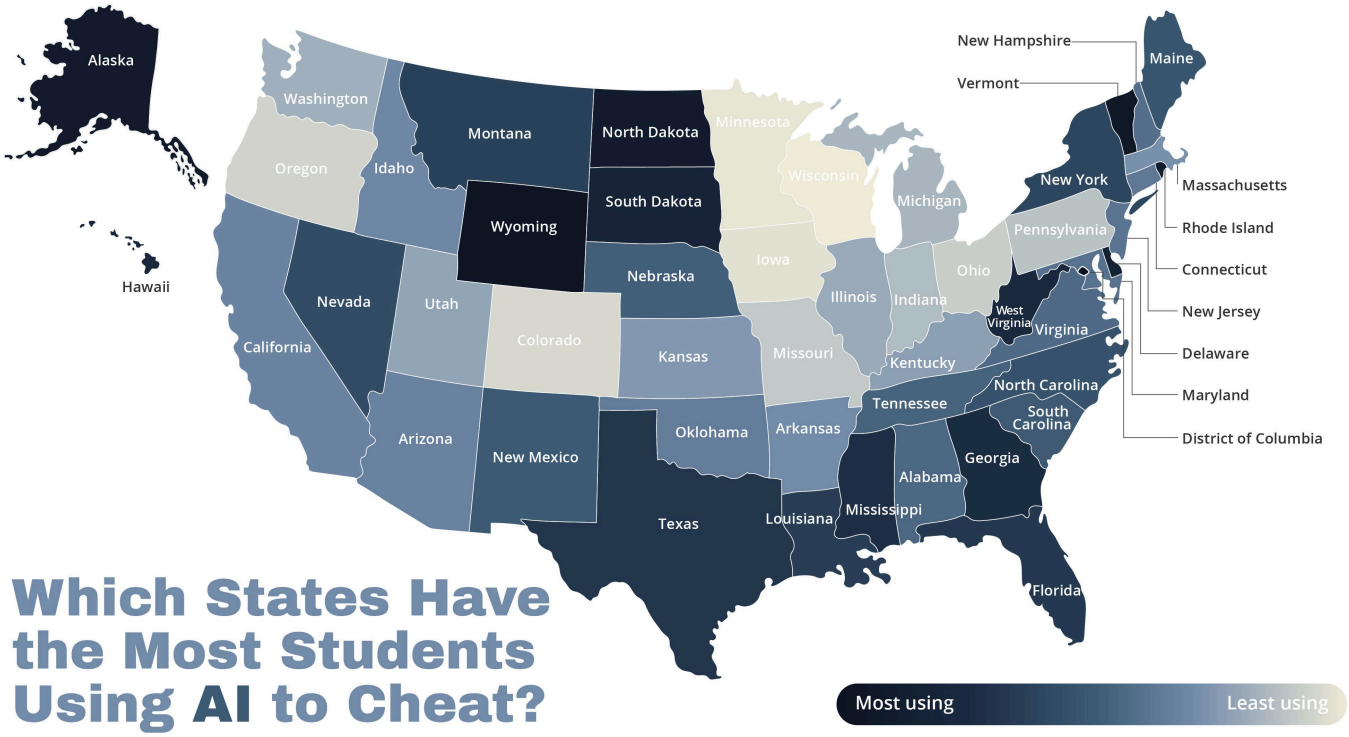
Cloudwards

Which States Have the Most Students Using AI to Cheat?

In the rapidly evolving landscape of education technology, artificial intelligence tools have emerged as both innovative learning resources and potential vehicles for academic dishonesty. As educational institutions continue to grapple with the implications of AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude and other generative AI platforms, understanding regional trends in student adoption of these technologies for potentially unethical purposes becomes increasingly crucial.

Cloudwards conducted a comprehensive study analyzing Google search data across all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia to identify where students are most likely to seek AI assistance for completing assignments, writing essays, and bypassing traditional academic integrity standards.

This research examines search volume data for terms related to using AI (like "ChatGPT essay" and "AI homework help") for academic shortcuts, offering educators, parents and policymakers a clearer picture of where intervention may be most needed.



Key Findings: AI in Education

- **District of Columbia ranks highest** for AI cheating-related searches with 1,450 monthly searches (2,135.58 per 1 million people), demonstrating significantly higher per capita searches than other states.

- **Rural states show surprisingly high interest** in AI cheating tools, with Wyoming, Vermont, Alaska and North Dakota all ranking in the top 5 states when adjusted for population.
- **The Southeast region demonstrates strong interest** in AI cheating tools, with West Virginia (number 10) leading the region at 717.49 searches per million people. Nearby Delaware, both a Mid-Atlantic & South Atlantic state, is at number seven on the ranking with 736.51 searches per million people.
- **Some populous states rank relatively low** in per capita searches, as evidenced by Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa ranking among the bottom five despite their educational institutions.
- **Regional patterns suggest cultural and educational factors** beyond simple technological access may influence students' likelihood to seek AI assistance for academic dishonesty.

