Artificial Intelligence in University Studies

Final Report and Recommendations of Student Compass

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Contents

Summary

During the spring of 2026, a discussion event called Student Compass was organized at the University of Turku. Students debated the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in university studies. The goal of the event was to develop recommendations to support the updating of the university's AI guidelines. Student Compass followed the deliberative mini-public model, in which a group of randomly selected participants receives information, deliberates, and produces recommendations on a relevant topic. Student Compass was carried out as part of the Advancing Digital Democratic Innovation (ADDI) research project and organized by the project's researchers.

All degree students at the university were invited to take part in Student Compass, and 680 students signed up as volunteers. Out of this group, participants were chosen using random selection, while ensuring faculty representativeness. Ultimately, 470 students participated in the discussions. The participants were split into 86 small groups, in which they engaged in roughly 2 hours of online discussion. Each small group was tasked with developing three recommendations for the university regarding the use of AI in university studies. To support the deliberations, each group was provided with information on AI before and during the small-group discussions. The students worked together to formulate recommendations using a collaborative writing platform. Progress of the discussions was supervised by a trained facilitator, who also made sure that the principles of deliberation were followed.

The groups produced a total of 258 recommendations, the content of which can be summarized in six key messages. First, clear guidelines for the use of artificial intelligence are needed both at the university level and for individual courses. Clear guidelines improve predictability, equality among students, and consistency in the use of AI across all courses. Second, the university should offer training in the use of AI, preferably in the form of a separate course offered by each faculty at the beginning of studies. Training should also be provided to staff. Third, both students and teachers should be open about their use of AI, as transparency is the best way to promote responsible use of AI. Fourth, instruction should be designed so that the use of artificial intelligence does not replace the student's own thinking. Courses should include in-person interactions as well as AI-free tasks. Fifth, the university should provide students with high-quality, secure AI tools. Finally, the environmental impacts of AI use should be considered, and criticism of sources and respect for copyright need to be kept in mind. Allegations of misconduct in studies should not be based solely on the results of AI detection tools.

In the exit survey of Student Compass, participants' feedback on the discussions was very positive, and the majority felt that similar discussions could be utilized in the preparation of university policies in the future. Most respondents also believed that the results of the discussions would influence the university's AI policies. Overall, Student Compass can be considered a success: the small-group discussions brought together a large number of students across faculties and resulted in a clear direction for the development of the university's AI policies.

1. Introduction

The rapid development and widespread adoption of AI-based technologies have a major impact on university teaching, studying, and learning. Regulations governing the use of AI in education have been developed at various higher education institutions throughout the 2020s, and the topic has recently sparked a great deal of public debate. The University of Turku's official policy on this matter was established in 2023, and Turku School of Economics published its own guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence in 2025. In 2026, the university-wide guidelines on the use of AI will be updated. As part of the updating process, there has been a desire to seek broad input from the university's degree students, to understand their experiences and views on the use of AI, and to provide them with opportunities to influence the new regulations. Involving students in the university's internal development and decision-making processes increases students' sense of ownership regarding common guidelines and enhances the legitimacy of those guidelines.

An opportunity for student participation arose in the spring of 2026, when the Research Group for Innovating Democracy[1] conducted a deliberative mini-public among students as part of the ADDI research project.[2] The event was named **Student Compass**. A deliberative mini-public is a democratic innovation in which randomly selected participants receive information about and discuss politically significant issues, and produce recommendations for decision-makers.[3] Deliberative mini-publics have been held in Finland and around the world on a wide range of societal issues. Over the past decade they have increasingly been used as a tool for citizen participation at various levels of government. However, as far as we know, Student Compass is the first deliberative mini-public in Finland to weigh in on the topic of AI.

In addition to helping shape the university's AI policies, the results of Student Compass are being used in research on deliberative mini-publics. For years, various algorithms have been employed in the organization of mini-publics, for example, in outlining methods for selecting participants or conducting polls. More recently, there is growing focus on the potential of AI in facilitating the deliberation process, particularly applications based on large language models. A large language model was used in the Student Compass discussion groups to assist in the development of recommendations. The results of Student Compass, which will be published at a later date, will provide insight into how combining a language model with deliberation affects, for example, the quality of the discussion.

