Friend or Foe? Using Artificial Intelligence to Empower Your Teaching

SPEAKERS

Tierney King, Jeremy Caplan, Liz Norell, Sheenah Hartigan, Flower Darby

Tierney King 00:01

This is the *Faculty Focus Live* podcast sponsored by the *Teaching Professor Annual Conference*. This year, join us in New Orleans from June 9th through the 11th, and attend a conference where you'll network, learn, and refocus on why you got into teaching in the first place. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. There's been a lot of chat about ChatGPT and AI in the field of higher education, from concerns about academic integrity to prohibiting this type of all-knowing AI. But today, I want us to see AI from a different perspective. What if you could use AI at your university to help students experiencing food insecurity and connect them with resources? What if you could use AI for your syllabus and lesson plan ideation? What if you could minimize the temptation to cheat and design prompts that are imaginative and relevant to your students' daily lives and goals. To start, Jeremy Caplan, Flower Darby, and Liz Norell will discuss how educators can embark on this new technological journey. A reminder that this full seminar, *Facing the Future: Educators Discuss Teaching in the Era of ChatGPT,* is 20% off when you use coupon code, **PODCAST20**

Jeremy Caplan 01:23

We've heard a lot of doomsaying. We've heard a lot of people racking their brains to figure out how to handle all of the cheating that this potentially enables. And I'm going to actually focus on a different side of this. I think this is an empowering set of tools that we can use in really creative ways. And I want to explore that with you. And so what you can do with AI, and this is an example of using it for syllabus drafting, is you can envision your learning outcomes. So I want to create an entrepreneurial journalism course, where I have these goals in mind, right? I want to then summarize what is the essence of this course, right? So that I can help the machine, the tool, understand what I'm after. Because then I'm going to constrain and I'm going to say, You know what, this is a five-week course or this is for a 10-week course, or this is for a three-hour one-day workshop. And I give it some specifics: this is going to be conducted in Spanish, or it's going to be conducted in German, or it's going to be done at a fifth grade level, or it's going to be done at a graduate level, or any any number of other kinds of constraints and guidance I can give to the algorithm, to the machine, to the language model. Then I give it a prompt, and I refine that. And I say you know what, that's too long, or that's too complicated. Or, in my own example, I asked for a syllabus for entrepreneurial journalism, it included a lot of detail about social media. And that's actually not in my area of focus for that particular course. So I said, you know what,

let's have a revision of that. Let's take out the social media emphasis, let's include more on ethics, and issues around ethics, right? And I'm using it again, I want to emphasize this not to replace myself, it's to supplement my own thinking, to identify blind spots and my own thinking, right? What aspects have I left out in my prior iteration of this course? What should I be thinking about that I might not have? What viewpoints am I missing because of my own privilege, or my own background or my own biases? So I'm using it to assist my own natural creativity, my own natural thinking, however limited that might be, and I'm using it in as a conversation. Just as I might use a photo editing tool to try out different looks for a photo or video. So then I refine, I reiterate, and then I humanize. I set aside the machine and I edit myself. I've got a working start and I make something that's that's new, and hopefully, good and useful. So a couple of tools to try as I get ready to conclude here and pass it over to, to my colleagues. ChatGPT is the basic one. I would encourage people to explore if you haven't yet, you can use it completely for free to experiment with. Notion AI and Craft AI are built into those tools. So Notion and Craft are great document tools and notebook tools that have these kinds of technologies built in. And the nice thing is you can organize all your materials within those tools. So they're basically digital notebooks or document tools. So when you ask the AI to generate something for you like a syllabus or a lesson plan, you can put it right into your planning notebook. So it's really nice, nicely set up for that. Edge and GPT is the example I showed earlier from Microsoft. It's in a browser. And then Canva has a whole range of new AI tools, including a magic writing tool, as well as tools for generating visuals. And those can be used for free by educators and students as well. So those are some tools to try. I would encourage you to experiment with this. I would encourage you to have this explore exploratory mindset and try things identify what's what works for you and what you want to leave aside.

