A plainspoken guide to Virginia Tech's current and future AI tools

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The applications and capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI) are rapidly evolving, attended by substantial controversy and spin, to the point where it may seem difficult to even know where to begin. We can't say when the field will 'settle,' but it's clear that AI is here to stay. All of us need to become conversant in its potential uses, opportunities, risks, and shortcomings. This brief guide will help you navigate Virginia Tech's current AI toolset, and make it easier for you to open up pathways that will allow your teams to take advantage of the capabilities that AI offers. This in turn will inform the decisions that are made regarding how AI technology is provided to the university community.

First, we'll cover the guidelines and governance that currently apply to AI decisionmaking at Virginia Tech, then move on to some brief guidance on which tools and services are optimized for which needs and tasks.

Framework for Responsible and Ethical AI at Virginia Tech

This framework guides policy development and use of AI tools at the university.

- Responsible and Ethical AI Principles - Seven principles to guide how we design, procure, and use AI across all university functions.

ai.vt.edu

This site is a starting point for information about AI resources and guidance at Virginia Tech. The site is co-managed by the Division of IT and Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS), and invites collaboration on content from centers, offices, and institutes across the university.

AI Working Committee of IT Governance

Formed in late 2025, this committee was organized through a collaboration between the offices of the Provost and the EVP for Operations to serve as the university governance body for AI-related decisions. The committee includes broad representation from academia, governance, and administration. To date, the committee has considered guidance on AI meeting assistants and approved the availability of three AI tools from Google.

Recommended tools for specific needs

Currently available AI tools, and links to access them are described on the Tools page of ai.vt.edu.
If you're just starting out though, consider what you want to do.

"I'd like to ask general questions, get explanations, or brainstorm ideas."

Best options

- Google Gemini App
- HokieAI
- Microsoft Copilot Chat

These tools are simple to use, and are included with your VT Microsoft and Google accounts (*no extra license required*).

"I'd like to get deeper explanations to help my research or teaching efforts."

Best options:

- Advanced Research Computing (ARC) LLM options
- Departmental license required - Google AI Pro
- Departmental license required - Microsoft 365 Copilot
- Google NotebookLM
- HokieAI

All of these tools offer ways to analyze, expand, or integrate your teaching and research.

Recommended tools for specific needs... continued

"I'd like help with writing, editing, or summarizing content."

Best options:

- Departmental license required - Google AI Pro
- Departmental license required - Microsoft 365 Copilot
- Google Gemini App
- HokieAI
- Microsoft Copilot

These tools can draft text, improve tone, and simplify, shorten, or summarize content. The licensed versions work directly in the tools that comprise that ecosystem (e.g. Microsoft or Google applications)

"I'd like to analyze my PDF files, notes, and research data."

Best options:

- Google NotebookLM
- HokieAI

This tool allows you to upload your own files and data, including audio and video, and then uses the information contained within that dataset to produce summaries, pull insights, and draw connections across the sources provided.

"I'd like to create or modify images."

Best options:

- Google Gemini App
- Microsoft Copilot Chat
- HokieAI

Can generate and refine images.

"I'd like tools for coding, app development, research, and technical work."

Best options:

- Advanced Research Computing (ARC) open access LLM Gateway
- ARC Custom LLMs via Open OnDemand (*you need an ARC account to access*)

These tools can be used to request, refine, and integrate segments of code in any computing language, cutting the time needed to develop and improve new applications.

"I'd like to automate workflows or build AI-powered tools."

Best options:

- ARC LLM Gateway (API access)
- ARC Custom LLMs via Open OnDemand

These tools can be used to build AI agents that work behind the scenes for projects or systems, and are ideal when AI needs to be integrated into software, scripts, or services.

Privacy & Data Safety

All tools listed here are approved by Virginia Tech and come with strong data protections when used as instructed. Many are approved even for sensitive data when you log in through your Virginia Tech account. For more information on the types of data that are included at various levels of risk, review the risk classification standard, as well the data risk page.

Support and Training

You can access support by contacting 4Help IT support. For training on essentials, TLOS offers a range of AI courses, including a four-part series of self-paced modules intended to provide a foundational overview of Generative AI. The content is aimed for instructors, but the concepts and perspectives presented are universal.