1 utu.fi/democracy

2 ADDI – Advancing Digital Democratic Innovation is an international research project funded by the European Research Council. The project is led by Maija Setälä, Professor of Political Science. advancingdemocracy.eu

3 For more on deliberative mini-publics, see, for example, Setälä, Maija & Smith, Graham (2018). Mini-Publics and Deliberative Democracy, in Andrew Bächtiger, John Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, & Mark D. Warren (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 300–314. doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747369.013.27.

2. Recommendations of Student Compass

The small groups of the Student Compass event compiled a total of 258 recommendations on the use of AI in university studies. These recommendations have been submitted in their original form to Vice Rector Tapio Salakoski and the UTU AI working group. In addition, the organizers have summarized the key messages of the students' recommendations, the most common being to develop clear guidelines for the use of AI and to provide training or a course on AI. In addition, many of the recommendations emphasized the importance of being transparent about the use of AI and fostering critical thinking skills despite the increasing prevalence of AI. Recurring themes in the recommendations included consideration of the environmental impacts of AI, transparency in the use of AI, equality, supporting critical thinking, and the importance of AI skills in working life.

2.1 The use of AI needs clear guidelines

The use of artificial intelligence requires clear, university-wide guidelines that are further tailored to specific faculties and courses. The traffic light model, which is already used at some universities, provides a clear way to communicate the acceptable use of artificial intelligence. At the beginning of each course, instructors should provide guidelines on how AI may or may not be used in the course, and these guidelines should be easily accessible. Preferably, the guidelines should include concrete examples of how, where, and with what tools AI can be used. It is important to explain how the use of AI affects course assessment. There should also be guidelines for reporting the use of AI for both students and teachers. Clear guidelines increase predictability and ensure fairness among students in their coursework, while encouraging appropriate and responsible use of AI. University-wide guidelines improve consistency in AI practices across different courses and reduce the burden on individual instructors when it comes to providing guidance. These guidelines should be regularly updated, as AI applications are continually evolving, and research findings are accumulating rapidly. The guidelines should emphasize the responsible use of AI.

2.2 The university should offer training in the use of AI

The university should offer training in artificial intelligence and its applications early in students' studies, preferably as a separate course. The course could be offered at the faculty level to ensure that discipline-specific differences are taken into account. The course could even be mandatory. In addition to being taught how artificial intelligence technologies work and how to use various tools effectively, students should be informed about the ethical use of AI, its benefits and risks, data security, environmental impacts, and copyright issues. Teachers should also be provided with training in the appropriate use of AI in teaching and assessment, as well as opportunities to maintain their AI skills. Training in AI is needed for everyone, as students should be given equal opportunity to learn to use AI responsibly and to evaluate it critically. Clear guidance from teachers and hands-on cooperative exercises help students identify how to use AI in ways that benefit their own learning. Practicing AI use together also promotes responsible use and transparency more effectively than strict prohibitions. In addition, integrating the use of AI into the curriculum helps students acquire the AI skills needed in working life.

2.3 The use of AI should be openly disclosed

Transparency promotes the responsible and appropriate use of AI. When submitting coursework and theses, students should disclose whether they have used artificial intelligence, for what purposes, and which models they used. Content created with AI should be clearly indicated as AI-generated. When reporting on AI use is a standard part of assignments, the barrier to reporting is lowered, and students come to evaluate the benefits of AI for their own work. Reporting AI use should not create an unreasonable amount of work. Ready-made templates, such as sample phrases, could facilitate reporting. The teacher, in turn, should explain how the use of AI is monitored in the course, whether the use of AI affects the course grade, whether AI is used in the assessment of course assignments, and whether they themselves have used AI, for example, in preparing lecture slides. AI tools should not be used as the primary or sole means of assessing coursework, as their use can make it difficult to demonstrate what the assessment is based on.