Flower Darby 04:51

Thank you Jeremy for a very informative and inspiring and quick tour of the kinds of things that we can use this tool for. I admit that I I am still learning about how I can increase my own efficiency and effectiveness as an educator, as a scholar, as a researcher, as a writer. I'm going to come at the topic of ChatGPT and other AI from a different perspective, and that is, how can we design our writing assignments and our prompts for students to minimize the temptation to cheat. So let's look briefly at just a few recommendations regarding assignment design. How can we craft assessments and activities recognizing that many times we might be asking students to write in order to learn, right? This this idea of writing to learn and help me figure out what I'm thinking. So what we want to do is we want to hit three primary areas as we look at putting together assignments. First, we want to capture student's attention and imagination so that I just want to do the task that's in front of me because it's inherently interesting, and not necessarily go feed this prompt in the ChatGPT or many other tools that are and will be more available. Let's empower students to do the work that's in front of them. So once again, if we can give voice and choice, if we can give students an opportunity to co create our policies as one example, as a class, how do we think we might use a tool such as ChatGPT in this particular assignment? Or as a class, do we reach consensus that no, this one really should just be generated right from within your own beautiful minds. Give students an opportunity to co-create, to influence the policies that the class comes up with. Give them options in terms of topics and ways that they can make our assignments more relevant for them. And this is exactly where I was going next is, when students can see that what they're doing relates to their own lives and their own goals, they're going to be intrinsically more motivated to dive in deeply and do the work. And so, as you may know, Simon Sinek's famous "Start With Why" is a great sort of phrase to remind ourselves, or to check in with

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ourselves—why am I asking students to do this work? What is the value? What is the purpose? That's a good opportunity for us to review that, making sure that there is alignment in our assessments with our goals, and that there is value for students. But also, we can ask students to generate the why. Because what we see in the research is when students identify the usefulness or the value of a task, they will be more motivated to avoid temptations. Now, this article that I'm thinking about, this study, was about temptations to waste time, I'm sorry, maybe not waste time but to choose to spend time on social media or Netflix or Hulu or Instagram, and choose to do tedious and mundane but necessary homework or exercise is problem solving. But let's see if we can translate that maybe we can nudge students to choosing to avoid temptations, if they themselves articulate the purpose and the value of the task that we're asking them to do. And then finally, we can ask students to just develop their own awareness of competence. And when I say as students, what I really mean is that we can structure opportunities for students to recognize for themselves, that they are increasing in skill and knowledge that they are developing the competencies that they need to be successful. So for example, when we scaffold our assignments, when we break down a task that seems overwhelming, like a 15-page, research paper. When we break that down into manageable pieces, have incremental due dates, invite self assessment, peer feedback, and where we can also give some guidance as well along the process, that's going to help students develop that confidence, develop that sense that they have the necessary abilities, skills and knowledge to perform without turning to a crutch or without cutting any corners. So I'm going to wrap it up there. I know Liz has some wonderful things to share as well. But just thinking about how we talk of ways to foster integrity, or nudge or encourage students to persuade our students to work with integrity instead of increasing resistance.

Liz Norell 09:06
Thank you FLower and Jeremy, it's great to be with you all today. And I want to talk and kind of build on what my colleagues have shared with you. And so I think that when we're imagining how to move forward here, we need to think about how to create learning environments that really emphasize the human in education. So I think if I'm going to contribute anything to this conversation, I think it's that reminder that the technology is useful, but it's only useful in as much as it helps us do things that technology cannot do. So how do we create learning environments that help our students, and also ourselves, take advantage of these tools in a way that supports our entirely human goals? So when ChatGPT is helpful, in my view, is to reduce barriers to learning. So here, I'm thinking, I'm very interested in and concerned about equity in education. And so think about students for whom English is a second or third or fourth language. These tools can be incredibly powerful to help communicate ideas, without getting bogged down in the incredibly difficult task of learning English fluently. It can also just kind of level the playing field, I think for a lot of students who may not have had the same kind of preparation for higher learning that others have had. ChatGPT can be really helpful, as Jeremy has shown us, to create material to analyze and critique. And I'm thinking here specifically about, you know, I often want to give students examples of work, so that they kind of have an exemplar of what I'm looking for, as a way to reduce anxiety and create more transparency in my classroom. ChatGPT can do this without needing to worry about revealing another student's work. So I will sometimes ask students if I can use something they've done and in an anonymized fashion, as an exemplar, but GPT may be great if you're teaching a new class where you don't have that, or if you don't have a student artifact for a new assignment or something that that you want to share. Finally, I think ChatGPT can be really helpful in fostering critical conversations around how and when to use this tool. Much in the same

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way that I think social media and other new media forms have been wonderful opportunities to talk about how and when to evaluate information online and when to trust it. So you know, these skills are the skills that our students need and finding ways to work those conversations into our classrooms, and our other, you know, programs, our extracurriculars our wraparound services these are these are great ways to prepare our students for the world that they are living in and will continue to live in once they leave our institutions.

