



Exploring AI in the Context of Career Services

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Understanding Employers' Use of AI

Career Services has been actively exploring how Artificial Intelligence is used by employers in the job search process and how we can guide students to effectively leverage AI tools for career exploration and planning.

Employers' Use of AI in Hiring

Our primary focus has been on educating students about these evolving trends. We recognize that large employers are increasingly using AI for screening, so we have strategically updated our Career Guide, presentations, and one-on-one appointments to reflect these changes. The most significant developments in recent years include:

- Resume screening through Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)
- AI-powered chatbots that answer candidate questions on employer job pages
- Virtual interview analysis tools used for initial screening rounds

While these technologies can help mitigate human bias in hiring, they also introduce new challenges, such as optimizing the formatting of documents for AI screening and understanding which keywords or phrases resonate more with algorithms than with a hiring manager.

AI in Career Exploration and Planning

Career Services has a long history of providing students with resources for career research, such as "What Can I Do With This Major?" and labor market tools like O*NET. We describe these as tools that, like a hammer, are most effective when used thoughtfully and in combination with other resources and with a human in control of the process. I would like to suggest the use of generative AI as one more tool for our students.

We are particularly interested in how ChatGPT can support students in researching career pathways and employers. We are actively testing effective prompts to personalize responses. For example, asking:

- *"What can I do with a psychology major?"* generates a broad overview, perfect for first-year students.
- However, a more tailored approach for juniors might be: *"If I am interested in working for a non-profit, utilizing my skills in empathy and relationship-building, and want a job that requires only a four-year degree, what opportunities exist in Duluth, MN?"*

AI in Professional Document Development

Our initial exploration of AI focused on helping students overcome “blank screen paralysis”—the challenge of getting started on high-stakes documents like cover letters and personal statements. We recognized that the hardest part of writing is often just beginning, and AI can serve as a valuable brainstorming tool.

As we continue experimenting with AI, we see its potential to improve efficiency in the writing process, freeing up time for other essential tasks, such as interview preparation and employer research. However, we emphasize that students must retain ownership of their writing, ensuring each document is tailored to the specific position and utilizing their voice and content. We have seen some particularly useful AI applications including:

- Copying a job description into AI to generate possible interview questions
- Providing background information on self and to request brainstorming prompts to help develop ideas for personal statements
- Analyzing resumes to identify potential job matches based on skills and experience
- Generating strong bullet points for resumes by asking AI, *“Write four ways I can describe my experience as a cashier in a way that aligns with a marketing career.”*
- Requesting analysis of draft writing to request an outline to organize thoughts effectively

Big Interview: AI-Powered Interview Preparation

This past year, we invested in a new technology to enhance interview preparation: Big Interview. This free tool for all CSS students features AI-driven feedback, providing immediate insights to improve interview performance. We are eager to expand its use across more departments, gather student feedback, and integrate it with our existing resources.

Final Thoughts

With proper guidance and an awareness of its limitations, AI in career exploration and professional development can enhance efficiency, accessibility, and technological literacy—all skills that future employers value.

Personal Reflections on AI Use

In preparing this piece, I evaluated our current practices, consulted with a colleague at Winona State (who is dedicating a sabbatical to this topic—I can't wait to read her final report!), and reviewed the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Career Services resources (which are impressively well-organized). After drafting the entire piece, I ran it through ChatGPT, asking for ways to strengthen the writing. This process embodies the type of ethical AI use we should model for students—leveraging technology to enhance, but not replace, human effort and expertise.