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Educators take on the question of ethical AI use

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AI has been a source of corporate buzz in recent months with the launch of ChatGPT, a chatbot developed by San Francisco-based OpenAI.

By James Ritchie
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Artificial intelligence is developing so rapidly that experts have yet to agree on matters such as what the technology will be capable of, what it will mean for the job market and whether it will be good or bad for humanity.

Many of the most pressing questions are not technical, but ethical.

AI has been a source of corporate buzz in recent months with the launch of ChatGPT, a chatbot developed by San Francisco-based OpenAI. The bot has garnered attention for its humanlike conversational abilities.

AI tools are being deployed in many industries, and they'll soon spread to many more. For years to come, it seems organizations will need to grapple not only with how AI can be used, but also with how it should and should not be used. Employers will soon seek to hire talent that is well versed in AI tools and knows how to use them properly and ethically to solve business problems.

To meet these needs, higher education institutions such as Boston University's Questrom School of Business are seeking to provide students with frameworks for ethical use of the tools. Since the artificial intelligence field is developing so quickly, the efforts are still in early stages, according to [David Epstein](#), visiting professor of the practice, information systems at Questrom.

Ethical debates will continue to arise for employers, educators, students and graduates as AI becomes more common. Epstein identifies the following areas as priority topics for today's students – tomorrow's business leaders – to understand when it comes to AI ethics.

Addressing bias

When an AI tool answers a question, who's to say whether the answer is impartial?

"All of our biases appear back at us in (a response from an AI tool) because (our input) is what it learns from," said Epstein, who is executive director of the Susilo Institute for Ethics in a Global Economy. "Humans are always going to be somewhat biased, so creating a machine that's not biased is kind of a fool's errand."

Students can, however, be taught to identify bias and try to minimize or adjust for it. A standard practice of fact-checking and cross-referencing additional sources goes a long way toward producing accurate, unbiased content in the classroom or for an employer. Other important skills for students include using objective prompts for AI tools and understanding the data they're drawing from. The tools are, after all, only as good as the

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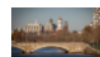
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underlying data.

"All we can do is teach students to check all the statements they're making," Epstein said.

Interaction with humans

ChatGPT and similar generative AI tools can come across as more than tools.

"It presents itself as a fully thinking and responsive partner or communicator," Epstein said. "I think that exacerbates a lot of the ethical issues that start to crop up. This tool is not just spitting back answers to you. It's causing you to have emotional responses."



"We are in for a long haul of learning to use these tools properly and determining what the limitations are," said visiting professor David Epstein.

That ability to spark an emotional response in a user makes AI a potential tool for manipulation in advertising, politics and other arenas. But it also raises concerns about humans bonding with AI-generated personalities or companion bots.

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Concentration of knowledge

The current generative AI movement is driven by a handful of large and/or well-funded companies, including OpenAI, Google parent Alphabet and Meta, and that's likely to remain true for the foreseeable future, Epstein said.

"It's a recipe for being manipulated more so than today for the interest or profit of those companies," he said.

Cautions about sources

Another challenge with using current generative AI tools is tracking their sources of information. The bots do not necessarily cite their sources.

"It devalues all of the sources of information that exist in the world," Epstein said. "The AI tends to meld that into one big, homogenized thing."

As an experiment, Epstein had a bot write an article and asked it to include references. "Three of five were fake, and people's names were real, but they never wrote about the topic. I was shocked," he said.

Generative AI's ability to quickly produce texts makes it tempting for students looking for shortcuts on their assignments. That leads to conundrums for educators who want to ensure academic integrity.

"We as educators have to change the way we do things," Epstein said. "That doesn't mean banning it. It's out there and people are going to use it, and people will use it in their businesses when they graduate. Our (objective) is how to teach them to use the tools but also have original thought."

Epstein readily admits: "We haven't figured it all out yet."

It's possible the use of tools like ChatGPT could be allowed for some school assignments. Students could be evaluated based on how well they use the tools to generate a quality product, while explaining their steps along the way. Even that approach, however, does not account for the fact such works can contain plagiarism.

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