

ChatGPT o3 deep research version (\$20/month) Preliminary Prospectus

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(ChatGPT o3 Deep Research July 5, 2025 - completed in **21 minutes**)

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

Preliminary Prospectus – Certificate in “Artificial Intelligence for Professional Communicators”

Introduction and Program Overview

The University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) proposes a new **online, non-degree certificate program in “Artificial Intelligence for Professional Communicators.”** This program is designed by UIS Continuing and Online Education faculty to meet the needs of professionals such as news writers, reporters, editors, public relations specialists, and public information officers who communicate with external audiences. The fully **asynchronous online** format will span one course with 10 weekly modules/meetings facilitated by UIS faculty. Participants from Illinois and surrounding states (Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana) – regions that host significant agriculture and high-tech industries – are the primary target audience. The certificate’s outcome is to equip these communicators with the **vocabulary, knowledge, and resources to effectively envision and communicate** with their publics about AI research, developments, current capabilities and the likely impact of AI over the next five years. In short, graduates will be able to translate complex AI topics into clear, accurate messages for various audiences and industries.

Program Format: The certificate consists of one **10-week asynchronous online course** led by UIS faculty with expertise in communication and technology. Course activities will include short video lectures, readings, discussion forums, and applied projects. Each weekly module focuses on a key aspect of AI and communication (outlined in the Curriculum section), building from fundamental concepts to advanced applications. The course will leverage **guest speakers** (including regional experts from industry and media) via recorded interviews or live webinars to provide real-world insights. Although non-credit, participants will earn a **certificate of completion** and Continuing Education Units (CEUs), and will be encouraged to share their work and reflections in each module. The course design emphasizes active learning and scaffolding of knowledge from week to week, ensuring a logical progression from AI basics to strategic communication applications.

Rationale and Market Need

Artificial intelligence is transforming many aspects of business and society, and the **communication field is no exception**. The rapid rise of AI tools – from generative text and image systems to data analytics platforms – is **reshaping how information is produced, shared, and consumed** in journalism, marketing, and public relations pce.uw.edu/dailyprbrief.com. Organizations across sectors see AI as essential: 87% of companies globally believe AI will give them a competitive edge over rivals explodingtopics.com. The overall AI industry is booming, with the global market expected to grow roughly **fivefold in the next five years** explodingtopics.com. This explosive growth means that communicators will increasingly be called upon to **explain AI-driven innovations, address public concerns, and highlight the benefits and risks of AI** in their fields.

Despite this trend, many communication professionals **feel unprepared to take advantage of AI's opportunities or to mitigate its risks** pce.uw.edu. A recent LinkedIn survey of marketers found that they lack confidence in using emerging AI technology effectively pce.uw.edu. In the public relations realm, adoption of generative AI tools has skyrocketed – the proportion of PR professionals using AI more than doubled from 28% to 64% in 2023 alone dailyprbrief.com – yet there is a clear **knowledge gap in how to use these tools correctly and ethically**. As one industry observer put it, *"Now's the time to get AI empowered. After all, your competitors are already using AI to create better content faster..."* ragan.com. Communicators who lack AI literacy risk falling behind colleagues who can leverage AI for media pitches, social posts, and other content creation.

Furthermore, in the Midwest region targeted by this program, the need is particularly acute. Major employers in agriculture and manufacturing are investing heavily in AI innovations. For example, the University of Illinois's Center for Digital Agriculture recently received a **\$20 million federal award to develop an AI institute for future agricultural resilience** corporaterelations.illinois.edu. Companies like John Deere and Caterpillar – both with large Illinois operations – are counted among the top adopters of AI technologies giesbusiness.illinois.edu. Communicators in these states will increasingly be tasked with explaining how AI is used for precision farming, smart manufacturing, healthcare analytics, and more. To maintain public trust and stakeholder engagement, they must be able to **speak knowledgeably about AI's capabilities, limitations, and impacts** in these industries.

In summary, there is a strong **market need** for an educational program that empowers journalists and PR/communication professionals to understand AI and communicate about it effectively. This need is driven by:

- **Industry Demand:** Employers prioritizing AI integration (83% of firms say AI is a top business priority explodingtopics.com) and expecting staff to be AI-literate.
- **Workforce Skills Gap:** Many communicators feeling unprepared or lacking formal training in AI pce.uw.edu.

- **Regional Growth in AI:** Key Midwest sectors (agri-business, tech, manufacturing) investing in AI R&D corporate-relations.illinois.edu, creating stories that need to be told to the public.
- **Ethical/Societal Stakes:** The proliferation of AI raises ethical questions (bias, misinformation, job automation) that communicators must help address for their organizations fitchburgstate.edu.

By launching the **AI for Professional Communicators Certificate**, UIS can fill this gap, “future-proofing” participants’ careers and helping them navigate the AI revolution in communications ragan.com. This program aligns with UIS’s mission to serve regional needs and provide innovative online education for working professionals.

Competitive Landscape

A number of universities and professional organizations have begun offering courses or certificates related to AI for communication. Below is a list of the top ten competitors to UIS in delivering a similar certificate online, with brief notes on each:

1. **Fitchburg State University – “AI and Data-Based Communication Strategy” (Online Graduate Certificate):** A 12-credit graduate certificate focusing on integrating AI and data analytics into communication strategies, including ethical and societal considerations. It aims to give students an *“in-depth understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics concepts, technologies, and their applications in the field of communication.”* fitchburgstate.edu Courses cover AI in communication strategy, communication ethics, emerging media, and analytics. (Tuition is roughly \$5,000+ for the full 12 credits, at standard graduate rates.)
2. **Loyola University Chicago – “AI in Advertising and Public Relations” (Executive Master Certificate):** A short executive education program (offered in live online sessions) for advertising, PR, and marketing professionals. It promises *“step-by-step guidance on how to integrate AI into your workflow, utilize the latest GenAI applications in creative processes, and conceptualize AI-assisted products,”* while also covering ethical and policy implications luc.edu. Loyola’s program is positioned to keep professionals *“at the edge of this AI revolution”* with practical tips and latest research. Tuition for the Spring 2025 cohort was **\$850** per participant luc.edu.
3. **Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) – “AI Tools for the Modern Communicator” (On-Demand Certificate):** A five-module online series by the PRSA focusing on the impact of AI in PR practice. The video-based course covers distinctions between generative vs. predictive AI, workforce impacts, ethical use of AI, and future trends in communications prsa.org. It is designed to give PR practitioners foundational AI knowledge and strategies to *“ensure ethical practices in the rapidly advancing field of*

public relations.” After completing all modules, participants earn a PRSA Certificate of Completion prsa.org. **Pricing:** \$450 for PRSA members, \$595 for non-members for the full series prsa.org.

