

Episode: Analyzing ChatGPT as a Class

Series: [AI in the Classroom](#)

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[series graphic and brief futuristic music interlude]

I teach a lot of courses that have a lot of, where students write reflections on what they learned. Specifically to the readings, they're usually pretty personal, but it did make me think, so are they going to put those topics into ChatGPT to try to see what would generally be said? Would they be taking from that?

This spring semester, I thought, I wanna actually acknowledge it right away. And it was actually the second class session. They had a paper due that time that had some questions and one of them, it was a course on nutrition education of just: How can nutrition educators use all of the different information about why people eat what they eat when they are doing nutrition education? It was a little bit more specific than that, but I put the exact question in ChatGPT and saw what the answer was. And then I put in a lot of other topics that we would be talking about all semester and saw what the answers were.

So we did a class activity, after they had all handed in their paper, so they could or could not have used AI to generate their answer and said, Here's what it generated. I would love to hear what you thought was good about this answer, and what wasn't in that answer that you might have put in it? And we did a whole class discussion on that.

What that did was it allowed the students to know that they knew I was aware of it and they knew I was thinking about how the AI would respond to the topics that we were covering in class. I think at first there was like a little bit of rumbling in the room of, you know 'cause there was so much talk about it like, Oh, how are we, how are we going to use this? And then I actually think they really enjoyed it.

Some of them felt like the answer that AI gave to the question that they all posed, actually AI had some good things in it that they hadn't thought about, but also was missing maybe some of the personal kinds of things that they were thinking about, that they had had in their answers.

And none of them were factual kind of questions. So for example, it would be something like, What are the benefits to children to have a garden at their school? And it was very interesting because it actually had varied nicely organized answers. It would always have a headline with kind of a, benefits to academic success and then some, some sentences about it. No, no sources for anything.

But knowing the literature, it was right on, you know, it was in the right areas but also seemed very sterile. And that ended up being a very interesting part of the conversation, is that the students said, Yeah, this is good, but it's not personal. And when we're talking to people about food and nutrition, we're talking to people who live it every day and it needs to have a more personal element to it.

So they felt like, I think even many of them said, This might be a good starting point, but it's never going to give us exactly what we need. But it could be good to get the general area on something.

I think the courses where we do more writing, I think that I will incorporate it in and, and maybe, maybe even, I don't know, I'm thinking about this now, is maybe even as a prequel to what they're reading about the next week because they read and respond to it. And maybe even say, So you're going to be reading about genetically modified organisms in food. Let's just see what AI says about that topic, which I actually have done.

And it is very interesting and gives a good general overview and then you're going to be looking at it in much more depth and we're going to be looking at some of these specific issues that are more nuanced than probably what you're going to be able to get from something that's looking at what's basically out there on the web and putting it together. For us, everything has drawbacks, right?

So if you're using AI, what are the drawbacks? And I will give an example which has to do with the web and, and a course project that was actually done for, for decades before the web in our program, which was to have students research a topic and it was supposed to be to try to call as many people or write to as many people as you could and find out things.

And students would end up going down a rabbit hole of calling up a person to ask about whatever their topic was and that person telling them some things that they would've never found out without talking to a person. And that person saying, Oh by the way, you may want to talk to this person.

And once the web was out there, the quality of those projects dropped tremendously because the students were only able to get kind of broad generic things and weren't able to have those conversations and then say, By the way, talk to this person, then talk to this person and then talk to this person.

The professors that were teaching it ended up changing the whole project because they realized what students were getting from it, even when they told students, Try to talk to people, maybe people were less willing to talk as well because now there was just the web. So I think that that would be something else to think about. Is that nothing comes without drawbacks or changes.

Nothing is always, it's totally better. So I think about how it can be a useful tool and then also when it's maybe not so useful.

I think this will change every class. So I do think that as professors it is our obligation to stay current and staying current, I think in this way, is how AI is going to influence how students think about and learn every topic.

You know, my personality certainly is one of like, take things head on. And so I can understand how different faculty may have different approaches to things or different things that work for their courses, but I think acknowledging it I think is really important.

I do think we need to be thinking about how AI will be used in the field of nutrition. And to give you an example, my son was playing with Bard and put in that he's a 24 year old and interested in losing a few pounds, and what would be the recommendation for his eating plan?

And we were very impressed. Very quickly it put out, here's a bunch of breakfast options, here's a bunch of lunch options, here's a bunch of dinner options and a bunch of snack options. And they were all good. And definitely things that if somebody ate those would be eating healthfully and probably would be able to lose some weight. There was nothing about portion sizes, which obviously would be important.

So I think maybe that could be actually useful to people in nutrition and maybe even to be able to put in more specifics about the person's background, like their race, ethnicity, gender, some other things about them and maybe it would give some specifics. And then I think that that would be useful to start a conversation with the person. How do these sound to you? Are these things that you typically do? About how much food?

So it actually could be useful and may change the field of nutrition counseling to be able to make it more, have AI give that starting point.

I actually think for example, when I'm updating my readings on a different topic, I may put in that topic and see what it's saying because sometimes it's, What is the latest that's coming out on that topic? And I do think that AI is going to be able to pick up on that.

I don't see myself using what it produces, say, as part of the reading, but I think it may be, Oh, I should be looking for information about this because this may be something that is newer or up and coming in this area. And so it may help to give some guidance.

I think sometimes if I'm giving an overview on a topic to students, I think using it and seeing, for example, what I talked about before is: How do children benefit from having a school garden? It did have many different areas and it would be okay. I would then say let's, maybe I would categorize it by those areas and then build on that by actually having the research studies that are backing that up put into it, which didn't come out, at least when I did the search.

The other interesting thing, by the way, on school gardens is I think I did what are the benefits and drawbacks, or I used some negative term. And what is in the literature about school

gardens is all the things, how children benefited from it. But then all the challenges schools have to actually doing school gardens such as: needing a person, the plants have to be cared for every day, you need to have space, there may not be time for the children to actually participate in gardening.

So it was very interesting how it was: Children benefit by, and very specific things by being able to be physically active, helping them connect to academics. And then when it was the drawbacks, it went to all of the challenges schools would have to do it. And I thought that that was insightful and actually did match the way it's talked about in the research literature.

When I was doing the activity earlier in the semester, I did tell all of the other nutrition faculty that I was doing this because I felt like it made sense for them to know that I was doing this and bringing it up in class. And as far as I know, none of them have done anything with AI specifically in their classes yet. Although maybe they have more recently and I just don't know about it.

And all of them said, yes, good for you for taking it on. And I think it is good for our students to know that we are thinking about this and thinking about how it will impact our field.

There's a photo really close to us that is Cooking in the 1930s, and sometimes I look at that photo and I think that seems so different than what we do today. On the other hand, it's actually really similar to cooking that I do with children today. And so I think this is a tool that will be useful and I think it is going to change our classes. But on the other hand, it's really just a tool to do the same things that we've always been doing in a different way.