Season 3 Episode 6

Student & Faculty Perspectives on AI

[UPBEAT MUSIC]

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Welcome to this episode of What We're Learning About Learning, a podcast about higher ed teaching and learning created and produced by the Center for New Designs and Learning and Scholarship, also known as CNDLS, at Georgetown University. I'm Kim Huisman Lubreski.

MOLLY CHEHAK: And I'm Molly Chehak, filling in for Joe King. As we head into the fall semester, the rise of generative artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT continues to raise big questions for educators, questions like, with the widespread use of these tools, what should we be teaching? And who has access to it? What is the value of education with these new capabilities in the hands of almost everyone?

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: We spoke to five students about their use of AI tools, their perceptions of the effect on their classes and coursework, and how they see AI potentially changing the climate of both Georgetown University at large and the dynamic within each classroom. You'll hear from Salvo Lavis, a graduate student in the Learning, Design, and Technology program, and four undergraduates-- Emilio Cazares Borbon, computer science major, Taylor Lowe, a comparative studies major, Tayah Rubio, a finance major, and Aiai Price-Smith, a pre-med student.

Toward the end of this episode, you'll also hear from two faculty members who will share their responses to the students-- Mark Fisher, assistant professor in government, and J. Palmeri, professor in the English department and director of the writing program.

MOLLY CHEHAK: Like many of us, the students we spoke to are still in the early stages of discovering these tools. First, we'll hear from Emilio, and then Salvo and Tayah.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: Before, let's say, five months ago, I didn't use any AI tools. It was only when people starting saying, oh, it's really good now, you should try it out. I'm like, OK, I'll see what happens. When ChatGPT came out, I started poking around, like a lot of people did, and was pretty blown away by its capabilities. That's not that long ago. It's only seven or eight months ago.

So sometime during the last semester, I started thinking, how might this help me with some work I was doing?

TAYAH RUBIO: I started using that last year when I discovered ChatGPT. And before that, I had no experience with anything AI. I think as a student, a lot of that information or a lot of that technology isn't accessible. But ChatGPT was the first time that I've ever even used anything associated with AI.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: One way these students have learned about these tools is by hearing about them from other students. Here's Aiai, Emilio, Salvo, and Taylor talking about a range of ways students are using the tools.

AIAI PRICE-SMITH: A lot of medical students use AI for memorizing a lot of tough processes and cell-related stuff and everything like that.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: I know a lot of students do use it more than I do to come up with an answer for a question they don't understand. I think they rely on it more to give the answer rather than the explanation.

SALVO LAVIS: I have observed other students in a spectrum of usage. I don't know of anyone who is putting the school prompt into ChatGPT and then just submitting that as their own work. I haven't seen that. But I have definitely seen people take the question being asked of me, by the professor in the class, put it into ChatGPT, see what ChatGPT has to say on the matter, just a first step, framing the problem kind of thing. And I've also seen people ask ChatGPT questions like you'd ask a tutor. So I've seen in another class people maybe not quite understand something or have a question and just ask the question of ChatGPT.

TAYLOR LOWE: Most often, I think I hear students using AI to quote and to make their own sources.

MOLLY CHEHAK: Many faculty do fear that students will just submit AI output as their own. As we discovered, that worries students, too. Here's Taylor.

TAYLOR LOWE: I do definitely think that there are some times that students are using it maybe when they're not wanting to write their whole essays.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: In fact, this concern has kept Taylor from using the tools much at all.

TAYLOR LOWE: So many people in professional settings in terms of professors or recruiters for jobs are so scared of AI that anything can be flagged as AI. There's definitely horror stories of seniors almost being kicked out of school for misquoting something on accident. And so I'm definitely a little bit anxious. And that's kind of why I haven't used it. I have some reservations just because I feel like it's not worth it to have to be on pins and needles when you're submitting an assignment, worried about, is it going to be flagged if I just use it as a resource, or are they going to think I'm cheating?

MOLLY CHEHAK: This concern has prompted Aiai to make particular choices when using this technology, like using Snapchat instead of ChatGPT.

