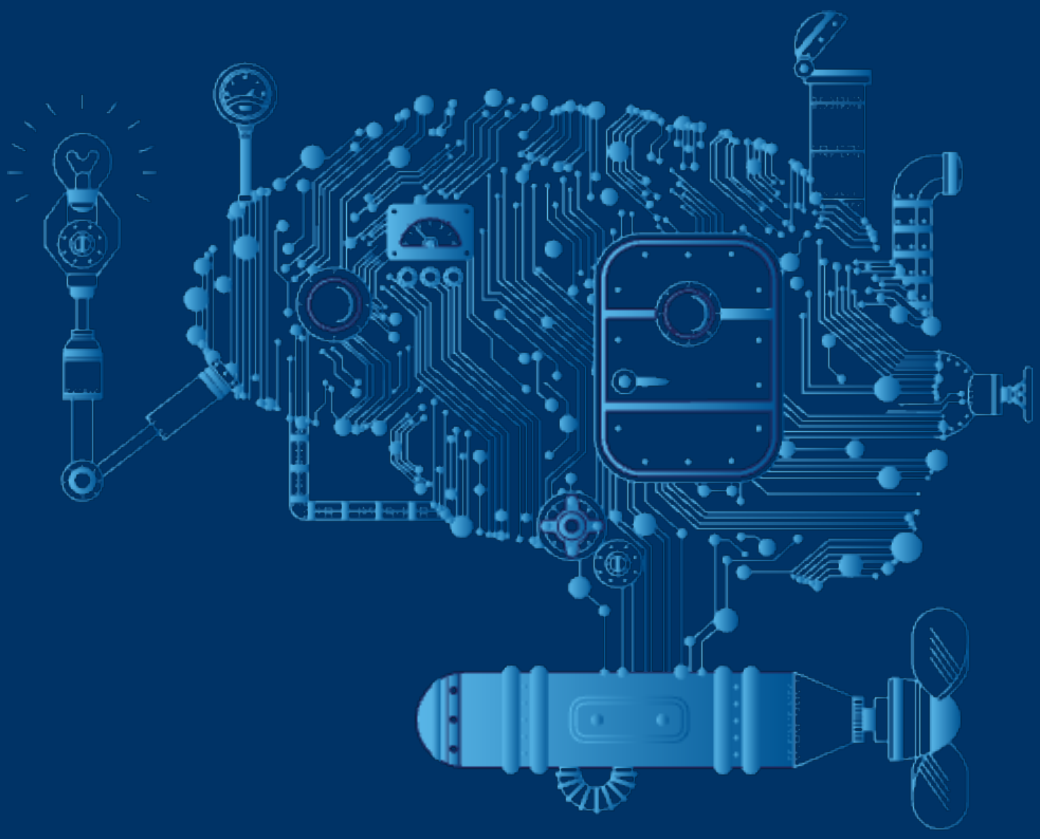
AI in Research at UVic

Findings from a UVic Libraries-Hosted Focus Group



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Shahira Khair & Karen Munro
University of Victoria Libraries

KULA LIBRARY FUTURES ACADEMY

Executive Summary: Recommendations

1. Establish an AI Research Consultant position within the library.
2. Invest in secure, institutionally hosted AI tools beyond Microsoft Copilot.
3. Build a living, curated resource hub for AI tools.
4. Create an institution-level values statement on AI for research and teaching.
5. Facilitate structured peer-to-peer dialogues to support research uses of AI.

