Taking Advantage of the Opportunities AI Presents

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Let it be known that I am not a big fan of AI. I suspect it will cause far more problems than it solves. But I am something of a pragmatist, and I can see the writing on the wall. It is becoming absolutely ubiquitous. Clearly, the vast majority of professionals will be utilizing it extensively in the very near future, and employers will expect college graduates to be competent in the use of AI. Hopefully, this document will help you make wise decisions given these facts. It is designed to supply supports where you need them, and **I encourage you to download this page you are on and type right into it.** You will benefit from using it on your own, but if you can entice even one other person to work on it with you, the experience will be far more enriching.

Difficult truths

Many students have been cheating all along, and it is often far easier to cheat in online courses, particularly in asynchronous environments. ChatGPT expert Ethan Mollick notes that "there's an estimate from the U.K. that, right now, as of today, 20,000 people in Kenya are employed full-time just writing essays for people." And I have heard that it is remarkably inexpensive to have someone else simply take an online course for you. Again, this is especially true of asynchronous courses. My own students have told me in no uncertain terms, "What we learned when we were online during the pandemic was how to cheat. When we are feeling anxious, hopeless, or exhausted, it is hard not to turn to that again."

Cheating is going to remain a fact of life until we realize we have designed our systems of education around grades and credentials rather than learning, hoop jumping rather than discovery, and what works for *our* needs rather than what our students want and need. We have focused on rewards and punishments rather than developing intrinsic motivation and a deep interest in learning, and that is a recipe for cheating. There is no reason to cheat in situations where the learning matters to an individual. **We cheat when the learning doesn't matter.** (When my co-authors and I wrote *Learning That Matters*, I don't think I fully understood how central this one concept must be to everything we do. I'm not sure I understood until I wrote that sentence and was shaken by the echo of our title. If your only takeaway is one sentence let it be that one.)

Why does your course matter? Why should students bother to put in the time and effort? What can they expect to gain from it?

Change the classroom culture: It needed to happen anyway

First impressions
First impressions are lasting impressions, and students who respect you and find you supportive and personable are more likely to buy into the course and the work it entails. How can you lay this groundwork well?

- If the class is small, consider conducting 5-minute individual Zoom meetings with each student, preferably in the day or two before the course begins. For a class of 24-36, might it be worth 2-3 hours if it makes a significant difference? Provide course materials and questions ahead of time. Ask 2-3 questions. What do you hope you might gain from a course on ___ personally and professionally? What types of activities and assignments do you feel have been particularly valuable to you in the past? What could I do to make this class meaningful and interesting to you?
- Ensure that your syllabus has an invitational tone (Scroll to Ch. 4)
- Consider writing a syllabus letter and/or introductory video to go along with your syllabus (Scroll to Ch. 4) I like to use a letter to introduce the course and its value and then a video to introduce myself personally.
- Ask previous students to write letters to the next class explaining what value they found in the course. Share a few of these with students, preferably via the app "Perusall" and invite students to annotate them and share their thoughts on what value they are hoping for. (Note: social annotation is infinitely more engaging and AI-proof than a discussion board.)

Which of these do you want to learn more about? Which will you try first and which later?

Increase intrinsic motivation and engagement

When students see the value in what they are being asked to do, feel like they will be able to be successful (expectancy-value theory), and aren't feeling desperate, they are infinitely more likely to do the work for themselves. If the work is also highly engaging, you have a perfect storm of wonderfulness.

The ingredients for intrinsic motivation are **A**utonomy, **M**astery, and **P**urpose (AMP it up!)

Increase autonomy
Synonyms for autonomy are agency, choice, and freedom. How might you increase these to the greatest degree possible while also keeping in mind that too much choice and

freedom is often paralyzing, especially for more novice learners? Daniel Pink recommends considering autonomy around time, task, technique, and team. Could students

- Set their own due dates within a given window?
- Choose between 2 or 3 possible ways to demonstrate their learning?
- Utilize ChatGPT (and tell you which prompts they used) or choose not to?
- Select to work with a partner of their choice or work alone?