4. **Ragan Communications – “AI Certificate Course for Communicators” (Virtual Workshop Series):** A private training company offering a three-part online certificate series (e.g., over three weekly sessions). Ragan’s program is very skills-oriented, teaching communicators how to use cutting-edge AI tools for content creation and strategy. Its agenda includes mastering AI text generators like ChatGPT and Jasper and image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney to **“create better content faster”** ragan.com. The tone is hands-on: participants practice prompt-writing, content generation, visual design with AI, and strategy development. Ragan emphasizes boosting efficiency and staying competitive: *“your competitors are already using AI to create content faster”* is a key theme ragan.com. **Pricing:** Approximately \$999 for the series (with discounts for Ragan members and early registration) ragan.com.
5. **University of British Columbia (UBC) – “Certificate in Artificial Intelligence in Digital Media” (Online):** A comprehensive non-credit certificate (approximately 150 hours of instruction) covering how AI and cloud computing are transforming content creation, audience engagement, and operations across media sectors. It blends foundational AI knowledge with practical no-code tool training and strategic implementation. Participants learn to *“use AI tools to generate, curate and personalize written, visual and video content”* and to address ethical/legal issues like bias, privacy, and governance extendedlearning.ubc.ca. The program consists of 5–6 courses and is **100% online with weekly live sessions**. **Cost: \$5,700 CAD** for the full certificate (approx. \$4,300 USD) extendedlearning.ubc.ca.
6. **University of Washington – “Empowering Marketing & Communications with AI” (Online Course):** Offered through UW Professional & Continuing Education, this was a short course taught by faculty of the Communication Leadership graduate program. It focused on incorporating generative AI into marketing and comms workflows. The syllabus included using conversational AI for brand storytelling, campaign creation, data analysis, and best practices for responsible AI use pce.uw.edu. By course end, students would *“have a clear understanding of responsible AI principles and best practices, and be ready to put generative AI tools to work”* in their organizations pce.uw.edu. (As of mid-2025 this course is not currently scheduled, but it exemplifies university-level continuing education in this space.)
7. **DePaul University (Continuing and Professional Education) – “AI in Marketing Certificate Program”:** A six-week evening course (offered in a flexible hybrid format) focused on how AI is reshaping marketing communications. Taught by industry practitioners, it provides a foundation in AI concepts and hands-on exercises in using AI for marketing tasks. The program is designed for non-technical professionals and

“provides a firm foundation of theory and hands-on experiences [to] leverage AI ethically and productively in your work.”grad.depaul.edu It covers topics like machine learning basics, AI-driven personalization, and content creation tools, and counts as a module within DePaul’s broader digital marketing certificates. (Tuition was roughly in the ~\$1,000 range for the course, consistent with similar DePaul CPE offerings.)

8. **Arizona State University – “Artificial Intelligence and Digital Media” (Online Certificate):** An undergraduate certificate program at ASU that explores how advances in AI and machine learning intersect with digital media and society. It focuses on the *creative and societal impact* of AI-generated images, video, audio and other media. Promotional materials ask, *“Do you want to understand the images, video and audio created by artificial intelligence and how these technologies impact society and culture?”*degrees.apps.asu.edu indicating the program’s goal of examining AI’s role in media production and its cultural implications. ASU Online offers this certificate fully online with multiple start datesartsmediaengineering.asu.edu (students often take it alongside a degree program). It serves those interested in media innovation, including communicators who want a deeper dive into AI-driven content (ASU’s tuition varies by credit hour; this certificate is 15 credits under standard ASU online tuition).

9. **University of Denver (University College) – “AI Strategy and Application in Communication” (Online Graduate Certificate):** A for-credit graduate certificate (can be standalone or part of an MS degree) consisting of 4 courses. Aimed at putting professionals *“at the leading edge of the AI wave revolutionizing the communications field,”* it covers AI’s capabilities, limitations, ethical considerations, and practical implementation in organizational communicationprofessionalstudies.du.eduprofessionalstudies.du.edu. Denver’s program emphasizes strategic and managerial aspects of AI in communication – students learn to craft strategies to achieve comms goals with AI and gain hands-on experience with AI tools. The flexibility of the online format is highlighted, but it comes at a higher price point. **Tuition:** Approximately **\$13,744** for the 4-course certificate (as of 2025)professionalstudies.du.edu, reflecting graduate-level tuition at a private university.

10. **New York University (NYU SPS) – “Accelerated Certificate in Communications and AI”:** An intensive non-credit certificate offered by NYU’s School of Professional Studies (Division of Publishing, Writing, and Media). This accelerated program (often conducted over a summer session) introduces communicators to **AI tools for writing, research, presentation, multimedia, and design**. Co-developed by faculty with expertise in AI and communication, it aims to *“supercharge your writing, research, and presentations with AI”* (as promoted in NYU’s outreach) and covers the latest AI applications like chatbots for copywriting, AI in content curation, and data storytelling. The program typically involves a single comprehensive course with *hands-on projects* and was recently launched (students began earning this certificate in 2024). **Format:** Available in online and blended formats, with fast-paced coursework. (NYU SPS’s course fees are generally in the ~\$1,500 range for comparable certificates, though exact pricing for this

program is not publicly listed; NYU emphasizes the value of learning from industry experts in New York's media hub.)

