AI Tool Evaluation Sprint

Many colleges and universities now have an institutional license to a particular generative AI tool—often Microsoft Copilot or ChatGPT, although there are others. Using institution-approved tools is recommended because they come with extra data security for the user. However, that one tool is likely not the best tool for every task we ask students to complete in our classes, nor the only tool that students will have access to and be able to use in their future careers.

This in-class activity is designed to help students develop the skills to critically evaluate and select AI tools that can be effectively integrated into their work. Students will explore various tools and practice assessing them based on criteria such as functionality, usability, reliability, and ethical considerations. It takes about 45 minutes to complete.

Materials:

- A starting list of GenAI tools for students to reference. Adjust this list to your context, adding and removing tools as appropriate for the tasks you will present to your students.
- A starting list of tasks and prompts for students.
- A copy of the Evaluation Criteria rubric for each student (or digital access).

Activity Outline:

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Remind students of the types of learning that you care about in the course, and acknowledge that there are ways that generative AI may support or harm that learning.
- Point out several classroom tasks for which AI tools could be used.
    - *Tip: Keep these very specific to your classroom learning environment. If time allows, you can invite students to generate this list with you—this would be a good way to get them to consider the steps involved in their class assignments, look ahead to upcoming assignments, etc. Even if students generate the tasks, you should still be prepared with relevant AI recommendations and prompts.*
- Provide an overview of the activity: “This in-class activity is designed to help you develop the skills to critically evaluate and select AI tools that can be effectively integrated into your work. In small groups, you will explore various tools and practice assessing them based on their functionality, usability, reliability, and ethical considerations. Each group will apply these tools to a different task and then share findings so that we can all benefit from the explorations.”
- Outline the AI Evaluation Criteria and hand out a rubric to each student:
    - Functionality: Can the tool effectively perform the task?
    - Usability: Is the tool accessible and easy to learn?
    - Reliability & Accuracy: Are its outputs consistent and correct?

    - Ethical Considerations: Does the tool address concerns like bias and data privacy?

Group Formation and Task Distribution (5 minutes)

- Divide the class into small groups (3-4 students) and distribute the following tasks (1 task per group). Invite students to designate two key roles: (1) who will share for the team at the end, and (2) who will complete the rubric on behalf of the team. Note that all students should take their own notes as they work.
    - *Tip: Ensure the tasks are relevant to your class. Generate your own tasks as necessary. For larger classes, provide the same scenario to multiple groups and allow them to compare and consolidate their explorations before the share-out.*
    - *Tip: Along with the task, you may provide students with a starter prompt to help level the playing field for all students and give them something standard across team members as they evaluate each AI tool.*
- Possible Tasks Include:
    - Summarize a Text: Quickly generate a concise summary of a long research article or textbook chapter for an upcoming class discussion.
    - Brainstorm a Project Idea: Generate various creative, interdisciplinary project ideas.
    - Conduct a Literature Review: Rapidly identify relevant articles and summarize the key findings for a specific topic.
    - Assist with Coding: Generate or debug code snippets to help complete a programming assignment or lab.
    - Create an Infographic: Create custom visuals to illustrate complex ideas.
    - Analyze Data: Analyze a dataset and present findings in an easily digestible format.
    - Generate Discussion Questions: Create thought-provoking discussion questions based on the assigned readings.
    - Revise Writing: Polish a draft of a paper by using an AI-powered editing tool.
    - Perform a Calculation: Solve a mathematical equation and articulate the steps involved.

Group Exploration and Evaluation (15 minutes)

- In their groups, students should:
    - Brainstorm: Each group member should identify an AI tool (from the provided list or others they know) to address their assigned task.
    - Explore: Group members should spend about 5 minutes exploring and testing their chosen tool. They should evaluate the tool against the criteria.
    - Evaluate: Discuss as a team: How did each tool perform? What are their potential strengths and limitations? All team members should fill in their rubrics during the discussion. One rubric must be provided to the instructor at the end of the activity so it can be shared with the class.

    - Decide: Together, the group should aim to agree on the AI tool that best meets the task and prepare a concise explanation of their decision.

Group Presentations and Debrief (15 minutes)

- Invite one representative from each group to present a brief (around 1 minute) summary that includes:
    - The assigned task
    - The AI tools evaluated
    - The rationale behind the final tool selection.
- Collect a completed rubric from each student group and let students know that these rubrics will be made available to the class within the learning management system so that everyone benefits from the collective wisdom the class has gained from this activity.
- Reiterate to students how they should–or should not–use these tools in class moving forward based on the course AI policy. Use this time as an opportunity to answer questions and make connections to students' expectations and experiences.