Center in Springfield, Illinois.

The subtitle of our NEH project uses the word *empowering*, which I have come to see as the most appropriate goal for myself: not to police or ignore student use of AI, but to foster a critical, informed relationship with it. Reflecting this spirit, I focused on the Spring 2025 semester offering of MUS 330 Korean Music and Culture to develop assignments that would engage students in working with generative AI. Because my university had no official AI policy at the time, I explored examples such as Glastonbury Public Schools' AI policy (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ki8pEkoUI8oDMyr81fnwn-vrzbvEXeVNt/view>) and the student-facing flowchart “Should I Use AI?” from *An Essential Guide to AI for Educators* (<https://www.aiforeducation.io/blog/quick-guide-graphic-for-students-should-i-use-ai>). Drawing on these examples, I created an AI usage guideline tailored to MUS 330, which is available

online at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GPSS0ejmpYlGbS4qkS0YLn0A3vhX7NCp6oT7nj10Pko/edit?usp=sharing>. Students were permitted to use AI for grammar, revision, conceptual breakdowns, summaries, and outlines, but not to submit fully AI-generated work or rely on unverified content.

Implementation of Scaffolded Assignments

I opened the semester with a class discussion on generative AI. I then released scaffolded assignments in the following sequence throughout the semester: (1) topic proposal, (2) outline development, (3) fact verification and supplemental content, (4) analysis of issue identification, context, assumptions, and conclusions, and (5) presentation checklist and draft slide creation. These steps culminated in an 8 to 10-minute PowerPoint-based final presentation on a student-chosen theme related to Korean music and/or culture.

Throughout the process, students were encouraged to use generative AI as a supportive tool for idea generation, organization, and drafting. At the same time, they were asked to reflect on its ethical and intellectual dimensions. The project emphasized responsible and creative AI use and the importance of maintaining intellectual ownership in a liberal arts context. I believe this step-by-step structure helped students manage a complex task while encouraging critical and reflective engagement.

One assignment question in Step 2 asked students to explain how AI contributed to their research. Responses revealed that tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, DeepSeek, and Microsoft Copilot were widely used in the early stages of research and presentation planning. Students demonstrated thoughtful and responsible integration of AI, primarily using it to structure outlines, narrow focus, brainstorm content, and improve clarity. They verified credibility through manual fact-checking with scholarly and authoritative sources. A few students found AI less helpful or “not very resourceful” but still used it as a starting point.

What Worked and What Needs Revision

One success was the class’s improved ability to evaluate sources critically. AI hallucination proved to be a persistent challenge. To address this, I demonstrated my own fact-checking process using AI-generated program notes for a specific musical composition before releasing the Step 3 assignment. I walked students through identifying missing information, misleading claims, and vague assertions. This demonstration appeared to be an awakening moment for many students.

Another success was that the course introduced AI to students who were previously unfamiliar with the technology. To gauge their perspectives, I conducted an anonymous end-of-semester survey. Most students had limited prior experience with AI at the start of the semester; only 26% felt very or extremely familiar. By the end of the semester, however, 63% found AI at least somewhat helpful, especially for structuring, wording, and generating examples. Encouragingly, 89% reported that their presentations reflected their own ideas, with AI used primarily for support. Still, one student admitted

to relying almost entirely on AI, underscoring the ongoing need for discussion around responsible use.

Moving forward, I plan to refine instructional guidelines and reinforce expectations regarding student ownership and critical engagement. Students valued AI most for brainstorming and clarity, and more than half reported that it improved their critical thinking. Nearly 90% supported the continued use of AI-integrated assignments in future courses, and more than 70% viewed AI as an important skill set for the future job market. (Per communication with our institutional review board, the survey data included in this essay were determined not to constitute human subjects research and were thus exempt from formal review.)

Although the course structure was largely successful, one area I intend to revise is how I implemented AI-specific instructions across the scaffolded assignments. My initial plan as I was preparing for the semester was to incorporate these directives throughout all five steps. However, as the semester progressed, I chose to remove them after Step 2. I felt that the initial stages, combined with the fact-checking demonstration before releasing Step 3, had already introduced students effectively to AI's role in the course. Additionally, I wanted to avoid overemphasizing AI, given that the course's title is Korean Music and Culture, not Korean Music and Culture and AI.

I also realized that assignment guidelines still need to clarify the difference between using AI as assistance and allowing it to lead. A few students' presentation slides, though accurate and well-structured, lacked depth. In future iterations of the course, I will require students to submit their AI prompts along with their slides as this will help me understand their process better and offer feedback on using AI as a thinking partner rather than a content generator.

Closing Reflections

A key takeaway was the confirmation that student effort continues to be the most important determinant of quality, regardless of the tools available. While I initially expected generative AI to significantly elevate the overall quality of presentations, it was ultimately the diligent and reflective students who stood out just as they have in pre-AI classrooms. AI did not replace hard work; rather, it served as a tool through which motivated students expressed their ideas with greater clarity and confidence.

At my public liberal arts institution, many students come from diverse educational and economic backgrounds, including many first-generation college students. For these students, learning to use AI wisely is a form of academic empowerment. It offers support for brainstorming, drafting, and clarifying ideas. However, this empowerment only materializes when students learn to question AI, not follow it blindly.

The aforementioned NEH workshop and charrette held in Springfield, Illinois in May 2025 was especially valuable. Unlike my previous experiences at traditional academic conferences, this gathering included no self-proclaimed experts; we were all navigating the uncertainties of AI's impact on

teaching and learning together. This shared humility fostered a rare openness: participants candidly shared vulnerabilities, experimental approaches, and in-progress ideas. The result was a rich, collaborative environment that felt more like a collective exploration than a series of presentations. It was, without question, the most inspiring and productive academic gathering I have experienced.

Looking ahead, I intend to integrate AI-related assignments not only in MUS330 but across my teaching portfolio. While AI can help students organize and articulate their thoughts, the principle of “garbage in, garbage out” remains true; without a solid understanding of the subject, AI-generated content lacks depth and accuracy. I will continue refining guidelines that reflect evolving technologies and student needs while maintaining the core objective: helping students engage with AI critically, creatively, and ethically.

There is no single “right” way to bring AI into the humanities classroom, but ignoring it is wrong. Reflecting on Spring 2025, I see my role not as gatekeeper but as facilitator. My students still wrestle with texts, build arguments, and craft insights. Now, they do so with a deeper awareness of how knowledge is shaped, how tools influence thinking, and what it means to be human in an AI-assisted world.