De La Salle Institute for Teaching and Learning

DLSI NEWSLETTER

Supporting teaching and learning at La Salle

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PLEASE DISCUSS AI WITH YOUR STUDENTS!

In recent weeks I've had the opportunity to speak with dozens of our students about their use of large language models (LLMs), like ChatGPT. Many are using AI regularly to do school work. They were at first reluctant to share their experience with me, and I soon recognized that this is because **they are not clear about how their instructors view the use of AI.**

Very few students have heard from us about our expectations for AI use. When they did, it was only in passing reference, such as through a syllabus statement about AI and academic integrity.

When I asked them how they and their their friends are using tools like ChatGPT, the most commonly reported tasks were writing and homework completion. This, of course, creates substantial inequities in our classrooms and makes it quite difficult to know whether or not students are learning what we intend to teach.

Our students are without direction on the ethical and practical uses of AI. While some are figuring out creative and ethical applications to help them learn and understand course concepts, others fear being accused of academic dishonesty, and some are covertly using these tools to create shortcuts and cheat.

We are clearly still in the early days of having access to these powerful tools. Like the general population, most of us have not explored the capabilities of LLMs, when to apply them, and how to use them ethically. I understand the significant challenge, given the rapidly evolving landscape of these technologies, **but is imperative that we take some time to become familiar with generative AI.** Then, we need to talk about the tools in our classes, alter our instruction and assessment to accommodate LLMs, and give continual voice to the issues of ethics and academic integrity. We have a responsibility to help our students learn how to use, **perhaps the most impactful piece of technology ever made available**.

A good place to begin is the DLSI's resource page. Create accounts for ChatGPT, MS Bing Chat, Claude, and/or Bard, and bookmark them, so that you are reminded to use them. How to Use AI - For Faculty provides information about interacting with AI. These products are in a constant state of flux, but today, the most comprehensive tool you can use for free (and the one I recommend to students) is MS Bing Chat in creative (purple) mode. However, this may soon change with the release of Google Gemini, rumored to be arriving around the new year, and believed to be a significant upgrade in LLM capabilities.

Mollick continues to suggest that "just using AI will teach you how to use AI." Think of the AI like an assistant and ask it for what you want…or maybe you need something and don't know quite how to have AI help you accomplish that task. Tell the AI your goal and ask it to guide you.

Here is a simple example. As you can see, when I write the DLSI Newsletter, I include hyperlinks to supporting papers, blogs, and websites. This typically requires several clicks as I navigate between my word processor and web browser. So, I asked ChatGPT-4 if I could make the process more efficient. It took some time and troubleshooting (that ChatGPT-4 handled), but I now have an Apple script that inserts the URL of an active webpage into this document with 2 clicks (or one keyboard shortcut). I had no knowledge of whether this was possible, nor how to even begin to set it up, before my interaction with

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ChatGPT-4.

I used what Mollick calls **"conversational prompting."** I simply discussed my need with ChatGPT-4, was presented with options, and we settled on an approach. I then asked it to guide me, step-by-step, through the process.

You might want AI to be a tool that does a single, repeatable task. For this, Mollick suggests **"structured prompting,"**an approach that provides the AI with a role, a goal, step-by-step instructions, and constraints. The set-up is more detailed than I can illustrate in this space, but is clearly explained in the linked Mollick article. Perhaps a good example is Breen's work with history simulation.

This has all become even easier within the past few days when OpenAI updated their ChatGTP plus product with a feature that allows users to create their own "GPTs", which become a LLM for a single purpose. These GTPs allow for the uploading of documents and provides the LLM with access to the web and coding capabilities, to create a self-contained tool that can be shared with others who have a "Plus" subscription.

As these tools develop, they are becoming more accurate (they still hallucinate so work must be checked), more powerful, and easier to use. Yet, it is important to consider that even if development stopped today, the products that are available to everyone right now can do all of the activities that you are asking your student to do, and much more…and they can do those activities well.

It is going to take some work. However, it is important for us to explore the capabilities of these tools, apply them to our own academic work, and discuss how to use them with our students. **They desperately need our guidance.**

SAVE THE DATE
and plan to join us!

January 9th, 2024

The DLSI Winter Teaching & Learning Conference
Innovate. Investigate. Integrate.

Look for program information and registration information in the coming weeks.