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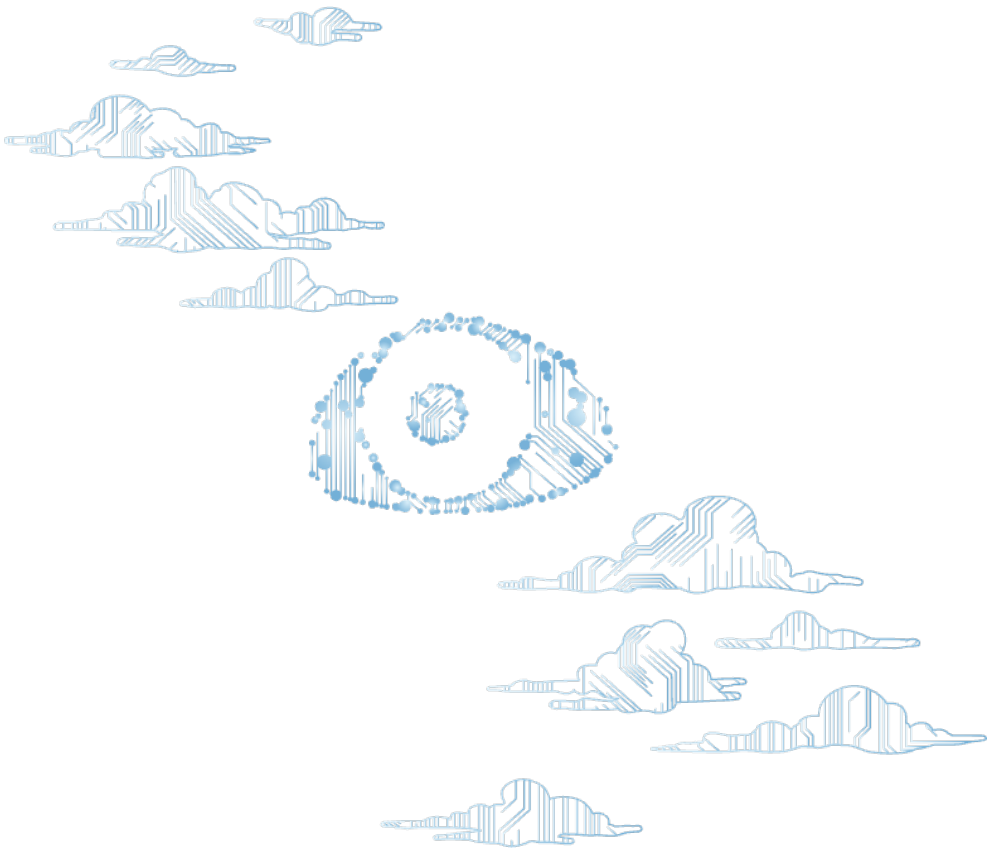
All artwork is original to Artie Goshulak, UVic Libraries.



Background

UVic Libraries convened a multi-disciplinary focus group in November 2025 to understand how UVic faculty and post-doctoral students are using AI in their research, where they face barriers, and what institutional supports they require.

Fourteen invited faculty and researchers participated from across a wide range of research areas. This report summarizes key themes from the focus group and closes with a set of recommendations for UVic.

> ***Note:*** *"AI" was used in the session as an umbrella term to refer to a range of technologies, including large language models, machine learning methods, and generative AI conversational agents.*

Key Findings

Research Workflows

Researchers have already adopted a wide range of AI tools

Faculty are using AI tools across multiple stages of the research process. Research uses of AI include data analysis and predictive modelling, literature review and synthesis, writing support (parsing, formatting, summarizing, and translation), application development, and the management of large or rapidly growing datasets.

> *"In terms of research, I think we just did our last hand analyzed scoping review. People are publishing protocols using Python script and it does a better job. NotebookLM does a better job than hand sorting."*

The scale and pace of adoption are rapid and notable

Participants saw AI fundamentally altering how they do research, with some suggesting that it is automating or transforming activities once central to the human researcher's role. With increased automation comes an increased pace of research production. Some participants saw genuine opportunity here: AI is making information and computing more accessible across disciplines and on a global scale, changing how knowledge is curated, shared, and analyzed.

> *"We don't have enough bandwidth to keep up with the AI learning resources that are being published."*
>
> *"We can do more with fewer people. We're more competitive with fewer resources which is useful for grant funding but reduces the number of jobs."*
>
> *"We won't be able to keep up with the research that is being generated – more importantly, what are we doing to keep up with critical thinking?"*

AI has expanded coding capacity

Coding skills are becoming more democratized through AI tools. Researchers without traditional programming backgrounds are now writing and using code, giving broader access to advanced methods. Nonetheless, participants commented that at some point researchers still need their own coding skills or access to skilled collaborators in order to prompt effectively and validate outputs.

