Our Library's Role in Helping Students Make Sense of Generative AI

by Shelly Davis and David Rogers

In November 2022, OpenAI released an early demo of ChatGPT. Since then, we've been able to witness and experience, first-hand, the rapid evolution of generative artificial intelligence (GAI). Many users, especially those of us in higher education, have viewed the implications of GAI as a mix of both extremely fascinating and deeply concerning. GAI adds new layers of complexity to finding and using credible information, as well as to the creation of new content in a variety of formats. The development of information literacy knowledge and skills has long been work championed and facilitated by the library, therefore it seems a natural fit for the library to help students make sense of GAI.

As faculty and staff at Husson University grapple with this new technology, we recognize that many students are likely both intimidated by and curious about GAI. Students want—and need—to make sense of it all and how it relates to their current roles as learners. It is our jobs, as librarians and educators in higher education, to work together to help guide their explorations and considerations of important, real-world topics. While some faculty are experimenting with GAI and perhaps integrating it into their courses, we believe that we need to develop a way to provide all Husson students with an opportunity to build foundational understandings of this emerging technology.

Like many other colleges and universities in Maine and beyond, Husson offers students opportunities to earn microcredentials, represented by digital badges. Badges allow students to concentrate on a discrete topic and to demonstrate specific competencies and skills. Because badges are singularly focused and take hours, rather than weeks, to complete, they are well-suited for cocurricular learning opportunities.

In response to a need in our community, during the summer of 2024, we developed a Generative AI Fundamentals badge which aims to help Husson students understand GAI as it exists now, the opportunities and challenges that currently swirl around it, and how they might use it ethically and responsibly in their research and learning.

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As it is our belief that clearly articulating learning outcomes for students is a part of good teaching, we emphasized them in the development of the Generative AI Fundamentals badge. Through four modules, students will

- express the fundamental concepts and principles of GAI,
- describe appropriate applications of GAI as a learner at the university level,
- experiment with GAI tools by employing current best practices for prompt engineering to produce outcomes that meet specific needs, and
- reflect on emerging trends and future directions in GAI, including ethical considerations and challenges associated with its use.

The Generative AI Fundamentals badge is an asynchronous online learning opportunity; students work at their own pace. They engage with curated content (readings and videos) to develop new knowledge and skills about GAI, and then complete meaningful assessments to demonstrate their learning. In the first module, students are asked—based on what they may already know and what they learned through the learning materials—to choose an audience (parent, teenager, friend, classmate, colleague) and craft a brief response to this person's question of "What is all this about generative AI and ChatGPT, anyway?" In the second module, students learn about impacts of GAI in the higher education environment and then they are asked to think of an assignment they have had in the past that they believe could have been appropriately aided by the use of a GAI tool. They then describe the assignment and relate how they might have employed GAI in the completion of it, including the steps they would have taken to ensure transparency and integrity in the use of GAI for the assignment. Building on this, in the third module, students learn about prompt engineering and experiment with GAI tools using the assignment they identified in the previous module. In the final module, we stress the importance of

Husson GAI Badge

following the development of GAI and engaging in conversations about the risks and opportunities associated with it. We ask them to consider, and share with us, how a higher education institution, like Husson, can continue to help its students develop skills and awareness around all the many facets of generative AI.

In the fall of 2024, students at Husson University will be able to self-enroll in the Generative AI Fundamentals badge, and we expect that many faculty will incorporate it as a requirement in their courses. Upon completion, students will claim their newly earned badge on Credly, a digital credentialing platform used by Husson and many other higher education institutions worldwide. Husson students will be able to display this, and any other badges they earn throughout their careers, on LinkedIn and in their resumes so potential employers can verify the skills students have.

While we know that the Generative AI Fundamentals badge has value for our students, it is intended as the beginning of their journey of understanding of this emerging technology. We envision that there will be additional badges on GAI that build on this one, delving deeper into the technology itself, as well as the societal and professional implications. GAI is going to affect our students' lives well beyond Husson, in ways we might not even be able to imagine yet. How can we prepare them and help them navigate a way forward? The ability to acquire new skills and knowledge quickly and continuously will be crucial to their success in our rapidly changing world. In this age of artificial intelligence, perhaps the most important metaskill we can help our students cultivate over their time at Husson University is developing a growth mindset. We have endeavored to ensure that our Generative AI Fundamentals badge provides students with practical knowledge and helps foster an understanding of the need for lifelong learning of this, and other technologies, they will encounter.

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