Navigating the AI Revolution
Integrating Artificial Intelligence in an Undergraduate Writing Course

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Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are now widely and freely available to students, faculty, and the general public. These tools have the power to upend not only the teaching and learning of undergraduate writing but also entire industries such as publishing, marketing, and creative works (Fu et al., 2024; Gregory, 2023; Sadek, 2025). While AI excels at mimicking human writing, it lacks the original thought, feeling, and authenticity of human authors (Rafalski, 2025). This raises important questions about how faculty should best prepare students for this new landscape that affects both academic and industry writing (Tuhin, 2025). This project reports on the efforts at a large public university to integrate artificial intelligence into an undergraduate writing course in apparel merchandising and design (AMD), aiming to equip students with the skills needed to navigate and leverage AI in their academic and professional lives.

The AI activities were designed for a 300-level writing course focused on fashion and cultural studies that was restricted to AMD students with a written communication general education prerequisite. The instructor, having completed several workshops on AI from the university's center for excellence in learning and teaching, implemented these activities both in person and online. Students and faculty had access to Microsoft Copilot AI, which assists with writing by offering suggestions on content, improving grammar and style, and generating content based on user prompts.

The integration of AI into the curriculum aimed to achieve the following learning objectives:

1. Enhance Students' Understanding of AI's Capabilities and Limitations: Provide students with an understanding of how AI tools function, their strengths, and their weaknesses.
2. Foster Critical Thinking: Encourage students to critically evaluate AI-generated content compared to human-generated content, developing their analytical skills.
3. Promote Ethical Considerations: Instill a sense of ethical responsibility in students regarding the use of AI in writing, both academically and professionally.

Implementation

The project involved a two-week series of activities, discussions, and reflections. Key components included:

1. **Homework Readings and Discussion Question:**
    - Assigned readings from Kaiser and Green (2022) and Illingworth (2021).
    - In-class writing prompt: "Can fashion be truly subversive when it comes to gender and/or sexuality?" Students wrote responses using a thesis, three points of support, and conclusion/analysis format.
2. **Lecture on AI in Academia and Industry:**

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- Covered AI's role, advantages, disadvantages, and ethical considerations in academia and industry.
- Discussion on AI's usefulness/harm to students' education and career.

3. **Online Compare/Contrast Activity:**
   - Students wrote a paragraph response comparing their handwritten discussion question with an AI-generated version using Microsoft Copilot AI.

The effectiveness of the project was assessed through both direct and indirect tools. Direct assessments included the completion of the discussion question and compare/contrast paragraph, while indirect assessment tools involved student reflections and group discussions on AI's usefulness and harm.

Outcomes

The class discussion revealed that most students (*n* = 18) were not utilizing AI in their academic, professional, or personal lives. They expressed appreciation for the lecture that outlined what AI is, along with its advantages, disadvantages, and ethical concerns for both academia and industry. Particularly illuminating were the insights from students who were using AI. For instance, when asked about the usefulness of AI to their academic careers, an English-as-a-second-language student reported that she used AI to summarize large amounts of reading material for easier translation lookup. Another student with a learning disability used AI for summarization due to difficulties with reading. One student admitted to using AI for school assignments when pressed for time and saw this as being helpful for their career. Other students responded saying this could be harmful as professors saw using AI as plagiarism. However, most students were not using AI and were unaware of its capabilities or how to use it effectively.

For the compare/contrast activity, students had similar thoughts on how their writing differed from that of AI. Most students were impressed by the professional writing and proper formatting. As one student wrote, "I was taken aback by how clear, concise, and fast AI was at writing an academic response to the prompt." They also appreciated the word suggestions and the speed at which AI produced a full response. One student noted, "English is not my first language, and it takes me a couple of hours to write a polished paragraph." However, students were mostly critical of the AI-generated responses. They noted that AI's writing lacked personality and did not convey human feelings or perspectives. Notably, five students reported that AI presented different, sometimes opposing viewpoints compared to their own responses. Students also criticized AI's generalized arguments and overuse of professional-sounding filler words. As part of the assignment, students checked the citations generated by AI and found that, in many cases, AI produced false quotes or incorrect APA citations. The students' reflections reveal a nuanced view of AI-generated writing, appreciating its technical strengths and assistance to students with support needs, but highlighting significant shortcomings in emotional depth, viewpoints, and citation accuracy.

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Conclusion

The integration of AI activities into the undergraduate writing course in Fall 2024 marked a significant step towards preparing students for the evolving landscape of academic and industry writing. This initial implementation demonstrated that the objectives of enhancing students' understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations, fostering critical thinking, and promoting ethical considerations were successfully met through group discussions and the compare/contrast activity. These outcomes underscore the importance of continued exploration and refinement of AI-related activities (Reiss, 2021). Planned changes include introducing a more detailed lecture on ethical considerations, inviting guest speakers from the apparel industry, expanding discussions through case studies, and refining the compare/contrast activity. These enhancements aim to ensure students are well-prepared to navigate and leverage AI effectively in their academic and professional lives.

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