Summary: The competitive analysis shows a mix of **academic certificates, professional association programs, and private workshops** addressing AI for communications. UIS's proposed certificate will distinguish itself by targeting the Midwest regional context and combining the strengths of these models: the academic rigor of a graduate certificate (like Fitchburg or Denver) with the flexibility and practical focus of short courses (like PRSA, Ragan, NYU). Importantly, UIS can compete on **affordability and regional relevance** – many competitors are either costly graduate programs or short workshops that don't delve into both current and future AI topics. There is a competitive opening for a moderately-priced, comprehensive **10-week online certificate** that specifically prepares communicators to serve Midwestern industries and communities.

Curriculum Design and Topical Outline

The curriculum will be organized into **10 modules (one per week)**, each building on the last to scaffold learning. The topics are sequenced to progress from fundamental concepts to applied skills and forward-looking discussions. Each module will feature a blend of instructional content, case studies, and interactive components (discussions or small projects). Below is the **preliminary list of ten top curriculum topics in the preferred delivery order**, along with key resources (readings or guest inputs) for each:

1. **Foundations of AI for Communicators – Concepts and Terminology:** This opening module demystifies what “AI” means in practical terms. Participants learn essential vocabulary (machine learning, algorithms, neural networks, generative AI, etc.) and a brief history of AI development. A key distinction covered is *generative AI vs. predictive AI* – e.g., how tools that create content (text, images) differ from those that analyze data to predict trends prsa.org. Real-world examples (like ChatGPT for text generation and predictive analytics in audience targeting) illustrate these concepts. **Key Resource:** Excerpts from the PRSA's *AI for Communicators* series Module 1, which provides “an in-depth introduction to Artificial Intelligence... focusing on distinctions between generative and predictive AI” prsa.org. **Potential Guest:** A UIS computer science faculty member or a local AI researcher will join a Q&A (recorded) to answer common questions about how AI works, ensuring participants gain a solid, jargon-free foundation.
2. **Current Landscape of AI in Communication Fields:** This module surveys how AI is being applied today in journalism, public relations, marketing, and corporate communications. Participants examine case studies of news organizations using AI (for example, automated earnings reports or AI-curated news feeds) and PR/marketing teams using AI for content personalization and social media management. The goal is to understand “*what AI can do right now*” in content creation, distribution, and audience engagement. **Key Resources:** Industry reports and articles highlighting current usage –

for instance, a Forbes Communication Council piece noting that *“from personalized chatbots to speech recognition systems, AI is fundamentally altering how we interact... offering a statistical view of its influence and potential future”*dailyprbrief.com. Another highlight: a 2024 Muck Rack report (as cited by Forbes) found **the percentage of PR professionals using generative AI jumped from 28% to 64% in 2023**, indicating rapid adoptiondailyprbrief.com. Such data underscore that communicators need to catch up with peers already leveraging AI. **Activity:** Learners will discuss an example of AI-generated content (like a sports recap written by AI) and debate its quality and appropriate uses. **Guest Insight:** A journalist from a regional newsroom that has experimented with AI (e.g. using algorithms for data-driven stories) will share their experience via a short video interview.

3. **Data, Analytics, and AI-Driven Insights:** Modern communicators must interpret and communicate data – this module explores the intersection of big data analytics and AI in communication strategy. It covers how AI systems analyze large datasets to extract trends (for example, tools that sift social media data for sentiment analysis or audience behavior patterns). Participants will learn the basics of how AI algorithms find patterns and the importance of data quality. They will also consider how to present data insights to non-technical audiences. **Key Resource:** Selections from Fitchburg State’s curriculum, which emphasize understanding how *“businesses, individuals, organizations, and governments use data and AI”* in decision-makingfitchburgstate.edu. The program will reinforce strategies for the **ethical and effective implementation of AI-driven data analysis in communication**, considering privacy and bias (topics Fitchburg also highlightsfitchburgstate.edu). **Practical Component:** Learners might use a no-code AI analytics tool (such as a simple Google Analytics AI feature or social listening tool) to generate an audience insight report and then practice drafting a brief explaining the insight in plain language for a client.
4. **Generative AI for Content Creation (Text, Images, and Video):** This module provides hands-on exposure to the AI tools making headlines – generative AI that can produce content. Participants will experiment with text generation (e.g. using **OpenAI’s ChatGPT** or similar) to draft press releases or news briefs, and with image generation tools (like **DALL·E 2 or Midjourney**) to create visuals. The instructional portion will cover prompt engineering basics – how to get useful outputs from these systems – and discuss reliability and quality issues. **Key Resource:** Ragan Communications’ workshop materials on AI text and image tools, which teach how to *“master the latest AI text tools like ChatGPT... and image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney”* for content creationragan.com. We will also reference Ragan’s “AI Terms Cheat Sheet” for marketersragan.com to quickly familiarize participants with tool names and functions. **Guest Speaker:** A content strategist or marketing professional from the region who actively uses generative AI in their workflow (for example, a corporate communications manager using AI to draft social media posts) will share tips and show examples of AI-generated content alongside the edited final versions. **Ethical Note:** This module will naturally segue into discussions (expanded later in the course) about verification and

authenticity – e.g., acknowledging AI assistance in content and avoiding plagiarism or misinformation.