AIAI PRICE-SMITH: I've seen its capabilities. And it's really cool and everything. But when someone's asking me to write a paper-- we had a grant proposal. And the idea-- obviously, it's a grant. So it's a new thing in my bio class. And so I was like, it's so dangerous.

You're like, oh, if I read what it said, then now it's really that-- those ideas and not necessarily my own. I'm not going to learn too much by having it spit something out. It's going to be hard to reword it and be like, OK, now I'm putting it in my own new words. At least to my knowledge, Snapchat doesn't really do that. It gives you a like paragraph type thing. So I think that gives me more guidelines.

It can be dangerous. You're like, oh, can you give me a few ideas? It gives you multiple paragraphs. And then it's like, well, there's the whole paper. Just like a Google search, it doesn't give too much. But it gives you a starter. I've used it for helping with acronyms and remembering things because I see a lot online about how it can be used as that sort of tool.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Emilio and Taylor shared how they want to keep a sharp line between their work and work generated by an AI.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: I just like to do my own work. Even if I have help from classmates, I'd rather still do it on my own rather than copy from them or reference their answer. I'd rather just do everything on my own. That way, I can have control of what I say and how I say it.

I learn more when I do things myself because I'm able to understand, I suppose, the background. So if I understand the background information, I'm able to understand what I'm doing now. What ChatGPT doesn't provide is an extensive view of the background information that I like.

TAYLOR LOWE: I find that I like to do my own work. I don't think I would learn as much if I were to write something into a prompt because I know that you can use it to siphon your research and to hone in on different topics. But I do enjoy scrolling through the internet and finding different sources.

MOLLY CHEHAK: Despite these concerns, these students have found uses and limitations with these kinds of tools. Tayah uses it to find information, for example. And then Emilio will talk about what he thinks ChatGPT can and can't do.

TAYAH RUBIO: When I'm searching something for class or I'm interested on a topic, ChatGPT-- I'm able to type in a question. It's able to pull a bunch of information and put it all in one summary versus googling. I have to exit tabs, go in and out. But with ChatGPT, it's a lot more fast and, I think, effective.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: One of the ways I use AI is to revise my work and check if I have the knowledge to complete an assignment. I complete whatever question I'm working on to the fullest of my ability. And then I go mainly ChatGPT to see if I have all the explanations needed for the answer of the question. If it adds something new, I don't add it to my own response because it's probably something that the professor didn't cover or something that they don't need.

So I don't really copy and paste from whatever the computer tells me. I just reference my answer and compare it to whatever ChatGPT tells me. I mainly do this with questions that I don't fully understand in context with the class. So I do paste in the question and some of my response.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: The students we talked with described ChatGPT as beneficial for checking work in general, brainstorming, checking comprehension, and helping with creating a bibliography. Here are some ways that Emilio and Taylor use it.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: When I have lab reports to do, the only thing I find it useful is to consolidate my information and create the abstract because I find it difficult to condense a 10-page lab report into a paragraph. I then compare it to my own. And then if I'm missing something that I didn't include in my own abstract, I then include it in my own abstract-- in my own writing.

TAYLOR LOWE: I find it tedious to manually create all your sources and citations. And so a lot of AI will actually be on your computer and check the website that you open and will create a citations list for you. I think that's actually a really helpful feature.

MOLLY CHEHAK: So instead of fully relying on ChatGPT or AI tools that offer essay-length writing, it seems like these students are using AI to check understanding or get them on the right track. Salvo Lavis is studying, among many things, higher education as a complex problem. He's been writing about his experience with ChatGPT on his blog and spoke with us about his experience as a graduate student using the tools.

SALVO LAVIS: Sometime during the last semester, I started thinking, how might this help me with some work I was doing? And I ended up asking ChatGPT some questions that I was thinking about in research I was doing. And I ended up going down this rabbit hole. I was essentially asking ChatGPT the questions I might ask of a research assistant.

So I started asking these research-style questions of ChatGPT. And it started spitting out these really impressive answers. And I thought, holy cow, this is cool. But then I started asking of it-- again, treating it like a research assistant. I thought, OK, well, you've given me some interesting things to think about. Tell

me where you got this information from because I want to go read more. And that's when ChatGPT started just fabricating sources wholesale.