Where can you incorporate more autonomy in your course?

Increase mastery

Students may experience mastery through sensations of competence, a clear sense of progress, or viewing failure as a natural part of the growth process. Strategies to increase such feelings might include:

- "TiLTed" instructions with links to supports (scroll to Ch.7)
- Ample opportunities to meet with you if needed
- Checklists where students can check off each step in their growth as they reach it
- One or more opportunities to "Request to Revise."
- Reaching out to students who appear to be struggling early and often with offers of support
- "Ungrading" (Ch. 6) is a practice that focuses students on truly learning rather than merely getting a grade. You'd need to study it thoroughly before attempting it, but I can say that it revolutionized the learning environment in my courses more than anything else ever has in 30 years of teaching.

How can you help students feel the satisfaction of growing mastery in your course?

Increase purpose

Concepts that are similar to purpose are value and meaning. How can you imbue as many aspects of your course as possible with purpose, value, and meaning? Strategies to increase these include:

- Providing opportunities for enjoyable human interaction where pairs or small groups of students can get to know one another, can hear one another's voices, and hopefully, see one another as well
- Helping students personalize activities and assignments to connect to their lives, jobs (current or future), interests, concerns, or current events

- Creating activities and assignments that match what experts outside of school settings do with the type of skills and knowledge the students are learning (authentic assessment/performance tasks, scroll to Ch. 7)
- Providing students with authentic audiences for their work beyond just you – at least the rest of the class, but preferably people beyond the classroom
- Helping students make connections for themselves between the content and their lives using the "Build Connections" strategy
- Asking students to choose a character strength to build as part of a project immediately adds purpose to any project. Ask students to make plans for how they might use that project to build that strength and a reflection afterward on how it went

You need to know the value of your own course, but how can you build on that by actively helping students describe that value for themselves?

Increase engagement

Barkley and Major, authors of *Student Engagement Techniques*, define student engagement as the "synergistic interaction between motivation and active learning." What might it mean to make learning more "active", especially in an asynchronous environment?

- Students tend to be more engaged when the content is more emotion-laden. How might you make your content more amusing, humorous, gross, unexpected, provocative, enraging, interesting, beautiful, awe-inspiring, etc.? How might you ask students to look for these aspects in the content for themselves?
- Where might you incorporate high-interest resources? If a lot of people outside your course are choosing to engage with a given video, podcast, article, etc. on their own time out of pure interest, that resource is likely to be more engaging than the standard textbook. If you build excitement around the resources in a short video message each week, all the better.
- How might you move away from materials and activities that ask students to witness *your* learning and move toward allowing students to experience the joy of discovery for themselves – let them be an explorer rather than a spectator?
- Please don't expect students to watch long, dry videos of you lecturing. I am the queen of focused attention, and even I would struggle to maintain engagement under such circumstances. Use materials that help you build modules that don't rely on recorded lectures.

- Games are generally built around principles of engagement and motivation. What games might already exist that would allow students to learn or review skills and knowledge? Students can play the games and send you screenshots.
- What would highly interactive and engaging modules look like? Do some already exist? How might you move the modules you require in that direction bit by bit? How might you involve students in the creation process? Do you have access to instructional technologists who could help?
- Instead of interacting with students via email or course management messages, try short, informal videos.

Of all of these suggestions, which do you suspect would build engagement the most for your course?

Tweak the assignment or change the format

Tweak your current assignments

Put a current assignment into ChatGPT and see what happens. The first pass is unlikely to yield a passing result, but add a few tweaking prompts to get the result closer to the quality you are looking for. If you can accomplish it, students can as well.

