

The ChatGPT Controversy: Striking the Balance of AI in the College Classroom

Kyle Beyersdorf

Abstract

ChatGPT has divided the field of higher education since its release in 2022 and debates continue regarding the artificial intelligence (AI) technology that mimics human intelligence. The divided field of higher education is now left to determine the extent of which AI has within their college classrooms knowing that AI technologies have already permeated nearly every aspect of the world (Southworth et al., 2023). Many academics insist ChatGPT be banned entirely to protect authentic student learning whereas others are advocate that ChatGPT is essential to prepare students for the age of AI. While technologies like ChatGPT continue to shape our world, this paper looks to address whether there a role for ChatGPT and other text generative technologies in college classrooms?

Keywords

ChatGPT, artificial intelligence, student learning

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Kyle Beyersdorf (he/him) is a first-year master's student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Program at Indiana University (IU). He discovered his passion for higher education at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where he earned his bachelor's degree in History and Political Science. Currently serving as a graduate assistant in the Office of Residence Life at IU, Kyle has also completed practicum experiences with University Division and the Office of Scholarships. Kyle is intrigued by the potential of employing an individualized, interdisciplinary approach with artificial intelligence (AI) to augment learning experiences and drive institutional change. In his free time, Kyle pursues his goal of exploring all 63 National Parks—he loves hiking, wildlife photography, and all things travel.

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Since its release in November 2022, ChatGPT has quickly divided the field of higher education, sparking debates about its impact on learning and assessment. ChatGPT is a controversial form of artificial intelligence (AI) capable of rapidly producing coherent and convincing human-like responses to questions or statements (Calhoun, 2023). When ChatGPT was first created, its goal was to generate text that could be indistinguishable from text written by humans that mimics human intelligence (Randolph et al., 2023). This capability raises concern about its potential to compromise the authenticity of educational assessments when students use the tool to create work that does not genuinely reflect their own skills and knowledge (Calhoun, 2023). While technologies continue to shape an ever-evolving educational landscape, the question remains: is there a role for ChatGPT and other text generative technologies in college classrooms?

Those who advocate for the integration of ChatGPT into curricula recognize the capabilities of AI and seek to prepare students for the responsible use of this tool. AI will be an integral part of the future for students, much like the rise of the pocket calculator, the Google search engine, or YouTube (Hicks, 2023). Each of these technologies, among others, seemingly threatened, yet revolutionized education in their own way. AI technologies continue to permeate and transform nearly every aspect of our daily lives (Celik et al., 2022; Southworth et al., 2023) and higher education is no exception. The integration of AI competencies within college curriculum is critical because the skills required of students continue to evolve to better align with those necessary in an AI-integrated world. AI can already outperform, outsource, and overcome fundamental functions of society (Southworth et al., 2023). Individuals who embrace the skills to effectively utilize this technology will undoubtedly have a competitive advantage over those who do not.

At the same time, it is essential that the incorporation of ChatGPT into classrooms should be done thoughtfully and it must be acknowledged that a student who intends to misuse AI for cheating can do so with or without ChatGPT. Rather than prohibiting its use outright, educators should strive to encourage and teach students on how to use these features with ethics and integrity to instead augment students' learning (Calhoun, 2023). When used correctly, ChatGPT has the potential to help people learn faster and think on a deeper level (Hicks, 2023). Higher education must take a proactive approach to incorporate ChatGPT in classrooms to leverage the next wave of technology. Unfortunately, higher education has been slow to embrace a future with AI (O'Dea & O'Dea, 2023), even though the two are now inextricably intertwined.

However, many argue for the banning of ChatGPT from college classrooms to protect authentic student learning. AI technologies are now capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence have altered cognitive processes today, including even thinking and learning (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Academics contend that students who use the text generative technology risk losing essential analytical, research, and critical thinking skills (Calhoun, 2023). If students can effortlessly outsource their learning and have ChatGPT generate well-crafted assignment within seconds, students will lose the ability to think and function for themselves and may become overly dependent on AI (Rudolph et al., 2023). That being the case, to allow ChatGPT in higher education would be to threaten, if not eliminate, the essential skills that a college education looks to provide.

Additionally, ChatGPT outputs frequently contain factual inaccuracies (Teel et al., 2023). It is known to cite or even create fictitious references and provide illegitimate information when generating research papers that students may use. ChatGPT is also known to generate hidden biases within their outputs related to gender, race, ethnicity, and disability status (Teel et al., 2023). It is no guarantee that ChatGPT provides diverse perspectives. The consensus among critics is that a college education and skill building should not be entirely replaced by AI and with ChatGPT, students could do so (Rudolph, 2023).

Ultimately, ChatGPT is a tool that is not going away, whether higher education attempts to prohibit its use or not (Teel et al., 2023). ChatGPT must be given space within college classrooms and

must be implemented for students to embrace the new wave of technology. Adapting to the concerns about students potentially losing their own skills and knowledge is imperative for the field, but college must also acknowledge that ChatGPT is an integral part of the present and future of education. Those who are slow to adopt AI will be at a disadvantage. Students and institutions alike that embrace AI technologies will be positioned for success, leading the way into a future where collaboration between human intellect and artificial intelligence is not a threat but a strategic advantage.

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