And since then, I've learned that this is officially called hallucination. But when I would then ask ChatGPT, are you hallucinating these or are you making these things up, it would say, oh, yeah, it doesn't seem to be right, let me give you some more sources. And it would make those up. I have adopted a cautionary arm's-length relationship with ChatGPT for now.

[UPBEAT MUSIC]

MOLLY CHEHAK: This variety of applications and uses led us to wonder how these students will experience classes in the fall. To that end, we asked, what are some things you wish faculty would be doing around AI in the classroom? Here's Tayah again, followed by Emilio.

TAYAH RUBIO: I think it would be nice if faculty acknowledged that it exists. Sometimes, I feel like there's a little bit of a barrier, like we're walking around the topic, not wanting to say that AI exists or there's maybe fear that people are going to be cheating and using it. And I would like faculty to know that they could also integrate this into their classrooms. So there could be some fun assignments that you could potentially use ChatGPT, like doing critiques of some sort of letter or doing a critique of the book. See what ChatGPT says. See what a student has to say. And I think there are a lot of fun ways to integrate it versus almost pretending that it doesn't exist.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: I think faculty should acknowledge that a number of students will use ChatGPT to get some explanation or use it to complete assignments. Students will use it as a source of information not in the sense of, oh, this is my answer because the computer told me this is the answer, but in the sense of, oh, I now understand why an equation works. Some students use it as a source of explanation, as a source of background information, rather than the source of the answer.

I try to only use it for explanation of things I don't understand for small questions because then I'm able to fit that in my own understanding of the subject I'm trying to learn. If you don't go through the process the professor laid out, you're missing some background information that will be useful later.

I think faculty should use ChatGPT to answer their own questions or their own assignments to compare from student to the AI. That way, they'll have a basis to add in a rubric. So I think it should be added to a rubric. How much did you use AI? I don't think all subjects should do this because there are just some subjects that you can't use AI to help you answer questions.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Aiai suggested that she would like to have guardrails in the classroom to preserve integrity. Emilio then notes how AI can be abused if it's not addressed at the beginning of a course.

AIAI PRICE-SMITH: I know they have sites where you can also flip it and ask, was this written by AI? I think that there are ways to implement-- make sure that people are not just blatantly cheating or not doing any of the work.

EMILIO CAZARES BORBON: I think ChatGPT can lead to a lot of academic integrity cases. And I think if faculty are not careful in the way they explain how to use it in their class or if the student simply just abuses it, I think the trust between faculty and students will decrease over time.

MOLLY CHEHAK: Taylor recommends that faculty also think about the nature of what they're assigning, focusing on assignments that are as meaningful as possible.

TAYLOR LOWE: I haven't seen people using it for big assignments or things that they're really interested in. I think it tends to be there's a lot of busy work. You have to write two paragraphs about this. And then

all that stuff adds up. And then students end up not having time. And maybe they feel forced to use ChatGPT for stuff.

So I do think that is one thing professors could keep in mind. A lot of students, when they feel overwhelmed-- they're just going to go and put in a prompt on the computer when they feel like it's just not really an assignment that they have to use a lot of critical thinking.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Aiai shared how her professor this summer integrated AI into a capstone course assessment and the trust that this approach fostered.

AIAI PRICE-SMITH: I liked how my professor that I was just talking about with a theology class-- he did it where he was like, let's use ChatGPT. But ChatGPT is not perfect. So let's talk about what can be fixed. So that was an academic sense where he wasn't saying, don't use it at all. He's actually saying, here we are using it. And it is not completely correct. And we can do work together and learn more about how to make it better. And so he trusts us to use ChatGPT and use the resources we have. And he also expects and hopes that we're able to parse it out and be able to go on further beyond what ChatGPT just spits out.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Overall, it seems like students are really using AI like a tool rather than as an opportunity to avoid learning in classes. By treating AI as a tool, faculty can help model how students should be using AI strategically. Salvo noted that AI asks us all to consider some key questions about the learning project as a whole, and also calls for more dialogue between faculty and students.