5. **AI in News Media and Reporting:** Focusing on journalism and media production, this module examines how AI is used to gather, produce, and distribute news and information. Examples include news agencies using AI for automated reporting on financial earnings or sports scores, broadcasters using AI for transcription and translation, and the emerging issue of “deepfakes” and synthetic media. Participants will learn the importance of verification and maintaining trust when AI can generate realistic content. **Case Study:** The class will review the incident of an **AI-generated image winning a photography contest**, which actually happened and sparked debate on authenticity – *a photographer won a Sony World Photography Award with an AI-generated image and declined the prize upon revealing it was AI-made*[fitchburgstate.edu](https://www.fitchburgstate.edu). This case (noted in Fitchburg State’s materials) vividly illustrates the challenges AI poses to media credibility and ethics. **Key Resource:** The Online News Association’s *AI in Journalism* initiative is another reference – ONA emphasizes that “AI presents a tremendous opportunity for journalism” but must be approached “with ethics, integrity and focus”journalists.org. Learners will discuss guidelines for newsrooms using AI (e.g., AP’s policy on AI-generated content) and how to be transparent with audiences. **Guest Speaker:** A regional editor or news ombudsman could join to talk about how their outlet is handling AI (for example, is AI being used to write briefs, and how do they ensure accuracy?).
6. **AI Applications in Industry Communications (Tech, Agriculture, and More):** Professionals in our target states often communicate on behalf of industries like agriculture, manufacturing, healthcare, and tech. This module explores domain-specific AI innovations and how to communicate them to the public or stakeholders. For instance, in agriculture: AI-driven farm equipment, crop monitoring drones, and predictive analytics for yield – communicators may need to explain these in press releases or community meetings. In manufacturing: AI for predictive maintenance or robotics on the factory floor. We cover best practices for explaining technical advancements in accessible language, avoiding both hype and jargon. **Key Resource:** News of local AI initiatives, such as the University of Illinois-led AIFARMS project on AI in agriculture, will be used to show real examples. “*The U of I’s Center for Digital Agriculture was selected to receive a \$20 million award to develop a new AI institute for future agricultural resilience and sustainability*,” a White House-backed effort to advance AI in farmingcorporate-relations.illinois.edu. Students will be tasked with crafting a short media advisory or internal newsletter blurb that communicates the essence of such a project to a general audience. **Guest Expert:** An AI project lead from a regional company (for example, a technology manager from **John Deere** or **Caterpillar**) will talk about how they frame AI advancements to non-technical stakeholders. This provides insight into communicating complex innovations to farmers, factory workers, or customers – tying back to the certificate’s goal of effective public communication.

7. **Ethical, Legal, and Societal Implications of AI:** Midway through the course, a dedicated module addresses the critical ethical questions surrounding AI. Communicators must understand issues like algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, intellectual property (who owns AI-generated content?), and potential job displacement, in order to communicate responsibly. This module covers frameworks for AI ethics and current guidelines or regulations (e.g., FTC guidance on AI in commerce, pending AI legislation, etc.). **Key Resource:** Fitchburg State’s program highlights the importance of these topics – *“the use of AI and data analytics raises important ethical and societal considerations, such as privacy, bias, and unintended consequences”* fitchburgstate.edu. We’ll delve into examples: biased AI outcomes (like facial recognition failures) and misinformation (such as deepfake news). An important discussion will be on transparency – how and when to disclose AI involvement in content creation. **Case Example:** The class will analyze a scenario where a government public information office uses an AI chatbot for citizen inquiries – what are the ethical safeguards needed? **Guest Speaker:** A tech ethics expert or media law professor from UIS or a nearby institution will speak on AI ethics and policy (possibly touching on the latest in AI governance, or the EU AI Act, etc.). Communicators will learn how to proactively address public concerns about AI, emphasizing *honesty and accountability* (much like PRSA’s ethics code values of transparency and fairness prsa.org, now applied to the context of AI).
8. **Communicating AI to Non-Expert Audiences:** This module focuses on the messaging strategies and best practices for explaining AI to lay audiences. Whether one is communicating to the general public, to customers, or to internal stakeholders, the challenge is to avoid both technical overload and undue simplification. Participants will learn how to anticipate audience perceptions and questions about AI – for example, public fear of AI (“will it take our jobs?”) or overexpectations (“AI is magic”). Techniques such as using analogies, storytelling, and focusing on benefits/impacts rather than inner mechanics will be practiced. **Key Resource:** We highlight the importance of building trust – consider that **only about 7% of people trust a chatbot to handle an important task like an insurance claim, compared to 49% who trust a human advisor** explodingtopics.com. This striking statistic illustrates the skepticism many have toward AI. Communicators need to acknowledge such concerns and emphasize human oversight or proven results when discussing AI systems. Another resource is a **“plain language checklist”** for tech communication to ensure our participants can convey AI topics clearly (for instance, avoiding acronyms or explaining them in everyday terms). **Activity:** Each learner will take a recent tech press release or news article that is dense with AI jargon and rewrite a portion of it as if communicating to a community group or via a local news broadcast. They will get peer feedback on clarity and tone. **Guest Interaction:** We may involve a science communicator or public affairs officer who has successfully conveyed complex research (perhaps someone from the NSF-funded AIFARMS project or a similar initiative) to talk about strategies like focusing on human stories behind the tech.

