Latest

Elon University explores integration of AI in classroom

As departments learn how artificial intelligence can reshape learning, professors navigate personal policies

By Cassie Weymouth | 9/24/24 3:02pm

Elon News Network created this image using Gencraft with the following prompt "Create an image of a person using artificial intelligence on a computer in a college classroom" and modified it using Generative Fill on Adobe Photoshop. AI generated image from Gencraft and Adobe Photoshop.

AI has become a topic of debate on college campuses, from professors encouraging and designing projects around the use of AI to others banning it from their classroom. Some classes, such as COM 3340: Politics and Mass Media, have introduced projects that utilize ChatGPT asking it to write analyses based on a student's notes, while other classes ask that their students refrain from using any AI.

Tom Kerr, a political science professor, asks students to refrain from using AI to write papers.

"Having the knowledge base of doing your own reading and writing makes it so that you can utilize the AI tool better in the future," Kerr said. "I think that it's necessary that you have to be able to think for yourself, because really when you use AI, you're outsourcing the creative process. You have to quality check, so having the skill set to do it on your own makes it so you can use AI more effectively in the future."

Kerr said regardless of his own policies, it is becoming harder and harder to distinguish AI written papers from student written ones.

"Even over the past year and a half, I've seen the quality of what's clearly AI increase," Kerr said. "It's still recognizable, but it's not as glaringly obvious as it used to be. So I think probably within the year, two years max, we'll get to the point where it's not going to be detectable, which is unfortunate."

Israel Balderas, a journalism professor, has decided to take a different approach by implementing AI into his classroom and curriculum.

"I started talking about AI in the context of ethics," Balderas said. "I could recognize that this tool would make it easier for students to do their homework, like Grammarly, like a calculator, but I thought this was different in that this thing was going to evolve over time, that whatever it was that I was teaching in the winter of that year, it would be different by the springtime, and certainly different by the fall. So as a teacher, AI has forced me to evolve my curriculum."

He also said AI would change the face of journalism and students need to adapt to that.

"For me, what I've been rethinking about is, how do we get away from this idea that journalism equals content, that journalists are content creators, and instead, journalism is about service," Balderas said. "I think journalism is human interaction. I mean human interaction is journalism."

Emma Butsch, a finance major in her sophomore year, said her professors have a wide range of policies that are fairly new.

"Almost all of my professors have actually mentioned it, two of which have said they're fine using it as a go off point. They're like, 'Please don't write a paper using AI, but if you're going to look up questions, it's a useful resource.' So they actually would not be shocked if we use AI on some of their work," Butsch said.

However, she said she has mixed feelings on how she feels about AI.

"I know it's become such a controversial topic, I think that you should be careful with how much you use AI as a crutch for your learning," Butsch said. "Like, yeah, it can solve problems for you, but can you actually do them? That's what you really need to know."

Amie Sanneh, a sophomore in strategic communications, has also seen an increase in AI use in her classrooms.

"In most classes, either we address it and say that we're probably going to use it in our class, or it's the opposite, and we address it, and we say we're not going to ever use it in our class.," Sanneh said. "There are some classes where we use it to our advantage and like, use it to do research things like that."

Elisa Edwards, a sophomore in international global studies, said she is very nervous about the use of AI.

"Personally, I feel like AI is really tricky to use in classrooms, sometimes I feel like I'm using it wrong. So I kind of stray away from it because I feel like I'm cheating regardless," Edwards said.