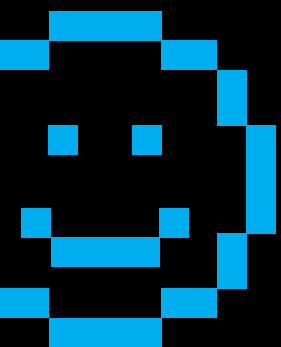




LET'S

CHAT

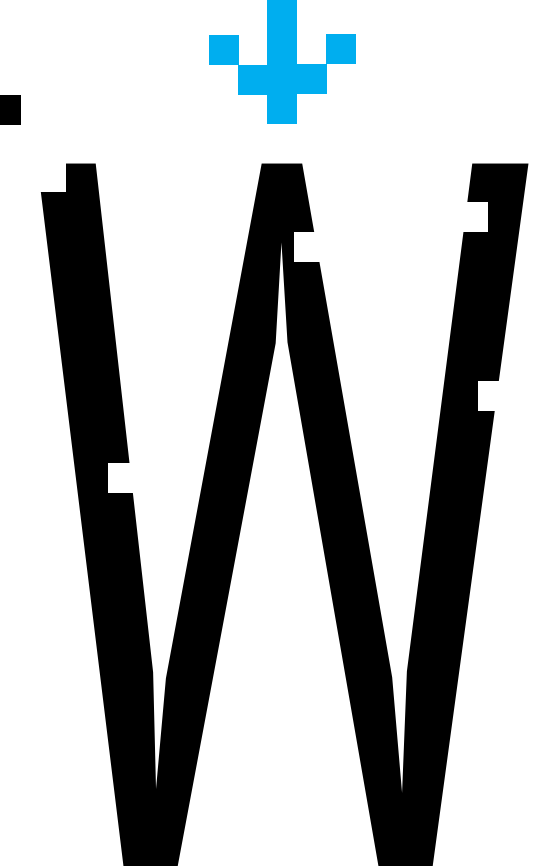


ABOUT

CHATGPT

In the dynamic landscape of post-secondary education, AI is revolutionizing learning experiences, from personalized tutoring systems that cater to individual student needs to advanced analytics shaping institutional strategies, ushering in an era of unprecedented innovation and efficiency.*

*credit: ChatGPT



ith AI in every headline and its impact on higher education changing daily, Voyageur asked for the perspectives of SLC community members on how they are learning about, working and dealing with AI. Patrick Egbononu, Interim Dean of Business & Community Services, sat down with Denise Nielsen, Professor of Communications and Ethics, Gerhard Freundorfer, Creative Director of Spark (SLC’s student marketing and advertising agency), and James Wallace, Manager of Institutional Research and Data Governance, in a conversation about what discussions are happening at SLC when it comes to AI in education.

Embracing AI, the discussion was co-moderated through prompts to ChatGPT to guide this discussion.

PATRICK EGBONONU Thank you all for joining today—I’m excited about this conversation on what we are talking about, wondering about, and worrying about when it comes to AI. Let’s start with the positive and ask how AI can enhance the learning experience for students in higher education?

DENISE NIELSEN I don’t feel like an expert, but I’ve found ways to integrate AI into the classroom to help students personalize. I have a critical thinking class that is all international students who can struggle with some of the concepts and language. I’ve used ChatGPT to personalize examples for them—an example that really explains it to them. When it comes to students struggling with writing, there are also opportunities to get past blank page syndrome.

But how do we use it for brainstorming? How do we use it for feedback on writing assignments? How do we use it to tutor us without outsourcing our thinking to it? Those questions are the big challenges that we face in the classroom.

“I often wonder how we, as institutions, ensure we’re embracing AI—but teaching it responsibly and really reinforcing the critical assessment of its use.”



DENISE NIELSEN
Professor of
Communications
and Ethics

JAMES WALLACE Use of AI raises some interesting questions about how we’re outsourcing different types of thinking and, in particular, critical thinking. Students still need to think critically because there are issues with the sources that AI is trained on—they are not value-free and they are not error-free.

Working with data, I see examples where AI can help aggregate information, but at times where an individual voice is required, it’s important to remember that there needs to be a human.

GERHARD FREUNDORFER In my work, we’re a bridge between the classroom and the real world for students that work at Spark. I’ve pushed the team to both use AI and figure out its boundaries, but also have AI act as a mentor and a prompt to help students go deeper and help expand their knowledge.

Any time we come across new tools that may be applicable to the work that we do, I encourage them to use it, test it, play with it, and share what they are learning.

The work that we do is for paying clients and there is more on the line than just handing in a paper for marks, so they really need to stop and think about how and why they will use it.