> *"AI has had a huge impact on daily research… more code and faster code, that wasn't possible on our own before."*
>
> *"I know so much more about coding now, it is equalizing our knowledge and access to information."*

Knowledge Production and Higher Education

AI is changing how researchers create new knowledge

AI is reshaping not just how research is conducted, but how knowledge itself is understood and produced. Participants described seeing shifts in how knowledge is curated, how theory is developed within disciplines, and how peer review operates (with some noting that AI could help address the growing volume problem in scholarly peer review.)

> *"AI is changing the place where knowledge is held — the library profession should lead this. Libraries changed with the internet. What does curation, protection, and caring for knowledge look like in the age of AI?"*

Looking further ahead, participants raised the possibility of AI serving as a cross-disciplinary collaborator and not just supporting analysis but directing it. One participant was developing an AI platform to prompt research thinking and question development.

AI is driving epistemological changes

A fundamental question running through the session was an epistemological distinction between human-generated and machine-generated knowledge. Participants questioned whether AI outputs constitute knowledge in any meaningful sense. These models work by convergence towards the mean, so this is not an abstract question: it has direct implications for research integrity and what academic institutions are producing.

> *"We're assuming it's knowledge, like knowledge we would create, but it's nothing like it at all, and that creates all sorts of problems."*
>
> *"There is increasing difficulty in distinguishing between human and AI created content and knowledge."*

AI poses new ethical questions

The ethical questions posed by AI vary across disciplines and research methods. They include concerns about privacy and sensitive data, hallucinations, the opaqueness of black box models, and emerging questions about authorship, attribution, and originality.

> *"Ethical concerns are at the forefront. Especially when working with people who have been through trauma, we are responsible for sharing these stories in an ethical and trauma informed way."*
>
> *"Patients are turning to AI tools to understand their concussions when they can't access care. These are dangerous tools for self-diagnosis."*

AI is disrupting higher education

Participants acknowledged that the pace of AI change makes planning difficult and questioned how universities are adequately preparing for disruption at this scale. Several participants expressed concern that students already perceive AI as a sufficient substitute for university learning. Remaining viable as an institution, in their view, depends on making the value of higher education visible and central.

> *"Nobody can really predict what the university is going to have to be able to do two years from now, three years from now. And so how do we proceed in the face of massive uncertainty?"*
>
> *"Are graduates of my department going to be needed? This may pose a risk to the entire department. Ultimately, will AI be 'fitting into' the discipline or replacing it entirely?"*

Participants were clear about what universities must protect. In a world where AI can surface information quickly and cheaply, the distinctive value of higher education is not in providing the right answers, but in teaching our students and researchers to ask the right questions.

> *"Do students learn how to think? Research requires critical thought."*

Challenges for Researchers

Keeping up with the pace of AI

Even researchers who actively engage with AI reported challenges keeping up with the rapid proliferation of AI tools and changes to AI performance, features, and behaviour, as well as the rapidly changing implications of AI. They wanted access to trusted local sources for guidance, exploration, and support for practical questions.

> *"It is a minefield to navigate all the different tools. How do I know what is best suited to my purpose? I am also trying to figure out a universal tool or what tools are suited to what purpose and what is best practice."*
>
> *"AI is getting better over time with passing false info as 'true,' or emphasizing false information."*
>
> *"It is difficult to test AI agents in research – the process lacks validation, and needs proof. Even though the final result can be useful."*

Gaining access to tools and licenses

Researchers must navigate a fragmented landscape of AI tools without coordinated, structured institutional support. UVic's institutional license for Copilot does not meet researchers' needs. Other tools like Claude and NotebookLM are desired but unavailable in a secure, hosted environment. Researchers working with sensitive data (e.g., patient information) face significant ethical constraints when using cloud-based AI tools that lack institutional privacy protections.