If your assignment doesn't pass this test, redesign it by asking students to do things that play to ChatGPT's weaknesses while also improving the quality of the assignment generally. Ask students to

- Apply learning to their personal or professional lives (ChatGPT could do this, but I suspect students will be hesitant to let it make up complete lies about themselves and their lives.)
- Connect new knowledge and skills to specific occurrences within the class itself that AI would be unaware of.
- Do a close reading or detailed analysis of a piece of writing that is not available on the internet and cannot be easily cut and pasted into a GPT. Videos would also work well for this.

Which of these would allow you to tweak high-engagement, intrinsically motivating assignments you already have?

Change the format

Multi-modal formats for assignments not only tend to be particularly engaging but are becoming increasingly common in the workplace. What role do videos, podcasts, and other types of newer media play in your life now versus ten or twenty years ago?

- If you previously asked students to answer questions or write a reflection or summary after engaging with a resource, instead try having students create a hand-drawn mind map (and upload a photo), engage in social annotation in the app Perusall, record asynchronous discussions with video and voice in VoiceThread, create Flipgrid videos, or take "Notes that Stick."
- If you previously required short answers, essay questions, or a paper, try asking students to complete performance tasks (Ch. 7) that require they use the knowledge and skills they've developed to create products such as podcasts, videos, debates, speeches, interviews, drawings, diagrams, scale models, storyboards, performances, displays, multimedia projects, "UnEssays," field studies, analysis of specific data sets, original research, etc.
- Consider what "Canva" can offer. Students could create infographics, flyers, pretend Twitter "wars" or conversations, or comic strips. I get a lot of great ideas from browsing their template collections.
- End-of-the-semester one-on-one oral exams over Zoom could be a marvelous experience if handled well. Obviously, these would be best for smaller courses, and you would need to work hard to make it an enjoyable discussion rather than a frightening interrogation, but being able to intelligently discuss key topics is an important skill we should be developing.
- Note that the "performance task framework" (aka "GRASPS") can help lead you through the design process for small or large multi-modal projects and make any of the above more authentic and engaging (Scroll to Ch. 7).

Which of these would allow you AI-proof any high-engagement, intrinsically motivating assignments you already have? How might multi-modal performance tasks allow you to create new and better assignments?

Embrace the future

Feel free to wag your finger and tell students how much trouble they will be in if they use ChatGPT, but remember that *warnings can become enticements*. And because the detectors are easily defeated and will likely continue to be, control may not really even be an option. Encouraging interactions with and discussions around ChatGPT and other AI is likely to help students see it as a tool to be used sparingly rather than an opportunity to go crazy with it. I cannot stress enough how much more effective it is to ask questions

and provide activities that allow individuals to *persuade themselves* than it is to lecture and warn. This is true across the board with individuals of any age, not just in the case of ChatGPT, and yet I continue to find myself attempting to actively persuade by telling rather than creating the conditions that would allow individuals to self-persuade. I'll keep trying to remember this point if you will.

Critique AI Together

The following activities are likely to put a damper on any unfettered enthusiasm students may be feeling. They draw attention to ChatGPT's weaknesses and its malicious shadow. I am advocating for a balance: recognizing the need for students to understand AI and use it wisely but also to be well aware of its many downsides.

- Perhaps start with providing students with Autumm Caines' *Prior to (or Instead of) Using ChatGPT with Your Students* – the best arguments against ChatGPT that I have come across. Ask them which of her concerns resonate with them. Are the upsides worth the downsides? Students can annotate websites in Perusall, and I can see where hers would generate some extremely interesting asynchronous discussion.
- If you'd like to lead students on one or more analyses of ChatGPT, Eric Prochaska has got you covered. Follow this link and let him help you lead the way.
- Facilitate a discussion on the ethical use of AI and try to only facilitate and not intervene. Paul Fyfe has excellent questions to guide you. Again, Perusall is going to be a better option not only because it is more "AI proof" than a discussion board but because it is more engaging and intrinsically motivating.
- Explicitly discuss the question, "How might AI rob you of what you came here for, what you are paying for, what you are hoping to become?"
- Ask students to each write personal AI statements. For your course, how and when will they use it (if at all)? The statements should follow the pattern, "Because AI... I will..." and then students sign them. But only do this if you are willing to allow them to use it extensively. If they can't be perfectly honest with you, it isn't worth it. But most students will hold themselves to a higher standard than you would imagine at that moment, and later when AI is tempting, they are far more likely to follow their own statement than one you force on them.