JW We are in the business of producing educated human minds. We have to remember that however AI tools support this, we must remain squarely focused on that goal.

DN I often tell students not to outsource your thinking and that ultimately, no matter what you produce, whether it’s AI-produced, you produce it, or it’s a mixture, your name is on it. I often wonder how we, as institutions, ensure we’re embracing AI—but teaching it responsibly and really reinforcing the critical assessment of its use.

PE Let’s move to the inevitable question about the dark side of these tools and the risk of a negative impact on the quality of education, quality of learning, student creativity, and the development of critical thinking skills. Is it something we should be worried about and what can we do to mitigate these potential negative effects?

DN I think there is a real possibility of eliminating the “learning”—and then why go to school if you don’t want to learn? I was in a class where students were learning how to forecast a budget and they were going through all these different steps and I was thinking “ChatGPT could do this,” but what ChatGPT can’t do is judge the outcome. So, whether I’m teaching them to learn to write, to problem solve, or to make decisions, they have to learn how to do that in order to judge the results that AI might produce. We can use ChatGPT to record something and to come up with a solution and to analyze the data. But if we don’t know if it’s right, then we’re just trusting it and I don’t think you can do that. And, so, learning has to happen somewhere along the line.

JW It goes back to how the human element is so critical—AI needs to be used to scale learning, not to replace it.

GF I think one of the risks of these AI tools is that as they scale and get better, we will see people start to prefer to communicate with AI tools rather than person-to-person. People may pull away from the messiness of human relationships—which give so much meaning in our lives—to the safety and convenience of AI chat bots that will never disagree and always make you feel good about how things are going.

JW Another big problem it’s creating is volume—we only have two eyes and we use screens primarily to view things. As a researcher, I’m finding this already with the volume of information that’s published online. I can only imagine what it will be like when AI is producing this content as well. There might be ways to code it so that you can identify which are AI-produced outputs, but it still could be that you can’t find the trees for the forest.

PE So, as an educational institution, what can we do about this?

DN We have to go back to humanizing education because that is the connection we have—we have to find ways to make sure that the human element is still there and that students are collaborating with each other. How can students use AI as a tool to support better interactions, better communication, better critical thinking, better problem-solving processes, and better collaborative and interdisciplinary work. If we can figure that out, we’re on the way to having a strong graduate.

PE I think the way we teach has to change. I think what we teach has to change. I think our approaches in the classroom and our relationships with students have to change.

GF AI tools provide an opportunity to increase the innovation capacity of our students—these large language models with natural language processing can become a programming language—they will provide opportunities for multidisciplinary teams to tackle problems and create digital tools and digital solutions that can help

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PATRICK EGBONONU
Interim Dean
of Business &
Community
Services

solve these problems. They can start scaling and building faster, and open up a new wave of innovation.

JW I think there’s a philosophical question that needs to be addressed somewhere along the line about why we must bring AI tools into all that we do. How we introduce AI tools to match what is happening in industry and society.

PE Which is a great segue to our last question: Can we integrate artificial intelligence into our curriculum at the College such that the student learning experience is enhanced, not replaced—where students are equipped with the AI skills and the knowledge they need to be leaders and innovators in their careers?

DN In the classroom, it comes back to rethinking the way we assess. I’ve taught communication courses for 20 years, and we’ve assessed in the same way which is to ask a student to research and write an essay. That will have to change because an essay is no longer a relevant output if it can be produced by AI. I’m not saying writing is irrelevant because writing is part of the thinking process and the ability to articulate your ideas clearly is critical. But writing an essay to show your knowledge is not something I think will stick around in education.

So I think we have to look at it program by program, class by class and embed the tools that make the most sense – for example, you don’t want your paramedic showing up and having to put into ChatGPT “How do I fix this heart attack?”

GF If our students can have that interdisciplinary knowledge, but also know where the boundaries are and can situate themselves on the boundaries, they’re going to be top performers and create a lot of value for our society.

PE Thank you all—it’s a fascinating time to be in education and it kind of excites me, but also kind of scares me. Education has been the same for 200 years and, all of a sudden, it’s changing daily. These conversations help us look at it from all angles and adapt and prepare as things evolve. ✂

AS A FINAL THOUGHT, WE ASKED EACH PARTICIPANT TO CHOOSE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE FUTURE OUTLOOK OF AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

Transformative
Optimistic for the possibilities about taking students’ learning to the next level but understanding things can transform for the worst, too. –DN

Transparency
It’s at the centre of a lot of what we need to do in order to keep an eye on a path that will be sustainable. –JW

Adventure
We don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. Move forward with the spirit of adventure and make the most of what comes. –GF

Potential
It all depends on how we harness it. –PE