2.4 AI should not replace students' own thinking

AI should not replace students' independent thinking; rather, it should be viewed first and foremost as a tool that supports one's thinking. However, courses and assignments should be designed keeping in mind that AI is here to stay—simply banning its use is not useful. This prompts us to reassess the meaningfulness of current course task formats. Students should be guided toward using AI in ways that are appropriate for the tasks at hand and that assist learning, and the use of AI in course tasks should be pedagogically justifiable. In fields where AI is part of working life, its responsible use should be a learning objective. Similarly, courses should also include tasks based on discussion and face-to-face interaction that foster students' creative thinking and do not rely on AI. The university should continue to nurture students' independent and critical thinking. If the use of AI is not justified, it should be avoided due to associated drawbacks, such as its environmental impact. Students should have the freedom not to use generative AI in their studies, unless its use is central to the course or degree.

2.5 The university should provide high-quality AI tools

The university should centrally provide students with access to AI tools and regularly inform them of the tools' availability. It is important to select high-quality AI tools that offer a high level of data security and privacy protection and ensure that data does not end up outside the EU. When possible, European and Finnish companies should be preferred. The university could also develop its own AI tool, either on its own or in collaboration with other organizations. The data entered into the university's own AI tool would remain under the university's control, and the use of the tool could be managed according to the needs of the courses. Students should be encouraged to use the tools provided by the university rather than applications from third-party providers, and they should be instructed on the security of these services. Centrally provided AI tools are important to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to learn how to use AI.

2.6 AI should be used responsibly

The responsible use of AI requires consideration of environmental impacts, critical evaluation of sources, and respect for copyright. The university should take the environmental impact of the AI tools it uses into account and prioritize more environmentally responsible applications when procuring AI solutions. Due to the high energy consumption of AI, students should be instructed to use it only when necessary. For simple tasks, it is advisable to use tools that have a lower environmental impact, such as regular search engines. The environmental impact of AI should be monitored and information about it shared.

AI should be viewed critically as a source of information, as the content it generates may be biased or inaccurate. Students have the responsibility of verifying the accuracy of information from reliable sources. When it comes to data fed into AI models, copyright and privacy should be considered, and the university should formulate clear guidelines for students and staff regarding what data and materials may be entered into AI applications.

Clear and transparent guidelines should be established to address the potential misuse of AI and allegations of misconduct. AI detection tools should not be used as the sole means of detecting misconduct, as these tools can produce inaccurate results. If various AI detection tools are used to identify potential AI misuse by students, their use should be thoroughly documented to ensure that students' legal rights are protected. Students should have the right to know the grounds for a failed academic assignment or a suspicion of misconduct.

3. The Student Compass Process

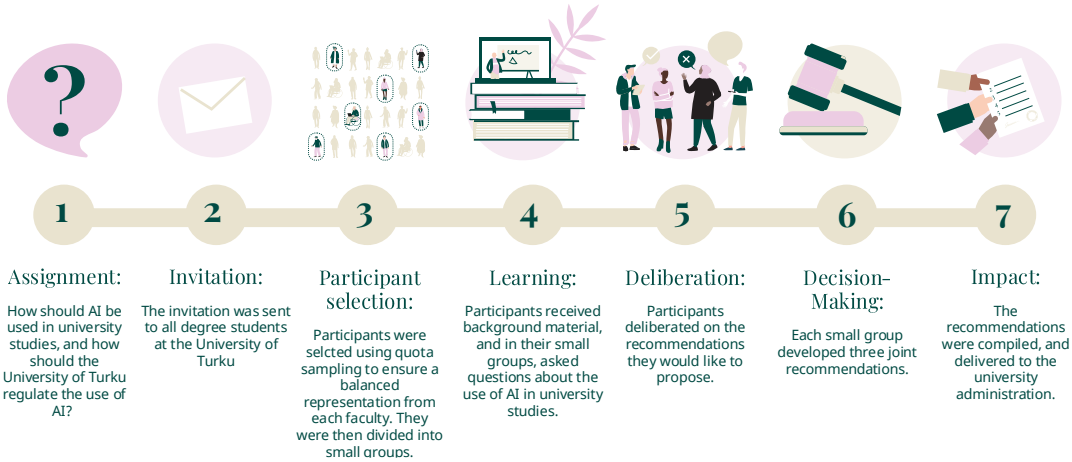
3.1 Student Compass is a deliberative mini-public

