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University of Chicago's Social-Sciences Division Bans Tech, AI in Cor...

Shea Vance · 3 min · August 25, 2026

The University of Chicago's undergraduate social-sciences division will go “analog” this fall, implementing a blanket policy banning technology in class and AI assistance on coursework across the division's core courses.

New restrictions apply to students and faculty members in required social-sciences core sequences, which students typically complete in three phases during their sophomore year. The university's law school announced earlier this summer a similar ban in required first-year core courses.

New Date Announced



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While many professors across the country have taken to banning tech in their classrooms and adding AI policies to their syllabi amid students' increasing use of large language models, or LLMs, on coursework, the new policy at Chicago is among the first to articulate a coordinated prohibition. The university provides free Claude subscriptions to all students and faculty members through a contract with Anthropic, which has spurred debate over the role of AI and tech in learning.

The undergraduate social-sciences division will also ban in-class audio or video recording and prohibit faculty members from using generative AI to assist in grading. The policy memo outlining the changes, obtained and published on Sunday by the university's undergraduate student newspaper, The Chicago Maroon, specifies that “wearable AI,” such as Meta’s AI glasses, are also prohibited in class.

The August 1 memo, signed by Jenny Trinitapoli, who leads the undergraduate social-sciences division, states that the new guidelines “afford students the freedom to think for themselves, to listen to one another without the cacophony of other (disembodied and non-human) voices in the room, to make mistakes, and to change their minds as they engage with thinkers of the past, with us, and with their fellow students in good faith, face-to-face.”

The new policy is a welcome change for faculty members who have grown frustrated with AI’s looming presence in the classroom. Aaron Jakes, an associate professor of history who teaches a core social-sciences course each winter, said his initial reaction to the memo was “relief and jubilation.”

In addition to students using LLMs to complete their take-home coursework, Jakes said it's become clear that some are also using them to contribute to in-person class discussions.

Like many professors, Jakes has already taken steps to limit tech and AI use by his students. But the blanket policy is much needed, he said, and “could actually open up room for positive conversations about what one might do with this technology that we basically haven't had an opportunity to explore.”

Trinitapoli developed the guidance in consultation with core chairs across the division. The “high-level learning goals” of the social sciences, Trinitapoli said, are consistent across the division's course offerings.

“This approach benefits students by putting a clear focus on what we want them to be doing in three courses that they take in their academic career,” Trinitapoli said. “And that is reading on their own, thinking for themselves, and engaging with their fellow students in conversations that really matter.”

The policy also aligns with values laid out in the university's 2025 report on AI in education, which establishes “human expertise, human engagement, and human interaction” as central to the university's mission. The report encourages exploration of AI uses that are “ethical, skeptical, and ambitious.”

A spokesperson for the University of Chicago's undergraduate college wrote in a statement to *The Chronicle* that the new policy “is

intended to reduce classroom distractions and encourage face-to-face discussions among students and instructors.”

‘A Two-Way Street’

Sarah Hammerschlag, a professor of religion and literature and co-director of the Divinity School’s Martin Marty Center, took part in discussions with Trinitapoli and other core chairs about AI policy in the division. The changes, Hammerschlag said, help resolve some of the “back and forth” between those chairs and administrators regarding the university’s AI offerings.

In the social sciences, Hammerschlag said, AI use can hinder the development of analytical and writing skills, even if access to the software can be more beneficial to students in other fields of study. Hammerschlag taught her first “all analog” course this past spring, which had a “remarkable” impact on student engagement and learning, she said.

The memo outlines restrictions on faculty AI use, too. Professors teaching core social-sciences courses won’t be allowed to use AI to assist in grading, unless professors “carefully” assess and disclose such use to students. Professors can “carve out exceptions to the device-free norm for specific purposes,” the memo reads, and those “deviations” from the “general approach” should be communicated to the relevant chair and Trinitapoli by the first day of class.

“It’s a two-way street,” said Emily Lynn Osborn, an associate professor of history who chaired the committee that wrote the 2025 report. “Whenever you think about policies for AI use for students,

you also need to establish AI parameters for faculty and instructors.”

Paul Staniland, a political-science professor, described the new policies as “common sense.” He said it’s important for the university to offer access to “sophisticated” and secure AI tools while also carving out analog spaces.

“AI is not going away,” Staniland said, “but also there’s no point in having a university if everybody’s just staring at their screens all the time and letting the AI do the work for them.”