JMU AI Task Force Spring Update:

JMU's Task Force on Artificial Intelligence has focused on four areas of exploration through the past academic year: authorship and the production of new knowledge; AI and the student experience; new contexts and meanings in higher education and society; and possible administrative applications of generative AI. We've undertaken this work in alignment with JMU's efforts in data governance, the Reengineering Madison project, and Presidential Goal #1b.

Together, Task Force teams have produced a rich set of preliminary findings and recommendations (February 2024 preliminary report), presented to the Board of Visitors (April 2024 slide deck), and — most recently — have compiled the additional takeaways and possible next directions outlined below.

Group 1: Authorship and New Knowledge

This Task Force sub-group convened a set of focus groups of faculty and staff from across campus in Spring 2024 to discuss the use of AI in teaching and scholarship. We used ChatGPT 4 to begin the process of summarizing the 6+ hours of discussion and our leadership group revised and prioritized what you see below. We want to share the key takeaways points and the key recommendations for future work from the discussions:

Key Takeaways from the Focus Group Transcripts

1. **Radical Transparency**: The necessity for transparent usage of AI in academic settings was a recurrent theme. This involves declaring the use of AI tools (and how they were used) in creating and editing academic work to uphold academic integrity and avoid ethical concerns.
2. **AI's Role in Learning and Skill Development**: Concerns were voiced about the balance between leveraging AI for efficiency and ensuring that students still develop critical thinking and fundamental skills. There is emphasis on teaching foundational skills without over-reliance on AI and the need to teach AI literacies.
3. **Disciplinary Difference**: The discussions reflected varied opinions and approaches toward AI across different departments and disciplines. Some advocate for strict guidelines to preserve academic integrity, while others promote more flexible, context-dependent uses of AI, for creativity and efficiency. We need to avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach so as to allow each discipline to best integrate AI.
4. **Academic Integrity and AI Detection**: The potential for AI to disrupt traditional notions of academic integrity was discussed, focusing on how AI-generated work can be detected and the implications for students and faculty regarding labor equity, false accusations, or overreliance on AI detection tools.
5. **Future of AI in Education**: There is an ongoing debate about how AI will reshape (or has already reshaped) educational practices (e.g., assigning fewer writing assignments, only assigning timed or in-class writing assessments) highlighting the need for ongoing dialogue and adaptation.

Key Recommendations from the Focus Group Discussions

1. **Develop Clear AI Usage Guidelines**: Establish clear, accessible guidelines on how AI can be used by students in educational settings, potentially categorized by risk or application area (similar to a traffic light system of green, yellow, and red).
2. **Enhance AI Literacy for Faculty and Students**: Integrate AI literacy into curricula to ensure that faculty and students understand how to use AI tools responsibly, ethically, and effectively. This is hoped to foster a deeper comprehension of why, when, and how AI can be applied in their work.
3. **Promote Transparency**: Advocate for the transparent use of AI across all academic endeavors, ensuring that all stakeholders, including students and faculty, openly declare the use of AI in their work.
4. **Engage in College and Unit Conversations**: Begin or continue conversations about how AI should be used by students in classwork and scholarship/creative activity, as well as what skills students will need as they enter the workforce or graduate school.
5. **Balance AI Use with Skill Development**: Encourage the use of AI to aid learning without compromising the development of essential skills. This might involve using AI for lower-level tasks while reserving higher-level cognitive tasks for humans.
6. **Regularly Update Policies and Practices**: Regularly review and update AI usage policies and practices to keep pace with technological advancements and shifts in pedagogical strategies, ensuring that educational practices remain relevant and effective.

As with any good research project, we find ourselves with more questions than answers. As we move into the 2024-2025 Academic Year, we will continue to offer opportunities for faculty to engage in discussion, both within colleges and units, and across the institution. Also, the Center for Faculty Innovation, the Libraries, and other groups around campus will develop and offer programming to help faculty learn more about AI and to talk about AI use in teaching and scholarship. To help us gear up to support you, please complete a quick 4-question survey as linked below:

Copy and paste the following URL to your preferred web browser to access the survey
https://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dascOjdinsYHW7A

Or scan the QR code below:

Please expect to hear more as we return to campus in August.

Group 2: AI and the Student Experience

To further knowledge of impacts related to AI and the student experience, this subgroup hosted informational interviews with students and campus partners who work directly with students. The Counseling Center, Academic Advising, Student Life, and Admissions were identified as departments who could provide expertise on how AI may impact the student experience. Some insights included:

- Practitioners expressed a general excitement in the possibilities of using AI. While ethical concerns remain around data and data privacy, AI may provide some efficiencies that will increase time spent engaging with students.
- Increased efficiencies may reduce staff workload during evenings or weekends and off hours.
- Concerns regarding how students are using AI remain unanswered. For example, will students use AI to bypass important university steps such as the Onebook provided by the Orientation and Transition team in order to get information about the institution?

Next-step recommendations include:

- Review other university models for managing the ethical concerns of AI in a student context.
- Also review departments doing similar work at different institutions to see how they are embedding AI into their work with students.
- Host focus groups with students to learn about their perspectives and how they are using AI in their JMU experiences.

Group 3: New Contexts and Meanings

This subgroup continued discussions to further its core findings and recommendations from February 2024, with attention to actions that could:

- leverage campus expertise on AI and its implications;
- foreground ethics, privacy, human agency, and social impact in future educational and research programs; and
- identify existing JMU curricular and administrative initiatives and groups that are poised to take the work forward in a sustainable, informed way.

We continue to recommend that JMU:

- Enhance students' capacity to engage as critical consumers of AI-enhanced and AI-generated media through increased attention to data and information literacy.
- Deliberately and broadly develop faculty and staff skills and knowledge in AI functions and underpinnings, and in the application of AI across the various professional fields and roles present in our university community.
- Study and actively promote more ethical and equitable frameworks to guide the development of AI policy and legislation, and to prepare students for the ethical application of artificial intelligence to the varied professional domains they will enter, all represented by JMU's colleges.

- Identify and critically contextualize the emergence of ubiquitous AI, positioning concerns within the broader context of human technological evolution and history, and reconsidering inherited views of superiority and inferiority when exploring the full spectrum of cognitive capabilities in both humans and machines.

Concrete next steps should include:

- Consideration of the moral heart of our own AI-enabled systems building, as an opportunity for JMU to exemplify and put into practice the socially and environmentally responsible approaches to AI that we would like to teach our students.
- Alignment of any new AI-related curriculum development and educational programming with next steps in the redesign of our General Education program, the offerings of Ethical Reasoning in Action and the Center for Faculty Innovation, and the data and information literacy expertise that is available through the JMU Libraries. Resourcing needs to support curricular efforts should be considered.
- Exploration of funding opportunities to support new research centers of excellence in AI, develop appropriate certificate or microcredentialling programs, and foster opportunities to engage with peer institutions in approaches to research and teaching with and on generative artificial intelligence.

Group 4: Administrative Applications of AI

An abbreviated list of major next steps for the Administrative Applications group includes:

- Engaging with and leveraging the work of the other Task Force groups.
- Piloting a Microsoft gAI engine which embeds in the Microsoft 365/Office applications to provide recommendations on impact, training, support, and models for campus use.
- Reviewing Microsoft gAI search tools in preparation for marketing this fall to students, faculty, and staff.
- Building a high-quality knowledge base for institutional processes, functions, and operations.
- Developing content strategy and model for training JMU-personalized chatbots. Initial focus is for administrative support staff and students.

In addition, we are continuing to actively align our work with that of JMU's Data Governance Council and the Reengineering Madison project.