Student Compass largely followed the process of a deliberative mini-public.[4] In a deliberative mini-public, a group of people receives information and discusses a topical issue. Based on discussions, the group may, for example, draft a joint statement or recommendations for decision-makers.

Participants in a deliberative mini-public are usually selected through random sampling, which ensures that every member of the target population has an equal chance of being invited to participate. The final group of participants is selected from among those who responded to the invitation using a method known as stratified random sampling, where quotas are applied based on factors such as age, gender, and educational background. The goal is to bring together a cross-section of the population for the discussion, thereby ensuring diversity among the participants and a wide range of perspectives in the deliberation.

The key principles of democratic deliberation are equality, openness, mutual respect, and the justification of one's own views. To support the discussion, participants learn about the topic, for example, by listening to experts and reviewing background materials. The goal of the discussion is to form well-considered and well-reasoned positions on the issue under discussion. Furthermore, transparency and accountability are crucial to the entire process: following the deliberation, the convener must respond to the recommendations and explain what actions they will lead to, or if no action is taken, provide a justification.

The phases of Student Compass are illustrated below:



4 Aarninsalo, Lyydia; Jäske, Maija, Kulha; Katariina; Leino, Mikko & Setälä, Maija (2020). Moniäänistä ja perusteltua päätöksentekoa – Puntaroivat kansalaiskeskustelut poliittisten kiistakysymysten ratkaisussa.

3.2 Recruitment and composition of the participants

Recruitment for Student Compass began in February 2026 with an open call directed at all degree students at the University of Turku. The invitation was sent to all students by email and was resent as a reminder through the study advisors in each faculty. In addition, information about the event was shared via the intranet news feed, the Student News newsletter, the Student Union newsletter, as well as through posters on campus and on the Tuudo app. To volunteer for the Student Compass discussions, participants signed up by filling out the recruitment survey sent with the invitation, either in Finnish or English. The goal was to have 80 discussion groups and 400 students participating in the Finnish-language discussions, and 6 groups and 30 students participating in the English-language discussions. From among the volunteers, participants would be selected at random while ensuring that they represent the university's faculties as well as possible.[5] Participants would receive €80 in compensation.

Registration to volunteer was initially open from 24 February to 15 March 2026. By the deadline, the organizers had received 509 registrations, 444 of which were from Finnish-speaking participants and 65 from speakers of other languages. In previous experience, some volunteers dropped out of the discussions quite late and unexpectedly. Therefore, it was decided to invite all Finnish-speaking volunteers to participate. In other words, no random selection was made from this group. Thirty-six participants were randomly selected from the other volunteers to take part in the English-language discussions, taking into account faculty representation. In addition, the registration period for the Finnish-language discussions was extended until 25 March, and advertising was targeted specifically at underrepresented faculties. During the extended registration period, a total of 171 additional students volunteered. Of these, 111 participants were selected for the Finnish-language discussions using stratified random sampling. A total of 680 students volunteered for participation, of whom 591 were selected to participate in the discussions.

Before sending out the discussion invitations, the organizers randomly divided the selected participants into small groups of 5–7 people, taking into account scheduling conflicts. In addition, the organizers made sure that each small group included participants from at least three different faculties. The selected participants were sent an invitation to take part in the Student Compass discussions at a specified time and were asked to confirm their participation by completing a pre-discussion survey. At this stage, some of the selected participants withdrew or failed to confirm their scheduled discussion time. In addition, a few participants cancelled their attendance before the discussions began, and some did not show up. A total of 470 students participated in the Student Compass discussions, with 439 participating in the Finnish-language discussions and 31 in the English-language discussions. Table 1 shows the distribution of volunteers, invitees, and participants in Student Compass by faculty, relative to the overall faculty distribution across the university.