9. **Future Trends and the Next Five Years of AI:** Looking ahead, this module explores the five-year horizon of AI – what developments are experts predicting, and how might these affect communications? Topics could include: more advanced generative AI models, AI in augmented reality, the proliferation of AI assistants in workplaces, and stronger AI regulations. We will discuss how these trends might change the way communicators operate. For instance, if AI tools become standard for drafting content, the role of the communicator may shift to more editing and strategy. Or, if deepfakes become even more realistic, trust in media could further erode, making the communicator’s role in verifying information even more crucial. **Key Resource:** A TechTarget analysis notes that in the next five years *“human life will speed up, behaviors will change and industries will be transformed”* due to AI’s acceleration of decision-making and operations [techtarget.com](https://www.techtarget.com). We’ll use such insights to springboard discussion on preparedness – how can communicators remain agile and continuously informed? We will also incorporate findings like the **Adobe 2025 Digital Trends** report (for example, many practitioners expect AI to improve content quality and personalization in the near term). **Activity:** Learners will draft a short op-ed or blog post from the perspective of a thought leader at their organization on “The Impact of AI in the year 2030” (encouraging them to apply what they’ve learned to envision future scenarios). This creative exercise synthesizes their knowledge and positions them as forward-thinking communicators.
10. **Capstone: AI Communication Strategy and Final Project Presentations:** In the final module, participants bring it all together. They will develop and present a mini **AI Communication Strategy** for a real or hypothetical scenario of their choosing. This could be, for example, a plan for their organization to communicate the rollout of a new AI tool, or an educational media campaign about AI’s impact in their community. The strategy should incorporate elements from the course – clear explanation of the technology, addressing ethical considerations, appropriate audience targeting, etc. Each participant will submit a brief strategic communication plan (or create a short slide presentation) and share key highlights with the class (asynchronously, e.g. via a discussion board or recorded video). **Peer and Instructor Feedback** will be provided. The goal is to have a tangible take-away: a plan or messaging document they could actually use or show at work. **Resource for Guidance:** We will provide a template inspired by best practices. For instance, Ragan’s workshop promises that attendees will *“receive an AI plan you can tailor to your organization”* [ragan.com](https://www.ragan.com) – similarly, our program’s capstone deliverable is an AI communication plan tailored by each student to a context they care about. **Wrap-Up Discussion:** The course concludes with reflection on learning gains and further development needs. We’ll encourage participants to identify one professional development step to continue after the certificate (such as joining an AI & Communications forum, or setting up Google Alerts on AI policy news). In essence, this final meeting reinforces that learning about AI is an ongoing process – but now they have the foundation and resources to navigate it confidently.

Throughout the curriculum, we will integrate **relevant resources**: excerpts from textbooks or e-books on AI communication, articles from sources like *Harvard Business Review* on AI in marketing, examples of corporate AI ethics guidelines, and links to tools/platforms mentioned (many offering free trials that students can safely explore). Each module's content will be reviewed annually to incorporate emerging developments – given the fast-evolving nature of AI, we anticipate updating case studies and tool references frequently.

Additionally, **identified regional experts** will be woven into the content. For example, we have contacts with faculty at the University of Illinois and industry experts like **Dr. Julian Sanchez of John Deere**, a director of emerging technology who speaks on AI in agriculture event.technologyreview.com. Experts like these can provide guest commentary (recorded interviews) that resonate with our students' regional interests. We will also leverage UIS's connections to Illinois state government, perhaps inviting a state Chief Information Officer or Public Information Officer to discuss how they communicate AI-related initiatives (e.g. smart city projects or AI use in public health) to the public. These voices from Illinois, Wisconsin, and neighboring states will make the curriculum **locally relevant** and help students build a network in the AI communications arena.

Tuition and Fee Structure

We propose a **competitive tuition rate** for this non-credit certificate to attract professionals and undercut some higher-priced programs:

- **Proposed Tuition:** Approximately **\$1,200** for the full 10-week certificate program. This could be structured as a single fee covering all modules and materials. We will explore discounts for early registration, group enrollments (e.g. an employer sending 3 or more staff), and UIS alumni or state employees, to encourage cohort building.

This price point is justified by benchmarking against competitors. Many comparable offerings charge around \$1,000 or more for short programs, especially those with live components:

- The PRSA's five-part AI fundamentals certificate is \$595 (on-demand, self-paced) prsa.org, while private sector workshops like Ragan's 3-session course cost about \$999 (standard rate) ragan.com. Given our program is longer (10 sessions) and more comprehensive, a tuition slightly above these shorter programs is reasonable.
- University-based certificates can be much more expensive. For example, the online UBC certificate (~6 months, part-time) costs ~\$4,300 USD extendedlearning.ubc.ca, and Fitchburg State's 12-credit graduate certificate would total over \$5,000 in tuition at non-resident rates. Our \$1,200 fee is a **fraction of these costs**, reflecting the non-credit nature but still providing substantial value.

- Loyola Chicago's short AI course was priced at **\$850** for a 5-session package luc.edu. At \$1,200, UIS's program offers double the number of sessions with only a modest increase in price, positioning it as **high value**.
- We note that more extensive academic programs (like University of Denver's \$13k certificate professionalstudies.du.edu or a full semester's tuition elsewhere) are far above our range, so we comfortably sit in an affordable niche for professionals paying out-of-pocket or with modest employer support.

Included in Tuition: All required e-books, reading materials, and access to needed software or tool demos will be included or provided at no additional cost. (Where possible we'll use open-access resources or UIS library holdings. If we adopt any licensed AI tool for teaching purposes, we will budget for educational licenses.)

We will not charge additional fees besides the base tuition, aside from a small certificate processing fee if needed for CEU documentation. Keeping the pricing transparent and one-time is important for adult learners.

Comparison of Similar Program Costs:

- PRSA (on-demand, 5 modules): \$595 prsa.org (no live teaching, certificate of completion).
- Ragan (live online, 3 modules): ~\$999 ragan.com.
- Loyola Chicago (live online, 5 evenings): \$850 luc.edu.
- Northwestern (for reference, a one-day AI journalism workshop, when offered, was ~\$300 – not a full certificate).
- Coursera MOOC (Kennesaw State's *AI for Professional Communication* course): Free to audit, ~\$49 for certificate – but it's a short 4-hour course coursera.org focusing only on a narrow skillset, not an in-depth program.
- Our \$1,200 is **below the cost** of any graduate credit-bearing option and competitive with the professional development certificates given the greater breadth and length. We will highlight this affordability in marketing, especially for small organizations and individuals without corporate sponsorship.

We will also examine the possibility of offering **payment plans** or an installment option to reduce financial barriers, as well as encouraging employers to subsidize fees (we can provide a template letter for students to request employer sponsorship, noting the skills gained).

