To the examiners and students of Ulm University

Declaration of Autonomy for written assignments, especially final theses
Attachment: Declaration of Autonomy

Dear Sir or Madam, dear Students,

Recently the Department has frequently received questions from examiners about the use of AI in written assignments, especially final theses. Students have often indicated the use of AI in their work without disclosing their AI prompts and answers. Examiners were unsure about which AI features students are allowed to use and which not. Therefore, we decided to write a letter to the examiners and students.

The Federal State Higher Education Act Baden-Württemberg (Landeshochschulgesetz, LHG) - including the changes proposed in the consultation draft - does not contain any provisions on the use of AI systems by students in examinations. Our general study and examination regulations (General Framework) also do not contain any specific legal provisions on the use of AI in examinations. Currently we rely on the provisions in our General Framework and on the provisions of general right of examination regarding cheating. This is also unproblematic for face-to-face examinations as AI tools are considered to be aids which, like all aids, may only be used with explicit permission. Students know or should know that the use of unauthorised aids are considered to be an attempt of cheating in a face-to-face examination.

The situation is different for the preparation of written assignments, in particular final theses. Although students are not allowed to cheat in these assignments either, students sometimes use generative AI systems in everyday examinations. The lack of regulations raises the question of how to deal with the new tools legally.

An argument against a general ban is that AI systems can be used as assistance systems (comparable to "inspiration" by third parties) without giving students an impermissible advantage with regard to the assessment-relevant criteria. However, it is also clear that a general authorisation of AI systems is not possible if they are used to replace examination performance (contrary to the purpose of examinations; infringement of the principle of equal opportunities). Due to the complexity of the various uses of AI, in particular the large
number of application scenarios of AI systems, the requirement that written assignments, in particular final theses, have to be prepared independently and without outside assistance is not sufficient in our point of view. The decisive factor will be whether the specific use of AI systems gives the students an advantage with regard to the assessment-relevant criteria. In each individual case it has to be clear to the students which form of use is considered advantageous by the examiners.

Universities are responsible for preventing cheating and ensuring that examinations are taken without unauthorised aids. Examiners themselves decide which aids are allowed or prohibited, depending on the respective learning objective and must inform the students about these aids. Before preparing any written assignment, students should know whether they are allowed to use aids and, if so, what aids they are allowed to use and in which form. For example, examiners may allow AI assistance systems that are not relevant to solve the tasks and may not allow the examination, or any part of it, to be completed using these assistance systems. An example of this could be an AI tool to improve the grammar and structure of a written thesis, provided that grammar and structure are not among the assessment-relevant criteria of these theses. The examiners will also determine the nature of the evidence to be provided. Students have to be prepared to demonstrate any use of AI-based tools with appropriate documentation as requested by the examiners (e.g. chat logs) in case any clarification is needed.

With immediate effect the signatory therefore proposes that students submit the following Declaration of Autonomy for written assignments (see attachment) when submitting their final thesis. This Declaration of Autonomy will be published on the website in the study section. In their own interest students are initially asked to download this Declaration of Autonomy (instead of a freely available one from the internet) and to attach it to their written assignments. Practice will show whether this Declaration of Autonomy has to be included in the General Framework for the Bachelor's and Master's programmes at Ulm University and have to be submitted with the application for admission to written assignments/theses.

Best regards

Birgit Tümmers
Declaration of Autonomy for written assignments, especially theses

Declaration of Autonomy

I hereby declare
Name, First Name: _________________________________,
that I have written this thesis entitled

_________________________________________________

independently and without outside assistance and have fully acknowledged all sources
and tools used in this thesis.
Regarding the use of tools based on Artificial Intelligence (e.g. ChatGPT), I declare the
following:

Please tick
  o the use of AI-based tools was permitted by the examiners. My examination per-
    formance or any part of it was not replaced by these tools. I am prepared to ex-
    plain the possible use of AI-based tools with appropriate documentation (e.g. chat
    logs) if requested by the examiners in case any clarification is needed.
  o No AI-based tools have been used

_________________________________________________
Place, Date

_________________________________________________
Signature