5 Participant selection was carried out using the Panelot algorithm, which combines representativeness and random selection. This type of procedure is called stratification or sortition.

Table 1. Representativeness of Student Compass by Faculty

Faculty	University		Volunteers		Invitees		Participants	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Humanities	2 440	15,2	95	14,0	95	16,1	76	16,2
Education	2 042	12,7	65	9,6	61	10,3	47	10,0
Medicine	1 753	10,9	74	10,9	67	11,3	55	11,7
Science	1 854	11,6	108	15,9	76	12,9	59	12,6
Law	895	5,6	41	6,0	35	5,9	30	6,4
Technology	2 747	17,1	142	20,9	104	17,6	81	17,2
TSE	2 689	16,7	65	9,6	64	10,8	46	9,8
Social Sciences	1 641	10,2	90	13,2	89	15,1	76	16,2
ALL	16 071	100,0	680	100,00	591	100,0	470	100,00

Among the volunteers, students from the Faculties of Science and the Faculty of Technology were particularly overrepresented, which likely reflects the interest the topic generated among students in those faculties. In contrast, Turku School of Economics and, to some extent, the Faculty of Education were underrepresented. The final group of participants was relatively representative in terms of the university's faculty distribution, with the exception of the School of Economics, which was clearly underrepresented, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, which was overrepresented. Of the participants, 63 percent were women and 33 percent were men (the "other" and "prefer not to say" options accounted for a total of 4 percent). The median age of the participants was 25 years.

3.3 The course of the discussions

The small-group discussions in Student Compass were held online via Zoom from 7 to 16 April 2026. Each small group was tasked with **developing three recommendations for the university regarding the use of AI in university studies**. The small-group discussions consisted of two parts: a learning phase and a collaborative writing phase. In the first phase, the students worked as a group to identify information needs and draft questions for an expert; in the second phase, they collaborated to develop their proposals into recommendations. Already before the discussions, participants had the opportunity to review background materials that consisted of international and domestic guidelines on the use of AI in education and training.

Principles of deliberation:

1. I will speak clearly and concisely and stay on topic.
2. I will confidently express my own thoughts and explain the reasons behind my opinions.
3. I am open to new information and will approach other people's perspectives with an open mind—including those that differ from my own views.
4. I will give others space to talk, and I will behave respectfully towards others. I will listen attentively to others.
5. If I disagree, I will express it constructively. I welcome a variety of opinions.

Each small-group discussion was led by a trained facilitator, who was responsible for assigning tasks, ensuring the work progressed smoothly, and managing the time. The groups followed the principles of deliberation. In addition, participants were reminded of the importance of critically evaluating the information obtained during the discussion. The stages of the discussions are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Stages of the discussions

Stages of the Student Compass discussions	
10 min	Beginning and introductions
10 min	Open discussion: Getting familiar with the topic
20 min	Discussion on information needs, drafting questions
15 min	Questions and Answers
5 min	*Break*
20 min	Open discussion: Preliminary recommendations
10 min	Writing down preliminary recommendations
30 min	Drafting and finalizing joint recommendations
5 min	Conclusion

The small-group discussions in Student Compass were intensive; in total, around two hours were allocated for the work. The discussions began with a presentation of the assignment and the guidelines for deliberation, followed by introductions from the participants. Next, each group had a brief informal discussion to get a feel for the topic. After that, the participants discussed what information they would need in order to draft recommendations for the university, and then each participant wrote down one question. The groups received answers to their questions from AI experts from across the university's faculties, digital services, the education sector, and the library, as well as from an AI agent created for Student Compass using the university's AI chatbot. If there was time left, the participants were given the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. After the question-and-answer session, a short break was taken.