Is a critique of AI in some form a good fit for your course? How much time would you be willing to spend? What would that look like?

Utilize AI

While I wouldn't require students to open a ChatGPT account, I can see where allowing its use could be useful in a variety of situations.

- I am particularly interested in how it might be used as "training wheels" that would allow students to feel a greater sense of competence and progress at the outset and then wean themselves off its use gradually. I have also been thinking a lot about how ChatGPT could be a blessing for some neurodiverse students, students who have long struggled with writing for various reasons, and others. My article, *Could ChatGPT Be a Blessing* considers these possibilities and others in more detail.
- Glenn Kleiman's simple "SPACE Framework" provides a nice introduction to writing with ChatGPT. To take the integration of AI to the next level, turn to Robert Cummings and Marc Watkins, and also John Warner (people who have been thinking about AI and writing far longer than most of us) to consider how to prepare students for the increasing prevalence of AI in our lives and work

Is the direct use of AI in some form a good fit for your course? How much time would you be willing to spend helping students learn to do that well? What would that look like?

The human element

There is much we can do to drastically *reduce* plagiarism and other forms of cheating while we work on solving the larger problem of designing learning that matters. The good news is that solving the larger problem will probably also mean the difference between having AI take over most teaching jobs vs humans becoming increasingly necessary and valued in the teaching field. But another difficult truth is that **many of us have designed online courses that could, in fact, be taught by AI**. We have sent the message to both students and the powers-that-be that a course can be good quality learning without significant human interaction, interactions where we communicate with our students via meaningful, *real-time discussions where they can see and hear us* as we directly inspire, encourage, and provide *personalized* support, guidance, and feedback. Research suggests that interactions where we can be seen and heard boost human well-being in ways that the written word cannot and that such interactions are required in vast quantities. This is the most important difference between a human teacher and AI, and we are allowing it to be quietly stripped away. Why are we surprised at the rampant

anxiety and depression? We are slowly destroying our own students by removing the part of teaching they need the most.

When I have been asked to teach online classes, I have been adamant that there be synchronous elements. Students were not pleased with me at first, and then literally by the second meeting they were telling me how valuable that time together was. It may be a long slog to infuse courses (and in some cases whole programs) with synchronous elements, but I see no other way to develop a teaching culture that deeply responds to human needs in ways that AI will never be able to thereby making teachers irreplaceable. Learning alongside (*literally* alongside) more expert others is a fundamental human need and one of the key ways we receive the nurturing we require beyond what our families provide. I suspect the modeling and enthusiasm we provide when we ask students to learn alongside is also crucial and irreplaceable. Eric Mazur has been able to pull this off even in large-enrollment courses, but they have been synchronous and he has graduate assistants.

We must elevate our profession from an efficient, assembly line model focused primarily on the transmission of knowledge to one that, along with building knowledge and skills, also *explicitly and expertly* inspires intrinsic motivation, develops crucial dispositions, and truly nurtures each individual learner. I suspect it will only be when students see the difference between these models and demand the latter that high-quality, humancentric teaching can become the norm.

In the near future, how, where, and when in your course can you build in some meaningful, real-time interactions with individuals or small groups?

Ideally, what changes would you like to work toward in the long term along these lines?

Artificial intelligence isn't the end of the world. Join Cynthia and her co-authors in redesigning your courses around our shared humanity.

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Set on the lush, forested campus of The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, Learning that Matters: the Course Design Institute offers faculty an opportunity to pause from normal routines to focus deeply on meaningful course design. During this four-day, resource-rich institute, faculty will find themselves supported and inspired as they develop and design courses that address the needs of diverse students within the contexts of their unique teaching environments.