A PROFOUND RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

In last month's DLSI Newsletter I raised the question of whether we had institutional policies that support our stated value of good teaching. As I interact with colleagues across campus, and share these observations, most agree, but then give voice the the **difficulty of systemic change**. This is not just an issue here at La Salle.

In another excellent piece in the Chronicle of Higher Education titled Higher Ed's Ruinous Resistance to Change, Rosenberg, a former President of Macalester College, discusses the significant ramifications of resistance to institutional change in academia. Noteworthy for me was that the catalyst for the article was an attempt to start a conversation with his faculty about *instructional improvements*. The conversation did not go well, as he encountered resistance to even *talking about* instructional change.

Fortunately, it feels like we are in a different place here at La Salle because of our teaching legacy and a general willingness to discuss our classroom practice. **Many of us *are* talking about teaching and learning.**

However, we face several challenges. First, unless one spent some time as a university student studying education, it is fairly unlikely they've had opportunities to explore the science of teaching and learning and be mentored by an experienced educator while developing their own instructional practice. While we are all experts in our fields, few of us have learned the best ways to help others learn. So, we rely on the methods that were used on us, which were probably not based on a strong educational footing.

Additionally, the prevailing assumption is that college students are supposed to arrive ready for learning. The fact is, **we don't teach our children how to learn**. We teach them content, but strategies for effective and efficient learning are sorely missing from our K-12 curriculum. Therefore, students rely on poor

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learning strategies recommended by parents, peers, and even educators, like highlighting text and re-reading notes, which are ineffective learning tools. Compounding the challenge of readiness are varied, often inequitable, schooling experiences, especially for many of our first-generation students, not to mention the impacts that the pandemic had on learning across the board.

The most effective response to these challenges is to improve our classroom instruction. However, to reiterate a point I made last month, "we don't have systemic mechanisms to identify the quality of teaching, nor do we incentivize continuing professional development of teaching, or require improved classroom instruction."

In this moment it is critical to understand the **direct relationship between classroom instruction and student persistence**, clearly an issue that we all need to consider. The challenge, then, is creating the institutional mechanisms that ensure classroom practice is improved consistently, across the university. It is a difficult proposition because it requires systemic change. Institutional change takes vision, creativity, commitment, and hard work. **It is uncomfortable at best.**

Rosenberg points out that the academy does many positive things for countless people. But, he writes, "if it were willing to think seriously about transformational change, let alone to initiate it, if it were willing to examine its own ways of working as carefully as it examines many of the disciplines within its curricula, it could provide more benefits to more people more consistently and avoid what looks increasingly like a bleak future for many institutions."

My travels around campus make me hopeful. I've been working with so many colleagues who are committed to improving how we support and teach our students. It is also clear that we need some systemic changes that allow those improvements to have a comprehensive impact in a strategic way. I would ask those of you who are on committees and in positions to influence systemic change to consider how you might help to nudge us in the right direction.

Resistance to change at most institutions is indeed profound. The status quo is comfortable. It doesn't challenge us. It is predictable….but it comes with significant risks. All one has to do look around at the state of small, private, liberal arts universities to realize that those risks are substantial.

Change is indeed uncomfortable, but consider this: If Jean Baptiste de La Salle did not advocate for revolutionary changes to the educational practices of his day, La Salle University would not be here at all.

BE EXPLICIT ABOUT YOUR LEARNING GOALS

When we know exactly what we are to learn, why we must learn it, how it is connected to what we already know, and how it will be connected to something we need to know (or something we are building toward), we become more interested, motivated, and more likely to encode that information in our memory. **It is critical to be explicit about our intended learning outcomes** for every lesson we teach.

It is critical that everyone explicitly knows the learning objectives of each lesson we teach. These can be specified at the outset of our lesson, or at some point near the beginning, but we should make sure to be as specific and as clear as possible.

Returning to the lesson's objectives near the end of the instructional period provides an opportunity for review and assessment. This can be accomplished with short discussion questions, low or no stakes quizzes, and exit tickets. Explicitly stating each learning objective is an easy and highly effective to improve student learning.

WE (STILL) NEED YOUR PROMPTS (AND GPTs)

We are developing a collection of prompts, GPTs, and AI use cases. Please share how you have been integrating LLMs, like ChatGPT into your work flow. Please click here.

The DLSI Newsletter is written, edited, and curated by

Frank J. Mosca, Director, DLSI

Find past issues of the DLSI Newsletter here.