Characteristics of a good recommendation:

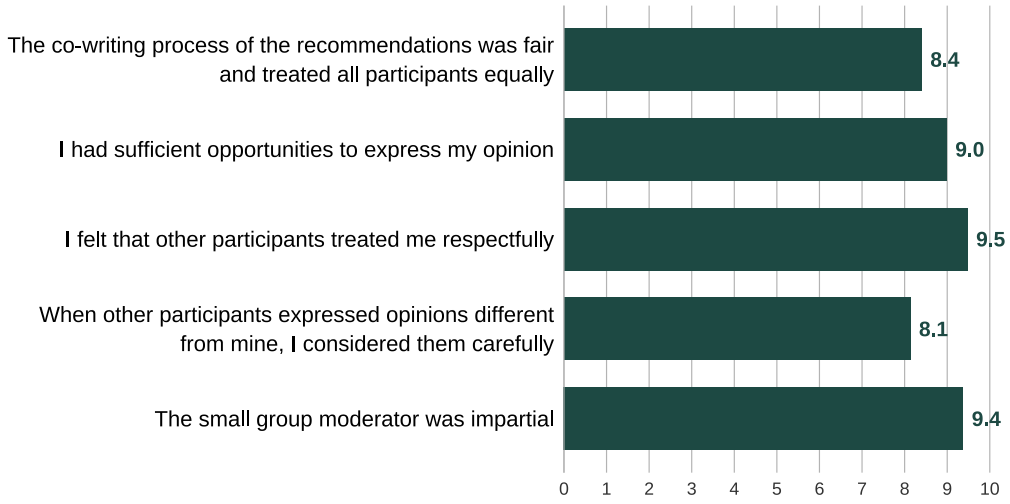
1. The recommendation is relevant to the topic at hand.
2. You consider the recommendation to be essential.
3. The recommendation is concrete, meaning it includes a proposal for action and its direction.
4. The recommendation is well justified.

The recommendations were written in a shared Word document on the University of Turku's SeaFile cloud service. To assist the participants in their work, the groups were given a list of characteristics of a good recommendation. Following an open discussion, each participant wrote down at least one preliminary recommendation, along with a rationale. Based on the preliminary recommendations, the group then began drafting three joint recommendations. A justification was also written for each recommendation. The goal was to arrive at recommendations that the entire small group could support. The groups always sought to reach a consensus on the recommendations through deliberation, but as a last resort, they also had the option of voting. Once the group was satisfied with the outcome, the facilitator instructed them on how to complete the final survey, after which the discussion concluded.

3.4 Participants' feedback on the experience

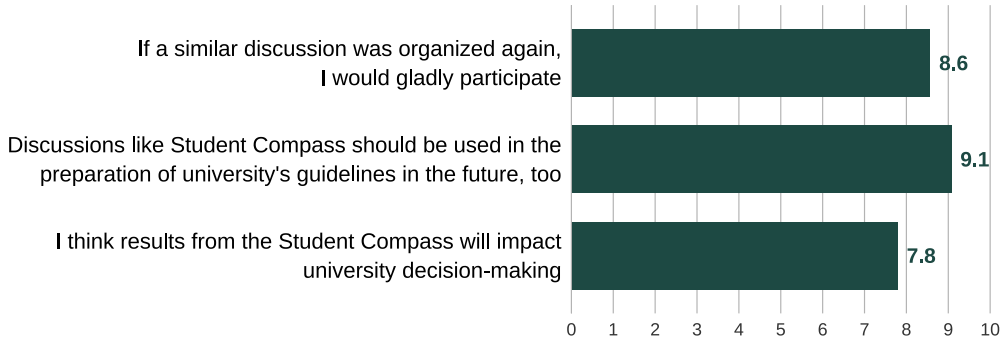
In the final survey, conducted at the end of the small-group discussion, participants were asked about the quality and relevance of the discussion, among other things. Participants rated a series of statements using a scale of 0–10, where 0 indicated complete disagreement and 10 indicated complete agreement with each statement. On average, the assessments of discussion quality were very positive (see Figure 1). For example, the average score for the statement "I had sufficient opportunities to express my opinion" was 9.0. Most participants also felt that the other participants treated them with respect (avg. 9.5), that the process of drafting the recommendations was fair (avg. 8.4), and that the discussion facilitator was impartial (avg. 9.4).