Marketing Plan and Budget

To successfully recruit participants from the target region (and beyond), a robust marketing strategy will be implemented. **We propose a first-year marketing budget of \$10,000**, followed by \$5,000 annually in subsequent years for ongoing promotion (adjustable based on enrollment outcomes). This budget will be allocated across multiple channels:

- **Digital Marketing (Allocated ~\$5,000 in Year 1):** We will run targeted online advertising campaigns on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google Ads focusing on job titles and interests such as “communications director,” “PR specialist,” “journalist,” “marketing manager,” and keywords like “AI training” in the geographic targeting of Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, and Indiana. LinkedIn, in particular, allows us to reach professionals in relevant fields and industries (e.g., members of PRSA chapters or media groups in those states). A portion of the budget will create sponsored posts highlighting the certificate’s unique selling points – e.g., *“Learn to communicate AI confidently – 10-week online UIS certificate (starting this fall).”* We’ll use testimonials or quotes in ads once we have them (initially, perhaps a quote from a UIS faculty or an industry supporter on the advisory board).
- **Email and Professional Networks (Allocated ~\$1,500):** We will design an email campaign to send announcements to relevant mailing lists. This includes UIS alumni networks in communication and computer science, local PRSA chapter lists (Chicago, Central Illinois, St. Louis, Indianapolis chapters, etc.), state government communications offices, and industry associations (like Illinois’ agricultural communications groups or tech councils). If needed, we will allocate funds to sponsor or partner on e-newsletters – for example, *PR Daily* or *Ragan’s PR Daily* often has a “Daily PR Brief” dailyprbrief.com where educational opportunities can be promoted. Additionally, we’ll coordinate with the UIS Marketing team to issue a press release to regional media about the new program (earned media effort).
- **Content Marketing (Allocated ~\$1,000):** Creating thought leadership content will help attract interest. We will produce a series of blog posts or short videos for the UIS website (and share on social media) about AI in communication – e.g., *“3 AI Trends Communicators Need to Know”* featuring insights from our faculty (with subtle calls to action to learn more about the certificate). We may also host a free informational webinar or “AMA: Ask Me Anything” session about AI in communications, open to the public, to showcase the instructor and curriculum. This can be recorded and shared as marketing content as well. Budget covers any production costs or boosting these posts on social channels.
- **Events and Partnerships (Allocated ~\$1,500):** We will leverage conferences and events. For instance, having a presence at the Illinois Governor’s Conference on Internet Technology, or regional PRSA conferences, or the Midwest Journalism Conference – either through a small exhibit, distributing flyers, or offering a workshop/sample class.

Budget might cover registration fees or sponsorship of a coffee break with our program branding. We will also coordinate with professional groups: e.g., do a presentation for a monthly meeting of the Springfield-area PRSA chapter or the state AP Broadcasters association about “Communicating AI,” which doubles as promotion. Part of this budget also goes to print materials or mailers (though we expect mostly digital outreach, we may send a postcard to targeted businesses or newsrooms).

- **Referral incentives and word-of-mouth (Minimal direct cost):** We will encourage early enrollees and UIS alumni to refer colleagues by offering a small discount or a bonus (like a free book or an extra workshop) if they bring another enrollee. While not a direct ad expense, allocating maybe \$500 worth for such incentives could yield organic growth.

We will monitor marketing effectiveness closely (using tracking links for digital ads, monitoring inquiries) and adjust spending to the channels yielding the most enrollments. The initial \$10k outlay is front-loaded to generate awareness in Year 1, aiming for a healthy inaugural cohort. In future years, with a built reputation, we anticipate needing less paid advertising and relying more on testimonials, alumni referrals, and perhaps employer partnerships for steady enrollment – hence a lowered sustained budget of around \$5k/year primarily for digital refresh and occasional events.

Enrollment Projections: We aim for an initial cohort of ~15–20 students in Year 1 (Fall or Spring launch), growing to 25 in Year 2, and ~30 by Year 3 as awareness spreads. These are modest numbers that reflect the specialized nature of the certificate and the regional focus, but with potential to scale if demand surges (the online format can accommodate larger numbers if needed).

Resource Requirements and Personnel Costs

To deliver this program with high quality, the following human resources and associated costs are anticipated:

- **Faculty Instructor(s):** The core of the program is the lead instructor, likely a UIS faculty member with expertise in communication and a strong interest/experience in technology (or co-taught by a communication faculty and a computer science faculty for interdisciplinary depth). We estimate faculty compensation for developing and teaching the 10-week course as a **stipend of \$5,000** per offering (this could be an overload for a full-time faculty or pay for an adjunct expert). For the first year, an additional **course development stipend (~\$2,000)** is budgeted to cover the upfront creation of content, recording mini-lectures, etc. If enrollment grows beyond ~25, we might allocate funds for a **teaching assistant** or co-facilitator (perhaps a graduate student or second faculty) to help with discussion moderation and feedback – estimated at \$1,000 per session as

needed.

- **Instructional Design and Technical Support:** UIS's online program unit will provide an instructional designer to assist in course design (ensuring the modules are well-structured and engaging). This is likely covered by existing staff as part of their role, but we allocate perhaps **0.1 FTE of an instructional designer** for a few months – cost roughly \$5,000 (embedded in Continuing Ed budget, not necessarily a new expense). Technical support for the learning platform (Canvas or Moodle) will similarly be drawn from UIS's e-learning team. No new full-time hires are needed, but a small portion of staff time is dedicated to this program.
- **Program Coordinator/Marketing Support:** We foresee a Continuing Education program coordinator overseeing enrollment, marketing coordination, and student support. This might be an existing staff member who handles multiple programs. Continuing Ed may need to allocate, say, **0.2 FTE of a coordinator's time** to this certificate in its first year (cost approx. \$10,000 including benefits). Duties include answering applicant questions, liaising with partner organizations, scheduling guest speakers, and tracking outcomes. After initial launch, this time might reduce slightly, but we keep some support for ongoing administration.
- **Guest Speakers/Expert Honoraria:** To attract high-quality guest contributions (e.g., industry speakers for a webinar or recorded talk), we will set aside a small budget for honoraria. For instance, offering **\$200–\$300 honorarium** for 4–5 guest speakers = ~\$1,250 total. In many cases, local experts might waive a fee (especially alumni or those keen to share), but we budget to ensure we can compensate professionals who require it or to send a thank-you gift.
- **Administrative and Overhead Costs:** General overhead (learning management system usage, certificate printing, etc.) is minor. If we count indirect costs, the program will contribute to UIS overhead as per standard Continuing Ed practices (often a percentage of revenue). Personnel-wise, the main ongoing cost is instructor compensation each time the course is delivered, plus incremental support.