> *"We need access to a range of products at UVic that we can leverage to do what we need to do in a safe way."*
>
> *"We are forced to go rogue outside the university."*

Developing needed skills

Although some researchers use AI to expand their coding skills, other find that they lack the underlying coding knowledge to effectively prompt, check, and correct the AI's work. This gap is especially acute in disciplines without strong computing traditions.

Some participants said it is unclear how to credit or disclose AI use in research outputs, and shared concerns about copyright and licensing when using AI tools in their research.

Participants also had concerns about the difficulty of validating AI-generated outputs, particularly for first-order research that demands rigour and reproducibility and is not easily validated.

> *"Vibe coding" is dead – genAI only gets you so far, you still need a coder in the loop to help validate and iterate.*
>
> *"It's difficult to test AI agents in research. It lacks validation (and I) need proof. Even though final result can be useful."*
>
> *"(I am concerned about) authorship, attribution, copyright. How are we going to deal with AI created information?"*

Navigating colleagues' resistance and connecting with collaborators

Perspectives on AI varied markedly across disciplines. Some participants described skepticism or resistance among their colleagues due to ethical, philosophical, or environmental concerns. Many participants mentioned wanting to connect with like-minded colleagues.

> *"The biggest challenge is the group of researchers who want nothing to do with AI. Why are people against it? Ignorance, ethics, climate, preference, philosophy? The library could invite this group to a separate session."*
>
> *"There are institutional barriers to getting everyone at the table. The Library as a non-faculty / open area could be good to meet and do some of that work."*
>
> *"I really like being able to come together and sit in a room like this and talk."*

The library's role supporting researchers with AI

Participants were consistent and specific about the challenges they face with AI, and the kinds of support they need. They saw the library as a natural home for coordinating AI support due to its nature a trusted cross-disciplinary partner that bridges research and teaching and provides valued information and digital literacy expertise.

Faculty see the library as a place where they can discuss their needs, get guidance on tools and strategies, and develop the AI literacy needed to work confidently and critically. Their specific expectations for the library included help identifying valid and reliable tools, support for staying current with a rapidly evolving AI landscape, and leadership in building institutional capacity around knowledge curation and the critical evaluation of AI outputs.

> *"AI is changing the place where knowledge is held. What does the curation of knowledge look like now? What does curation, protection, caring for knowledge look like in the age of AI? The library profession should lead this. Libraries changed with the internet – I see a resurgence for the library here. If not the library, who will lead this?"*

Recommendations

1. Establish an AI Research Consultant position within the library.

Faculty and students need expert support integrating AI tools into their research (selecting tools, building prompts, and designing AI-integrated research workflows), as well as guidance with more exploratory conversations. They see the library as a trusted source of expertise that can help them focus, collaborate, and stay up to date on the rapidly changing AI research landscape.

2. Invest in secure, institutionally-hosted AI tools beyond Microsoft Copilot.

Researchers need access to more capable tools in environments that allow for experimentation and protect sensitive data.

3. Build a living, curated resource hub for AI tools.

A centralized, maintained repository with guidance on tools, use cases, and known limitations would directly address the "minefield" that faculty describe when navigating AI in research independently.

4. Create an institution-level values statement on AI for research and teaching.

Before or alongside guidance and policy, a UVic statement of values would help faculty to orient their decisions and share with students and collaborators.

5. Facilitate structured peer-to-peer dialogues to support research uses of AI.

Faculty across disciplines (including those resistant to AI adoption) need facilitated spaces to exchange experiences and build shared norms. With partners across campus, including OVPRI, FGS and other Faculties, and LTI, the library can host nuanced conversations on the adoption and resistance to AI in research from which shared guidance can be developed.

Appendix – More background on how this data was gathered

Purpose

This study by the University of Victoria (UVic) Libraries used a qualitative approach to explore UVic researchers' perspectives on the role of AI in research. The goal was to gather insights about how faculty are currently using AI in their research, perceived gaps between current and desired uses, anticipated developments in research methods, ethical concerns, and opportunities for institutional support. A secondary goal was to use these insights to inform UVic Libraries' research support programs.