Figure 1. Participants' evaluations of the quality of the Student Compass discussions
Average score on a scale of 0 = Strongly disagree to 10 = Strongly agree.



In addition to the quality of the discussion, participants were asked whether they would take part in a similar discussion again and whether discussions like those in Student Compass should continue to be used in the preparation of university policies. Most respondents strongly agreed with these statements (see Figure 2). The majority of participants also believed that the results of Student Compass would influence the university's decision-making (avg. 7.8).

Figure 2. Participants' views on the value of Student Compass
Average score on a scale of 0 = Strongly disagree to 10 = Strongly agree.



Respondents were also asked about the reasons for participating in Student Compass (Table 3). More than four out of five respondents cited an interest in the topic and the monetary compensation (€80) offered for participation as their reason. Three out of four cited a desire to influence the university's AI policies as their reason, and just under two-thirds said they wanted to support scientific research.

Table 3. Reasons to participate in Student Compass

Reasons for participating in Student Compass (n = 468)	
There was monetary compensation for participating.	89 % (417)
I was interested in the topic.	82 % (384)
I wanted to influence the university's AI policies.	74 % (345)
I wanted to support scientific research.	63 % (293)
I was interested in the methodology of Student Compass.	28 % (129)
I wanted to have something to do.	6 % (27)
Other reason	4 % (20)

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of developing the university's AI guidelines, Student Compass can be considered a success: the recommendations it generated provide a clear picture of the direction in which students want to take the use of AI in university studies. Overall, the Student Compass process went smoothly. The invitation to the event reached a wide range of students from various faculties, the participants were highly engaged, and they succeeded in producing well-considered recommendations for the university despite the tight schedule of the event. The participants' own assessments of the quality of the discussions were positive. As organizers, we agree with the majority of participants that this type of discussion event could be utilized in the development of the university's policies in the future.

For such future deliberations, Student Compass offers some insights. First, the invitation to the event was widely distributed to all students through various channels and via mass email, which made it possible to reach a diverse group of participants. Cooperation with the university's communications department was therefore important in the recruitment process. Second, Student Compass was able to draw on existing knowledge available at the university, as members of the UTU AI working group served as experts in the discussions. The interdisciplinary nature of the University of Turku would undoubtedly make it possible to leverage the research-based expertise of its faculty and staff in many other areas as well. We encourage the university administration to consider what other university decisions would particularly benefit from the well-considered views of the university community.

Acknowledgements

Student Compass would not have been possible without the participation and support of many different parties. The organizers would like to thank all the students who participated in the event, taking time to familiarize themselves with the topic and produce recommendations. We would also like to extend our warmest thanks to the experts who participated in the small-group discussions, the discussion facilitators, and, from the University of Turku staff, Vice Rector Tapio Salakoski, who supported the Student Compass initiative with an open mind, as well as Communications Coordinator Liisa Rannankallio, Communications Manager Tuomas Koivula, IT Service Architect Suvi Ylioja and the UTU AI working group, and Personnel Secretary Katja Miettinen.

Attachments

Attachment 1. The experts of Student Compass

Samuli Laato is an assistant professor (Phase I) at the Department of Information Systems. He was named Researcher of the Year at the Turku School of Economics in 2025.

Erkki Kaila is a university lecturer in the Discipline of Information Systems. He is a member of the UTU AI group and is researching the use of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning.

Heidi Salmento is a university lecturer at the UTUPEDA Center for University Pedagogy.

Elina Toivanen is a digital architect at the University of Turku. She promotes the university's digital transformation and, in this context, coordinates the activities of the UTU AI groups and the updating of the AI development roadmap, among other things.

Mira Valkama is a senior planning officer and works in support roles within the education sector.

Anu Valtari works as an information specialist at the University of Turku Library. She is involved in the implementation of the library's AI-related services.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