

# Better Writers? The Hunter College Debate on Ethical AI

By Sarah Grimsted

Sammi Fauz leaned over his laptop during a news literacy class at Hunter College and typed a prompt into ChatGPT. “Can you show me how my essay matches the rubric?” the 19-year-old sophomore accounting major asked, as his teacher circulated around the room.

Text bubbles appeared on his screen, indicating the AI chatbot was thinking. Seconds later, ChatGPT displayed feedback on how well his essay aligned with the assignment guidelines.

Fauz breathed a sigh of relief. He would receive an A on his essay, and he hadn’t broken any rules of the class.

Amy Levine-Kennedy, a journalism professor, oversaw the exercise. The course teaches students techniques such as lateral reading, conspiracy checking, and thorough reporting. For the final assignment, students were tasked with giving a clear prompt to ChatGPT and having the chatbot evaluate where their essays could better align with the rubric. They were not allowed to copy and paste any text generated by the chatbot into their essays.

Levine-Kennedy sees designing the prompt as the first step of the creative process. “The prompt is where your individuality begins in AI,” Levine-Kennedy said.

The classroom experiment reflects a broader trend in education. According to a Market Analysis Report from Grand View Research, the global AI in education market size was estimated at \$5.88 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \$32.7 billion by 2030.

At Hunter College, faculty are split on the ethics of generative AI implementation, and students are using it anyway, with mixed results. The challenge facing faculty and students alike is how to use it responsibly and ethically.

Hunter College does not condone AI use without the authorization of a professor. The City University of New York Academic Integrity Policy states that “any use of generative AI tools must be in line with the usage policy for specific assignments as defined in the course of the syllabus and/or communicated by the course instructor.” Some professors prohibit AI entirely or call for limited uses, such as rubric-guidance or grammar checks. That inconsistency has left students navigating different expectations from class to class.

Robert Hickman, an art teacher, requires students to redo assignments by hand if they have used AI to write class assignments. “I don’t want AI doing the thinking,” he said.

Hickman expressed nostalgia for the effort students had to put in to complete their assignments before AI. "When I was an undergrad, we had to type papers on a typewriter...if you forgot a paragraph or sentence, you'd just start all over again," he said.

However, he acknowledges that he uses it in his personal life. "I do a lot of writing and so I will write it to the best of my ability, and then I'll run it through AI to make it better," he said.

Levine-Kennedy has guidelines for safe AI use in her classroom. Students must write their essay first drafts themselves. They are then required to disclose when and how they used AI in their final drafts. She asks students to copy and paste their ChatGPT log into a Google document and complete a reflection at the end of the semester on their experience. If a student fully plagiarizes with AI, she brings them in for a chat instead of penalizing their grade.

Levine-Kennedy said she has noticed a marked improvement in student writing since bringing AI into the classroom.

She sees it as a tool with benefits. "You know, it's like a calculator," she said, "why would I not use it if I need to find the sin or cosine of something?"

Fauz said it helped strengthen his introduction and made his writing less flat. He also thinks AI is a good writer.

"I remember one time in class when the teacher was showing an AI anecdote, and a student-written essay, and she was asking us which one we thought was better and I almost said that the AI was the better writer," Fauz said.

Professor Sissel McCarthy, who directs the news literacy curriculum, believes AI should be incorporated into education because it improves students' writing and prepares them for a workplace where their co-workers use AI.

"The future is a reality," McCarthy said.

She acknowledged that AI isn't without flaws. She pointed out that AI is trained on the internet and is prone to racist, sexist and anti-LGBTQ bias.

"AI should never replace critical thinking," she warned.

Researchers at Chapman University found that AI is trained on large, unfiltered portions of the internet that are embedded with generalizations and bias. This training can cause AI to perpetuate social inequalities. In a news literacy classroom focused on confronting misinformation and conspiracy theories, that possibility adds to the ethical dilemma. Sometimes the information AI generates is wrong, harmful, or entirely made up. When students open AI, they're getting a microcosm of the public sphere.

Hickman is worried that the future of AI may not be entirely positive.

“The AI algorithms mostly go towards the negative, like what's going to enrage you?” he pointed out. “It hasn't been good for the country,” he said, reflecting on political polarization.

Despite warnings, some students are still handling AI without guidance. One Hunter student, who requested anonymity, said that he typically uses AI to manage his schedule and review his homework. He doesn't see anything wrong with AI reviewing his work or asking questions about finite answers, but he once cheated during an exam with AI.

“The professor was, like, stop minimizing and maximizing your screen. He knew something was up,” the student said. He said he didn't feel good about the experience. “I don't like lying,” he said.

As AI becomes more common in higher education, students are navigating the tension between convenience and critical thinking.

For Fauz, the news literacy course offered a framework for using generative AI more responsibly.

While working on his essay, he didn't just ask ChatGPT how his answers aligned with the rubric. He also asked the chatbot a question that users might overlook: “Where are you getting your information?”

Fauz knew that AI tools can sometimes hallucinate, leading to incorrect or made-up answers. He wanted to make sure that the information he received was accurate and reliable.

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