SALVO LAVIS: I think that there needs to be a much more open dialogue between faculty and students about what it is the faculty are hoping that the students are getting out of the course and why that's important.

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KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: In the interest of fostering dialogue between faculty and students, we invited two faculty members to listen to some of the students' thoughts on AI and offer some responses. We hope this will inspire more dialogue between faculty and students. Both J and Mark appreciated how students were using AI in creative ways and were very careful about maintaining academic integrity. First, you'll hear from J, then Mark, followed by J again.

J. PALMERI: I really appreciated the student voices in this conversation and that they were incredibly thoughtful about how they were using it, and I think especially thinking of it as an extension of their writing process, potentially, rather than a replacement for it, which I thought was very insightful.

MARK FISHER: I think their encouragement of faculty to incorporate AI, think about how it can be used in assignments constructively, makes a lot of sense to me. And so for the most part, I'm very supportive of what they said.

J. PALMERI: I thought the students had really great advice. One of the things that I thought was really telling was that many of them had just heard from their faculty on issues of policy about when not to use it or the academic dishonesty implications and that that left them feeling perhaps a lack of trust and a lack of sense of, OK, well, what do I do? We all have at least checked out these tools.

And I think their suggestion that teachers should bring the tool into the classroom and have conversations with students and actively use some of these tools and then talk about how to use them ethically and responsibly and what some of the limitations of them are-- and I especially like their suggestion of looking at a response of an AI bot about a course topic and pointing out all the ways it is wrong and what it actually is missing, perhaps factually, about that course topic. Or then in other cases, I also think about

pointing out what it misses about their individual personal reaction because that's one thing that most of these AI tools can't do-- is they can't say, how does this course concept apply to my life, because they think by combining lots of texts that they've read. But they don't think by centering their own embodied lived experience and history in the world.

That's a thing that we as humans are uniquely good at. We can actually think about what our own embodied unique experience in the world gives us better if we can then look at what this bot does that doesn't have that and then figure out, how would we approach this topic differently if we brought our own personal embodied experience of the world to it?

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Both J. and Mark talked about the value of collaboration and partnership between students and AI and students and faculty. Here's Mark envisioning how students could partner with AI, followed by J.

MARK FISHER: Rather using it as a way of generating factual responses, seeing it rather as a collaborative dialogic partner-- I want to try to help or push students to see it as a roommate who's very, very clever and has infinite amounts of patience and is willing to sit down and talk through your work with you ad nauseam, long past where your roommate would have actually gone to bed, but to begin to see it as not a omniscient source of all knowledge, how we approach Google, but a fallible, but hyper-intelligent tutor who's going to read your work, who's going to comment on your work, who's going to help you clarify your ideas. So in that way, I do think that there's a lot of room to grow. I really appreciated, though, the integrity that was behind these students' use of it.

J. PALMERI: Think of it as a limited conversation partner. And when we see what it's missing, we see what we are adding as humans. And the students definitely led me to that with the suggestion. I like that they weren't like, let's just bring this in, and now it's going to write everything for us. They were more like, let's bring it in and talk about it and critique it and figure out what we as humans have to bring.

It makes sense to me that young people are better at thinking about this because they're looking forward to a world, knowing that these technologies are going to exist in it. And for the kinds of work they want to do, for the kinds of civic and social change they want to promote, they're going to need to be able to articulate what they as humans bring to the table that the AI technologies don't. And I think it's our job as instructors to help them do that, but also maybe recognize what we don't know-- I think all of us have a lot we don't know about AI technologies, the students and the faculty alike.

But I think the faculty, myself included, may have a deeper learning curve. And so it would behoove us to open up conversations with students, especially about those sticky questions about AI that we don't have the answers to that we might benefit by engaging in dialogue with our students and trying to figure out what the answers might be.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: Here's J. imagining how faculty could use AI to support students' learning.