Summary of Continuing Personnel Costs (annual, starting Year 1):

- Lead Instructor stipend: \$5,000 per run (assuming one cohort per year initially; if we run it twice a year in future, double that).
- TA/Co-instructor: \$1,000 (only if needed for larger cohorts; Year 1 likely not needed).
- Program coordination/administration: \$10,000 (portion of salary).
- Total direct personnel: ~\$16,000 (inclusive of some development cost amortized, etc.) in Year 1. In subsequent years, development cost is done, so mainly \$5k instructor + \$10k

admin = \$15k per year (adjusted if we expand frequency).

These costs will be covered by tuition revenue once a minimum enrollment is reached (see Profit/Loss timeline below). We will ensure that faculty time is acknowledged and that teaching this certificate is counted as a valuable service to the university's outreach mission. If demand is very strong, we may consider training additional instructors (perhaps other faculty or qualified alumni) to rotate or expand offerings, but that is likely a Year 3+ consideration.

Five-Year Financial Projection (Profit & Loss)

Below is an **anticipated profit and loss timeline over five years** for the certificate program. This projection assumes one cohort per year initially, with modest growth in enrollment, and uses rough estimates of the main revenues and expenses discussed:

- **Year 1: Launch Year** – We estimate ~15 paying participants at \$1,200 each, yielding **\$18,000 revenue**. Against this, costs include development and delivery: ~\$7,000 faculty (development stipend + teaching), ~\$10,000 marketing (initial push), ~\$10,000 admin/overhead. Total expenses Year 1 around **\$27,000**, resulting in a **net loss of ~\$9,000**. This deficit is expected as an upfront investment in program development and awareness. (Note: If we secure more than 15 students, the loss will be lower; breakeven would require ~23 students in Year 1.)
- **Year 2: Building Enrollment** – Assume 20 students at \$1,200 = **\$24,000 revenue**. Expenses: marketing ~\$5k (as awareness is already established), faculty \$5k, admin \$10k, plus minor updates \$1k = **\$21,000 expenses. Net: +\$3,000** (the program moves into a slight profit by Year 2). Additionally, no new development costs this year, so margins improve. We might also see some economies if, for instance, less admin time is needed per student as processes smooth out.
- **Year 3: Growth and Potential Expansion** – 25 students at \$1,200 = **\$30,000 revenue**. Expenses: faculty \$5k, admin \$10k, marketing \$5k, guest speaker honoraria \$1k = **\$21,000 expenses. Net profit: ~\$9,000**. By this year, the program could fund some enhancements (maybe sponsoring a networking event for alumni, etc., from its surplus). We might also consider running a second cohort in Year 3 (e.g., one in fall, one in spring) if demand is high – which would double revenue and proportional costs.
- **Year 4: 30 students = \$36,000 revenue** (or if two cohorts of 15 each, similar revenue). Expenses might creep up slightly if we add a TA for the larger class (~\$1k) and modest increase in marketing to tap new audiences \$6k, so say **\$23,000 expenses. Net profit: ~\$13,000**. At this stage, the certificate is mature, and positive cash flow can be reinvested (e.g., content updates, faculty training on latest AI, etc.).

- **Year 5:** 35 students = **\$42,000 revenue** (or possibly two cohorts totaling that many). Expenses: faculty \$5k, admin \$10k, marketing \$6k, other \$2k = **\$23,000** (scaling admin beyond 30 students is minimal thanks to online automation and peer support). **Net: ~\$19,000 profit.** By year 5, the program should consistently generate surplus.

In tabular form for clarity:

Year	Projected Enrollment	Revenue (@\$1.2k each)	Estimated Expenses	Annual Profit/Loss
1	15 students	\$18,000	~\$27,000	-\$9,000 (loss)
2	20 students	\$24,000	~\$21,000	+\$3,000
3	25 students	\$30,000	~\$21,000	+\$9,000
4	30 students	\$36,000	~\$23,000	+\$13,000
5	35 students	\$42,000	~\$23,000	+\$19,000

(These figures are net of any university overhead assessments if applicable; they assume the program's direct contribution.)

We see a **break-even by Year 2** and growing profitability thereafter. Even if enrollment plateaued around 20-25 students per year, the program would sustain a modest positive margin. If demand exceeds expectations (say 50+ students/year), we could increase the number of cohorts or section the class with multiple instructors, still remaining profitable at scale.

It's worth noting that beyond direct monetary return, this program has intangible benefits: it raises UIS's profile in a cutting-edge area, potentially attracts students to other programs (someone taking the certificate might consider enrolling in a UIS master's later), and strengthens industry partnerships. Those factors support continuing the program even if profits were smaller. However, our projections show a healthy outlook.

Assessment of Need and Impact

Need for the Program: Our earlier rationale established strong demand, and this has only become more evident with each passing month as AI dominates conversations in media and business. Communicators in our region **need a program that is accessible, practical, and comprehensive** to help them navigate AI. The competitive scan shows that, while there are programs out there, many are either too narrow (focusing just on tool use without broader context) or too broad in audience (general AI programs not tailored to communicators). UIS's certificate will specifically target the junction of AI and communication, meeting a nuanced need that is currently under-served, especially in the Midwest.