Results

	States	Average Monthly Search Volume per 100,000 people	Average Monthly Search Volume per 1 Million People
1	District of Columbia	213.56	2135.58
2	Wyoming	107.87	1078.66
3	Vermont	92.67	926.69
4	Alaska	91.35	913.55
5	North Dakota	86.74	867.43
6	Rhode Island	79.38	793.82
7	Delaware	73.65	736.51
8	South Dakota	72.88	728.80
9	Hawaii	71.77	717.70
10	West Virginia	71.75	717.49
11	Georgia	71.54	715.37
12	Mississippi	71.44	714.36
13	Texas	69.30	693.04
14	Florida	68.73	687.28
15	Louisiana	68.22	682.15
16	Montana	63.56	635.59
17	New York	62.03	620.30
18	Nevada	61.05	610.49
19	North Carolina	60.08	600.80
20	New Mexico	59.59	595.92
21	Maine	58.75	587.51
22	South Carolina	58.25	582.48
23	Nebraska	58.13	581.28
24	Tennessee	57.81	578.12
25	Alabama	57.16	571.60
26	Virginia	57.14	571.38

27	New Hampshire	57.06	570.59
28	Maryland	55.18	551.76
29	New Jersey	54.35	543.55
30	Connecticut	53.91	539.09
31	Oklahoma	53.78	537.76
32	Arizona	53.29	532.88
33	California	52.84	528.42
34	Idaho	52.42	524.25
35	Arkansas	52.16	521.56
36	Massachusetts	50.13	501.33
37	Kansas	49.31	493.11
38	Kentucky	46.84	468.39
39	Utah	46.52	465.22
40	Illinois	45.74	457.38
41	Washington	45.57	455.66
42	Michigan	44.83	448.33
43	Indiana	44.59	445.92
44	Pennsylvania	42.97	429.73
45	Missouri	41.96	419.62
46	Ohio	41.74	417.45
47	Oregon	40.87	408.66
48	Colorado	40.83	408.33
49	Iowa	38.98	389.77
50	Minnesota	37.47	374.70
51	Wisconsin	35.53	355.27

Top Five States for AI Cheating Searches

The District of Columbia leads the nation in per capita search volume for AI cheating-related terms, with an impressive 2,135.58 average monthly searches per million people. This suggests that the capital's high concentration of educational institutions, competitive academic environment, and technological fluency creates conditions where AI academic shortcuts are frequently sought.

Wyoming follows in second place with 1,078.66 searches per million people, showcasing an unexpected pattern that challenges the assumption that AI cheating is primarily concentrated in urban areas or tech hubs. Vermont ranks third with 926.69 searches per million, followed by Alaska (913.55) and North Dakota (867.43), further demonstrating that rural states with smaller populations are actively engaging with AI technology for academic purposes.

States with the Lowest AI Cheating Search Interest

Wisconsin shows the lowest interest in AI cheating tools nationwide, with just 355.27 searches per million people. Other states with notably low search volumes include Minnesota (374.70), Iowa (389.77), Colorado (408.33) and Oregon (408.66).

These states represent a mix of Midwestern and Western regions, suggesting that differences in educational approaches, technological adoption rates, or academic cultures may influence student behavior regarding AI tools. However, low search volumes should not be interpreted as absence of concern—they may simply reflect different stages of AI adoption or awareness.

Regional Insights

The Northeast Shows High Interest

The Northeast region demonstrates high interest in AI cheating tools, with the District of Columbia (1st), Vermont (3rd), Rhode Island (6th) and New York (17th) all ranking in the top 20 nationwide. This challenges previous assumptions about the region, showing widespread awareness and adoption of AI tools across both rural and more urbanized states in New England.

Rural States Dominate Top Rankings

One of the most surprising findings is the dominance of rural and less populous states in the top 10 rankings. Wyoming (2nd), Vermont (3rd), Alaska (4th), North Dakota (5th) and South Dakota (8th) all demonstrate search volumes that suggest widespread awareness and interest in using AI for academic shortcuts.

This pattern indicates that factors beyond simple technological innovation centers or population size drive interest in AI cheating. Possible explanations include the necessity for alternative educational resources in areas with fewer in-person academic support options, or potentially different approaches to academic assessment in these regions.

Mixed Results in Populous States

Large population centers show mixed results in AI cheating search behavior. While Texas ranks relatively high at 13th place with 693.04 searches per million people, other populous states like California (33rd), New Jersey (29th) and Pennsylvania (44th) rank surprisingly low despite their numerous educational institutions and technological hubs.

This challenges the assumption that tech-forward states would naturally demonstrate higher interest in AI cheating tools, suggesting instead that specific educational policies, institutional approaches, or cultural factors may play more significant roles in determining AI adoption for academic purposes.

AI Cheating in Education: Possible Solutions

The significant regional variations suggest that one-size-fits-all policies will likely prove inadequate for addressing the complex challenges AI presents to academic integrity. Instead, educational institutions might consider developing regionally appropriate responses that address specific contextual factors driving students toward these tools.

Solutions could include introducing AI literacy programs in schools and universities that teach students both the potential benefits and ethical challenges of using AI, while making clear the institution's code of conduct in regard to what is considered cheating.

Additionally, these regions could encourage more project work and assignments that require creative or personalized responses, making AI-generated work less feasible. More in-person assessments (where possible) may also help.

Using AI detectors is another option, but these aren't always entirely accurate and could therefore cause further issues. What's more, using AI detectors on an individual basis would prove costly time-wise.

Another problem institutions could address is the confusion surrounding AI tools and what they should and should not be used for. For example, while AI writing is not acceptable for essays or completing homework, some institutions may permit using it for research purposes. Coming up with some rules regarding AI use and making them clear to students may remove some of this confusion.

For states with higher search interest, the priority might be addressing the specific factors driving students toward AI cheating tools. Educational initiatives tailored to the unique challenges in regions like the District of Columbia or Wyoming might focus on building a stronger culture of academic integrity while also acknowledging the technological reality students operate within.

Methodology & Sources

This study analyzed Google search volume data for keywords directly related to using AI for academic dishonesty purposes. The research team collected monthly search volume for terms including "AI essay writer," "ChatGPT essay," "AI homework help" and other related terms across all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

We compared search interest across all states and the District of Columbia to identify meaningful patterns and regional trends. States were then ranked based on total search volume per 1 million people, creating a standardized metric that allows for fair comparison regardless of population size. This methodology revealed significant geographic variations that would not be apparent from raw search volumes alone.