

Ask... and Tell: Acknowledgement of AI Use in Course Syllabi

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I live in the real world... well, at least part of the time. As much as I might like to wish some things away, I know that doing so would be a disservice not only to myself, but also to my students. The existential threat that artificial intelligence poses to education is one of those things that although I may not want to deal with, I know that I must. I suspect that our students feel much the same way. I believe that it is our professional and ethical duty as educators to help our students navigate the murky, sometimes scary, waters that AI is now inhabiting, seemingly at every turn.

Here is what I have done up to this point in time, and here is where I think we need to go as instructors and advisors of undergraduates.

What I Have Added to My Courses

It was impressed upon me in my professional circles through various webinars and listservs over the summer of 2024 that we *must* do something about AI, and that we *cannot* do nothing. So, as my first step into this unknown, I decided to take the Harry Potter approach, and to not be afraid to name it. Specifically, in the Academic Integrity section of my Fall 2024 course syllabi, I added a section entitled “The Use of AI in This Course”. This has now become a standard section in all my courses. In this section I make it clear to students that I am aware of AI and what it can do. I also make it clear that I do not think that AI is the enemy. I use the “tool” analogy and state that AI is something that we can use to aid us in accomplishing our tasks. However, I caution the students that this is a tool that is not without its dangers. So, in effect, I communicate a) awareness of AI; b) acknowledgement that this is a new frontier for all of us, and; c) there are rules in this new realm of AI in higher education.

Awareness

I let students know that I am not only aware of AI, but that I have some degree of knowledge about it. I name the amorphous AI entity: ChatGPT... Copilot... Claude... Consensus. This hopefully communicates that I have some understanding of these tools, and that I therefore cannot be unquestionably bamboozled by them.

Acknowledgement

I do not pretend that I have an in-depth understanding of all the AI programs out there, as this would surely be a clue that I do not really know what I'm talking about, and they can indeed bamboozle away. In fact, I encourage them to reach out to me when they run into questions, and assert that we are in this together, learning from one another. This, incidentally, is one of the cornerstones of the mission at my institution, so I am provided with an opportunity to tie this journey into AI into the mission of the university- a win-win.

Rules

Here is the leap of faith, requiring trust of my students. I tell them which assignments it is okay to use AI tools with, and when AI should not be utilized. It is not okay for AI to write your History of Psychology paper. It is not okay for AI to fabricate a personal experience to write about in a Reflection Paper for Personality Psychology or Social Psychology. It is okay to use ChatGPT to help you brainstorm topics for a Reflection Paper, or even Research Questions in Research Methods I. It is fine to use AI when you are experiencing a writer's block about how to phrase a particular sentence, or to refine a specific thought you are struggling with expressing. But I tell my students, there's a catch: you must cite your AI tool, just as you would any other source. I explain to them that they must clearly indicate where and when, and how they have used AI in their work. This hopefully teaches them that this is not the boogie man that cannot be named. It is also not something that they can use without consequences. It is, hopefully, teaching them that they need to be responsible users of AI-artificial intelligence- and that HI- human intelligence- is paramount.

How AI Has Changed the Course(s)

I don't believe that accounting for AI has markedly changed the courses that I have taught thus far. I think accounting for AI has changed me and my mindset. It has made me more aware of how much my assignments prompt students to use their brain, and how much they may prompt them to use AI. I hope that at this moment my explicit recognition and discussion of AI with my students allows them to understand that we are on this journey into the new frontier together, and that trust in each other is part of that journey. It has, however, elicited an urgency to reevaluate the types of assessments I use, which was probably due anyway.

What I Have Learned and Where I Will Go

I will definitely continue to explicitly acknowledge AI and its potential uses, both good and evil, in my course syllabi. I will also continue to have discussions with my students about its use in the classroom. I have not yet attempted to have a similar discussion in my asynchronous online courses. However, that is something that I will be incorporating into my summer class: Research Methods I.

This course will be an even more challenging one in which my students and I will need to navigate the AI waters. It requires students to develop a research proposal and design a study, without requiring them to actually collect, analyze, and interpret data. It requires the development and refinement of research questions, including article summaries for a mini literature review... in short, it is ripe for Chatbot use. I will be taking notes for my future self to incorporate into the next academic year and beyond.