Participants

Participants were 14 faculty members and researchers from UVic representing different departments and areas of study. Participants were recruited by direct invitation, targeting faculty who were currently using or investigating AI in their research. Faculty participated voluntarily in the session.

Disciplines represented: *Anthropology, Business, Classical Studies, Computer Science, English, Geography, Health Sciences, Law, Physics and Astronomy, and Writing.*

Ethics and Data collection

Informed consent was gathered from all participants (UVic HREB #25-0437). Transcripts were de-identified and results are presented here so as to be unattributable to specific participants.

Participants were then divided into four small discussion groups. Each group discussed the same set of guiding questions related to the role of AI in research. Each group had a moderator from the library who facilitated the discussion and recorded notes. Subsequently, a full room discussion was held where each group shared and expanded on each other's key points. This discussion was recorded and transcribed.

Discussion questions

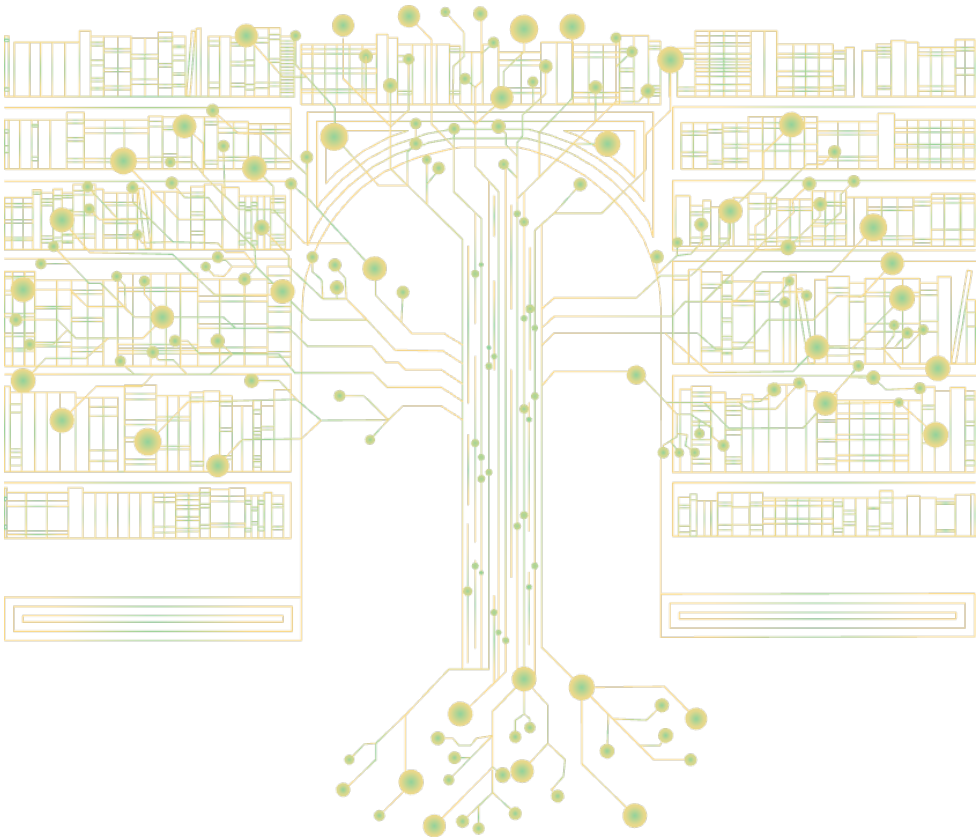
- In your own research currently, how is AI serving as either a tool or subject of study?
- Do you see gaps between what you want to do with AI but cannot yet achieve? What skills are needed to use AI effectively in your research?
- Where do you see AI fitting into your discipline's research methods in the next 1 to 3 years?
- Do you have ethical concerns about AI in scholarly research?
- If you were advising the Libraries AI strategy, what is one thing we should do to position ourselves to work with you and support your research?

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify key ideas and themes related to faculty perspectives on AI in research. Coding was conducted by a single coder using an iterative approach.

Limitations

This data results from a small sample of researchers currently using AI. Their views are not necessarily meant to be generalizable, but to provide insight into current practices.



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