Tierney King 12:23
So there are numerous ways you can use AI and chatbots as essentially an assistant or supplement to aid your teaching. But next, we'll see how a community college is using a chatbot to better communicate with students and meet their needs. In this program, Sheenah Hartigan introduces us to Reggie, a virtual chatbot employee who works at Ocean County College. A reminder that the full program, *Using an AI Chatbot: Programmed for Success*, is also 20% off with coupon code **PODCAST20**

Sheenah Hartigan 12:54
The pandemic has been really difficult to navigate for institutions across the board. We can't look backwards. We couldn't say well, how did everyone else recover from the Spanish flu. But we can look forward and figure out how to recruit, retain and ultimately meet the needs of our students. At that time, Ocean decided to lean heavily into our chatbot capabilities and engage with our students in new ways, which provided the institution with great insight, usable data, and ultimately measurable outcomes. Meet Reggie, my favorite employee just don't tell the others. He was born in November of 2017. He was named by our students. His full name is Reginald T. Bot but you can call him Reggie. And we were the first community college to implement a chatbot in the country. He uses a web interface but primarily 92% of the time communicates with our students via text messages on their smartphone. He is trained as a one-stop employee. He is cross-trained with a broad understanding and knowledge base in admissions, registration, financial aid, the bursaries, office advising and college knowledge. Unlike the rest of my team members though, he works 24/7 and 365. We have essentially trained a machine to have emotional and contextual intelligence. When you think about it, it's impressive because it's hard to train humans to do that, right? So how does Reggie work at the point of inquiry? The second a student inquires, and they can inquire in a bunch of different ways, but the second they inquire, Reggie will introduce himself to the students as a virtual chatbot. He does not pretend to be a human. He's a virtual assistant. Once that relationship is established, he will respond to student inquiries and messages 24/7 using a web of questions that are in a knowledge base. In 2017, Reggie began with about 700 understandings, we now have over 3000 understandings. He learns as he goes every day. His database is increasing. The more that students interact with him, the smarter he gets. Reggie translates messages from student lingo and acronyms. So things like "IDK," he understands that means, "I don't know." If a student says "I'm broke," they're really asking "How do I do my FASFA?" He's translating those institutional semantics back to the students as well. He's providing consistent answers to large groups quickly. The message that he sends and receives, they all work to increase engagement with the institution, gain student insight, build connections, and then ultimately, drive action. So, what does Reggie say to our students? Reggie sends a multitude of messages that we categorize in four different ways: nudges, surveys, invitations, or value-added communications. We utilize these messages in in-depth college-wide communication plans. And we develop them annually. They're targeted to specific

groups of students. So, some plans go to everybody: Registration opens for a semester. The message, though, that the students receive may differ. So, degree-seeking students can register themselves using the student portal. Early college students are going to need assistance from a guidance counselor in order to register. Nudges, those are a call to action. We're driving students to click on a link, make an appointment, complete that next enrollment-related step. Surveys are conditional questions that Reggie asks that he's encouraging students to respond by either answering yes or no or choosing from a selection of options. This real time data allows us to act quickly and efficiently identify and target students who need assistance, connect them with real time appropriate resources. Reggie sends invitations to upcoming events. He gets more RSPVs than sending something in the mail, than phone campaigns alone. Recently, we've started actually sending invitations to events that are happening in real time on the campus to students that are on campus at that time. We have a conference that's from 8:00 to 1:00. We're going to send it to students in that major that are on campus already from 8:00 to 1:00. Community college populations are sometimes more difficult to engage for that reason. And we found that's been really helpful. The value-added ones are secretly my most favorite because they're fun. He wishes students a Happy New Year. He wishes them a Happy Thanksgiving. He lets them know a Happy Birthday. He sends out a daily happy birthday message to each and every student on their birthday. This past New Year's, his New Year's resolution was to spend more time with his mother board. This one is a survey that we actually sent out in May of 2021. Reggie texted 6,100 students about food insecurity. I was completely staggered by the results. I know my FAFSA numbers right? I know we're 70% financial aid. I know what percentage get Pell Grants. I had no idea how widespread food insecurity was amongst our student body. We had a robust food pantry already, we still had so many students that were experiencing hunger, and we're worried about purchasing food. Reggie allowed us to connect directly with students who are experiencing food insecurity and connect them with resources like the food pantry, we were able to push out gift cards to local grocery stores. We used the results from this survey in order to obtain a $75,000 grant from the state of New Jersey to further assist with our students needs. He doesn't eliminate the ability for students to engage with humans. And I want to make that clear. He simply serves as another modality and allows the institution to directly connect with those that need it most. Our engagement rates are far greater than any of the other modalities that we previously used to connect with students, students that might not have previously engaged or raise their virtual hand for support now have an avenue to do it in a modality that they're comfortable with.

Tierney King 19:11
Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the *Faculty Focus Live* podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.