J. PALMERI: One thing I found myself reflecting on is one of the interviewees talked about using it like it was Google. And the one thing that concerned me a little bit about that was the-- at least ChatGPT is not particularly good at showing the sources from the internet from which it's drawing its summaries. So it is hard to verify. And so as a teacher, I found myself thinking one of our goals might be to introduce other AI tools to students that might be better at this, such as the tool called Elicit, which can allow you to search databases of peer-reviewed articles and provides you some summary of that conversation. But it also provides you the information to go read the article for yourself and verify the validity of it.

And so I found myself thinking students are using these for research purposes. And a lot of our goal as teachers needs to be to help them figure out which tool might be best for that purpose and what are the ways they can critically evaluate it. It reminded me a little bit of Wikipedia. There was a time period when teachers just said, never use Wikipedia.

And the truth is we all google and look at Wikipedia when we're trying to find information. But what we moved towards was evaluate the entry see. How good it is. Look at the footnotes. Double-check what's there to make sure it's valid. Use it as a starting point, not endpoint, for research.

MOLLY CHEHAK: J. and Mark had thoughtful advice for students and faculty, as we are all learning to navigate this new reality.

J. PALMERI: We don't want to produce fear in our students. If we get a piece of writing that isn't quite meeting our expectations that seems odd, our first step should not be to accuse a student of using ChatGPT because there are not valid metrics out there for doing that. Our first step is to invite a conversation with that student. Ask them about their process of writing. Ask them what they were doing. And then give them advice about how to make it better.

The advice I would have for students who are experiencing fear is when in doubt, ask faculty what their policies are on AI if they don't tell you. And also, you can never go wrong by disclosing. When in doubt, disclose. If you're using words generated by AI, quote them and cite them and ask a librarian, the Writing Center, your faculty member for advice for how to do that. But even if you just used an AI for idea generation, you might drop a footnote next to that paragraph that just said, so my thinking here was influenced by a conversation I had with ChatGPT. But these words are my own.

You can't go wrong disclosing your use. Even if a faculty member might say, well, I would have preferred you not use that, they're certainly not going to accuse you of any kind of dishonesty if you disclose. So that would be my advice to students-- is when in doubt, just disclose your use. And if unsure, ask. And I think honestly, that's just good advice for college.

MARK FISHER: If I had one message to students if they're going to be listening to this, I think one of the things I've seen among my colleagues that has been behind a lot of the resistance is I think we're used to being experts in what we're teaching. And a lot of the impulse to ban it stems not from the desire to make the students' lives harder, but because we don't feel experts in it. And so we don't know how to get up in front of a class and teach them how to effectively use a technology that we don't really understand ourselves.

And so I really appreciate the way in which students said, trust us and work with us on this. I would really encourage them to extend that to their professors, as well, knowing that part of this process where we're trying to figure out how to use it creatively in assignments, there are going to be some things that go wrong there. Part of experimenting in this way is there are going to be some duds. There are going to be some assignments that just don't really work.

I'm planning to put ChatGPT up on the screen during my lecture tomorrow. And I have no idea what it's going to spit out. It may be a really boring 15 minutes where we're doing this. And so just, I think the charity goes both ways. And so to the extent that we're-- we see this as a collaborative process, we're going to give them some grace in terms of figuring out how they can use it most effectively. And it would be great if they could extend that our way, as well, and help us figure out how to do this as best we possibly can.

KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: While this conversation is far from over, we'll end today's episode on that note. As we continue to navigate a world that will include AIs in ways that we can't fully comprehend, all we can do is the best we possibly can.

MOLLY CHEHAK: We hope you found some good food for thought in today's episode of What We're Learning About Learning. Please reach out to CNDLS@georgetown.edu if you would like to join a teaching circle on AI or consult with a staff member about your classes. This episode was made possible by many people at CNDLS, including Eddie Maloney, Joe King, David Ebenbach, Sophie Grabiec, Eleri Syverson, and Stephanie Chae.

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KIM HUISMAN LUBRESKI: For more information about our podcast series and our guests, check out our show notes, where you'll find links to previous episodes, information about how to share your thoughts and ideas with us, our website and blog, and other resources. Again, I'm Kim Huisman Lubreski.

MOLLY CHEHAK: And I'm Molly Chehak. Thanks for listening.