By offering this certificate, UIS can become a **regional leader in AI literacy for professional communicators**. We will measure the program's success and impact in several ways:

- **Enrollment and Completion Rates:** Meeting our target numbers and seeing participants successfully finish the course (we aim for >90% completion given the professional motivation of students).
- **Participant Feedback:** We will gather feedback each year via surveys. We expect participants to report increased confidence in understanding and discussing AI post-certificate. Qualitatively, we hope to hear success stories (e.g., *"After this program, I led a webinar at my company on AI's impact in our field"* or *"I was able to pitch an article on AI to our local paper, which I wouldn't have done before."*).
- **Employer/Industry Recognition:** Over time, we anticipate that having this certificate could be seen as a mark of distinction in communications hiring in the region. We will actively seek endorsements from industry – for example, a statement from a PR agency CEO or a news editor that *"We value staff who have undergone training like UIS's AI certificate, as it equips them with critical skills for today's media landscape."*
- **Adapting to Evolving Needs:** We'll keep advisory channels open with industry partners to ensure the curriculum stays relevant (adding new topics like AI and crisis communication, for instance, if that becomes a pressing need).

Given the current trajectory of AI integration into virtually every sector, the **need for this program is not a short-term fad but a long-term requirement**. Communicators will need continuous upskilling as AI evolves. Thus, we see this certificate as fulfilling an ongoing professional development need. It also aligns with state and national workforce initiatives emphasizing digital skills and ethical tech use.

Additionally, providing AI education for communicators has a **broader societal benefit**: it helps ensure the public gets accurate, understandable information about AI. In an era when hype and fear about AI run rampant, having trained communication professionals who can explain AI's realities (neither exaggerating nor downplaying risks) is valuable for informed public discourse. UIS would contribute to that societal good by educating these front-line communicators.

Further Recommendations and Future Opportunities

While the primary focus is launching the non-credit certificate, we have identified several opportunities to expand or enhance the program in the future:

- **Develop a Credit-Bearing Path or Degree Minor:** If the certificate proves popular, UIS could consider translating some of the content into credit-bearing courses. For example, creating a 15-credit **minor in "AI and Communication"** that undergraduate students

(e.g., communication or business majors) could take. The certificate's curriculum could serve as the backbone for such a minor, with additional assignments for credit and integration into degree requirements. This would leverage the content to benefit degree-seeking students and could potentially be offered jointly by the Communication department and Computer Science. Similarly, at the graduate level, UIS might integrate this into a track or concentration in a Master's in Communication or Public Affairs in the future.

- **Stackable or Advanced Certificates:** We can design the certificate to be *stackable*. For instance, this initial certificate could be labeled as “Level 1: Foundations.” In a couple of years, we might introduce an “**Advanced AI for Communicators**” follow-on (covering more technical depth, or specialization like **AI for Health Communication** or **AI and Data Journalism**). Participants could then stack two or three certificates for an “Advanced Professional Diploma.” This staged approach keeps alumni coming back for more education as the field evolves.
- **Alumni Community and Continuing Engagement:** We should build a community among certificate alumni (perhaps a LinkedIn group or an annual virtual meetup) to share updates on AI developments and maintain UIS's connection. This network can also serve as a referral source for new students and as a feedback group for updating curriculum. We might host “**refresh webinars**” exclusively for alumni every year to update them on “what's new in AI since you took the course,” effectively offering continuing education that keeps the credential fresh.
- **Partnerships with Employers:** We will explore partnerships with large employers in the region (state agencies, corporations like Caterpillar, State Farm, John Deere, hospitals, and media companies). For example, a company could sponsor a cohort of their communicators through the program. If demand exists, we could run **closed cohorts** for a single organization or sector. There's also potential to partner with professional associations (like PRSA Chicago chapter or Illinois Press Association) to co-market the program or offer their members a discount – expanding reach while giving those organizations a value-add for membership.
- **Curriculum Expansion to Emerging Tech:** As AI tech changes, we might incorporate modules on related emerging technologies that communicators should know (for example, **data visualization tools, AR/VR for storytelling, or robotics** as they pertain to public info campaigns). Staying ahead of the curve will keep the certificate cutting-edge. We'll keep an eye on trends like AI governance – possibly adding content about how communicators engage in public dialogues on AI ethics/policy (useful if students find themselves needing to address community concerns or legislative issues about AI).
- **Leverage University Strengths:** UIS could involve its **Computer Science and Data Analytics faculty** more deeply to enrich the program (guest lectures, joint projects).

There might be grant opportunities in AI education (NSF or foundation grants for workforce upskilling) that we can pursue to subsidize development of simulation tools or case studies for the course – e.g., creating a repository of AI communication case studies hosted by UIS. If grant-funded, UIS's program could become a model that's shared nationally.

- **Monitoring Outcomes for Continuous Improvement:** We recommend setting up a formal assessment after the first two cohorts. This might involve tracking how participants have applied what they learned (through follow-up surveys or interviews 6 months post-certificate). If, for instance, many alumni report needing more on a certain topic (say “crisis communication involving AI failures”), we can integrate that in future. The program should remain flexible to incorporate feedback and new material year by year.

In conclusion, the **Artificial Intelligence for Professional Communicators Certificate** is poised to meet a timely need, leveraging UIS's online teaching capabilities and regional connections. By starting with a solid preliminary prospectus and adapting through feedback and trends, UIS can create a signature program that not only achieves enrollment and revenue targets, but also **positions the university at the forefront of continuing education in the AI era** for the communications field. This program will enhance the skill set of our region's communicators, ensuring they are well-prepared to inform and engage the public on one of the most influential technologies of our time.

(ChatGPT o3 Deep Research July 5, 2025 - completed in 21 minutes)