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You do not have this authority -- Re: Mandatory Professional Development Courses on AI and Education

Carsten Holz <carstenholz@gmail.com>
To: [omitted] @ust.hk>

Tue, Sep 17, 2024 at 6:54 AM

Dear Professor [omitted / colleague at HKUST],

Thank you for your message.

I share your view that AI will have a significant impact on university education.

As you saw, my email to the provost was solely about the mandatory nature of the AI courses (and quizzes).

You mention the large impact AI has for teaching/research assistance/tutoring in your field. The impact of AI on the social sciences may be slightly different than in the natural sciences. I don't know. Diversity in teaching methods across faculty I would consider a 'positive.'

For my field of economics / China studies, I see two issues. (1) I would like my students to develop an argument on their own. I want them to be able to think creatively (independently). To approach an economic problem and be able to figure out how to solve it. To come up with different viewpoints to facts about the Chinese economy that they may encounter in the news or in their work. My approach so far has been to encourage students to use AI however they find useful, and in the exam they still need to show that they can think on their own. (At the end of last semester I ran a Mentimeter survey of how they used AI for the course, and the response was that they used AI mostly for polishing their presentations.)

As to assessment, I don't need AI to grade a multiple choice exam (AI is pretty good at coming up with M/C questions, though). I can probably use AI to grade factually oriented short questions, and I am hesitant to do so because it's still I who is responsible to the students for correct/fair grading. In essay questions, I want to see students' ideas / creative thinking, and I am not sure that AI can grade which idea or insight is better than another.

(2) For me, teaching is not a mechanical programming exercise (even if it appears treated very much so at HKUST). There is a reason why Coursera hasn't taken off much more. My teaching "philosophy"—and I insist on academic freedom to choose one's own teaching "philosophy"—aligns closely with Parker J. Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* (1998). POE's 50-word summary of the book is not useful, a 100-word summary is somewhat: Palmer advocates for a "profound relationship between teaching and personal identity. He emphasizes that effective teaching stems from the teacher's inner life and authenticity. Palmer argues that educators must confront their fears and vulnerabilities to create a nurturing environment for students. He highlights the importance of community and dialogue in the teaching process, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. Ultimately, the book champions the idea

that teaching is not just a profession but a vocation that requires courage, self-reflection, and a commitment to fostering genuine connections.” -- HKUST managers, in my view, push faculty in a fundamentally wrong, mechanistic direction. (I found the second “common core transition” illegitimate under ‘academic freedom,’ but I can’t complain about everything and some things are complicated, with perhaps pressure from the University Grants Council, "Total Quality Control," etc.) Pushing I can accept, options to learn more about AI I very much welcome; ‘mandatory’ goes too far.

Best,

Carsten

[Quoted text hidden]