



AI in Education

BTA scholarship recipient shares her perspective

by: Ashley Nierman, 2024-25 BTA scholarship recipient

Editor's note: For the 2024-25 school year, the BTA scholarship application essay question was: "There is a debate on whether the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education is good or bad. One side of the debate leans toward the belief that the use of AI discounts the educational experience and fosters dishonesty. The other side of the debate leans toward teaching students to use AI ethically and preparing students for careers that highly use AI. What are your thoughts on using AI in higher education?" The following is an excerpt from the essay, edited for length (note the use of ellipsis), written by Ashley Nierman, recipient of the 2024-25 Bob Goldberg Scholarship.



The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education is on the rise no matter what scientists, professors or students have to say about it. In my classes a little over a year ago, I heard only one mention of AI and many of my professors banned the use of it. This semester, three of my five classes regularly discuss it, with some assignments centered on using AI. One of these classes specifically focuses on AI and its benefits to higher education and the business world. While I have learned of the many advantages of using AI from this class's content, I have also seen firsthand the potential detriments of AI in higher education. Therefore, my opinion on using AI in higher education aligns with the side of the debate that leans toward teaching students and professors to use AI ethically and in moderation.

Last year, the majority of my classes banned the use of AI, including ChatGPT ... This year, we are utilizing AI in one of my classes to generate questions for in-class speakers. This use of AI is beneficial because it provides good practice on prompt engineering and enhances in-person learning. Along with that, the use of AI in this way provides a new perspective to students, personalizes learning experiences and teaches contextualization.

In the class mentioned in the introduction above, my professor uses AI to generate quiz questions and encourages us to use AI if we do not understand a concept. While these uses also have benefits to learning, especially when students are allowed to use AI to help understand concepts, they also show me the need for AI in moderation. In our first couple of quizzes for the class, there were many questions with typos and incomplete sentences. Some were repetitive and had wrong answers. This demonstrates the discounted educational experience that makes up

one side of the AI argument ... While using AI to learn is beneficial, fact-checking the information is essential, which is why AI use must also be taught to teachers.

Another detriment of AI use in higher education I have witnessed in this class is too much reliance by both the teacher and students ... In class, our teacher has introduced a topic many times and then proceeded to

tell us to use AI to learn about it outside of class because we do not have enough time. This has caused students to be much less engaged in class ... I have encouraged my classmates many times to learn the material and refrain from using AI to quickly and easily complete class quizzes ... Because of my experiences in this class, I believe it is important to teach teachers and students to use AI ethically and in moderation to avoid dishonesty, a discounted educational experience and an unhealthy reliance on AI technology for learning or a job. To do this, AI use and practice need to be integrated into classroom learning.

According to "How AI is Reshaping Higher Education" by Anthony Hié and Claire Thouary, educators need to introduce AI learning in classrooms to teach students to use the technology effectively. This is precisely in line with my own thoughts. Without some sort of education on the correct and ethical way to use AI, students — who will later become employees — will be more inclined to partake in academic dishonesty, will suffer from too much reliance on AI and will engage less in their learning ...

Overall, the use of AI in higher education has the potential to be transformative. By incorporating the teaching of ethical and effective use of AI into higher education, students can take advantage of AI assistance while understanding the detriments and precautions needed to mitigate the risk of dishonesty, bias, errors, isolation and reliance. Since it is clear that generative AI will continue to be utilized in higher education, it is important to diminish the risks associated with it ... Teaching students and professors to use AI ethically ... preparing students for careers that use AI, is the most important step to maintain the function of AI as a valuable tool. ■

Ashley Nierman, a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is the daughter of Michael Nierman, corporate service manager for Eakes Office Solutions, based in Grand Island, Nebraska.

