Chat GPT on Campus One Year Out:

A View from GLCA Faculty

By Paul A. Djupe & Lew Ludwig
Denison University

We've just had a year with ChatGPT in our lives, but according to commentators, AI has left higher ed in ruin. Emerging from the rubble are panicked professors with a sole "assignment" – to prevent AI from sowing chaos this year. Others foresee AI instigating a 1984-style surveillance state to inhibit cheating. In another article, faculty are polarized, suggesting AI taps our primal instincts to provoke a culture war that will consume campuses. Of course, more than one commentator has pronounced the benediction for student writing assignments written outside of class, and at least one issued a call to cancel the class one of us is slated to teach in the spring – writing 101.

But is this the way faculty think about AI? Are faculty at each other's throats over AI?

Instead of examining the squeaky wheels in this debate, we sought to capture what faculty are doing and thinking about AI through a survey of **over 500 Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) faculty from 11 institutions.** The survey asked whether and how they used AI and on what platforms.

Many Faculty Are AI Users, at least Incidentally
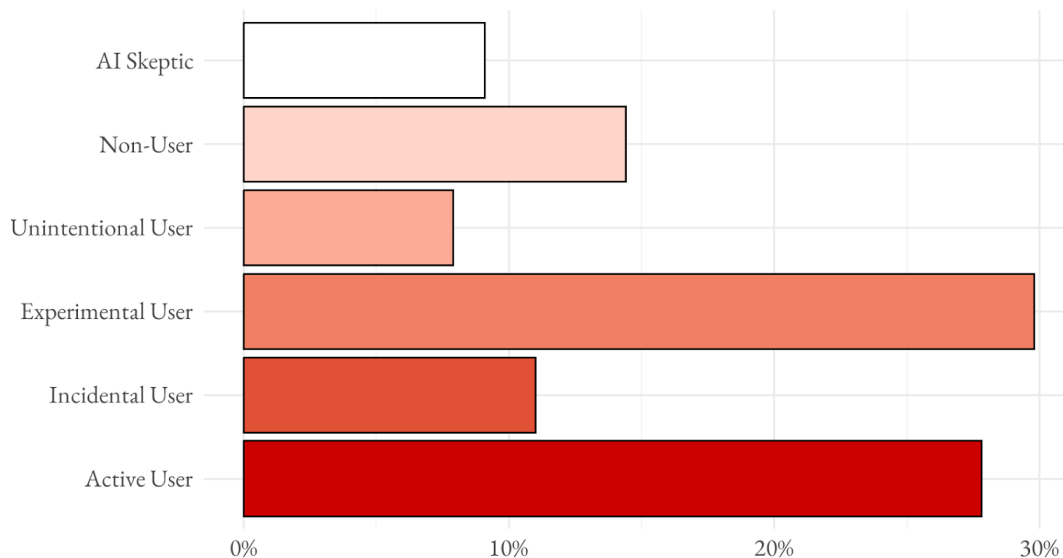
Source: October Faculty Survey

But especially important are the results of their thoughts and concerns about AI and higher education. A critical uniting factor appears to be their beliefs about AI's likely influence on their students' futures.

The dominant frame in commentary about AI and higher education is cheating. AI, like the spread of the internet, will offer lazy students easy access to research and writing. At least the internet paper mills would often supply papers tangential to the prompt that wouldn't typically earn top grades. Still, ChatGPT is quite a bit more advanced and can tailor essays to the particular prompt within seconds (though it too can have problems with accuracy).

The faculty surveyed, however, lean toward the cheating frame with just a slim majority (**52 percent**) agreeing that "AI in education is fundamentally an issue of academic integrity – unless faculty specify its use, using AI for classwork is cheating." Still, many faculty see uses for AI in the classroom, with only a minority (**29 percent**) agreeing that "Using AI in coursework undermines the value of a college education." And, in any event, very few view AI from a war-like footing – just **8 percent** of faculty agree that "Those faculty who integrate AI into their courses are just making the problem worse."

Nor do faculty admit emotional responses that indicate they are bracing for battle. Very few are angry about AI (though there are a few, of course), and few are happy about it. More common were excitement and hopefulness. The dominant emotional response noted, however, was anxiety – faculty reported experiencing "some of that emotion." Anxiety can be debilitating in high doses, but at lower levels, it signals a heightened state of awareness and is associated with learning and engagement, for example, in political campaigns.

Faculty Are a Bit Anxious, but Not Worked Up About AI

'When you think of AI rapidly growing in use in academia, what emotions do you feel?'

Excitement
Hopelessness
Hopefulness
Happiness
Anxiety
Anger

None of that emotion   A lot of that emotion
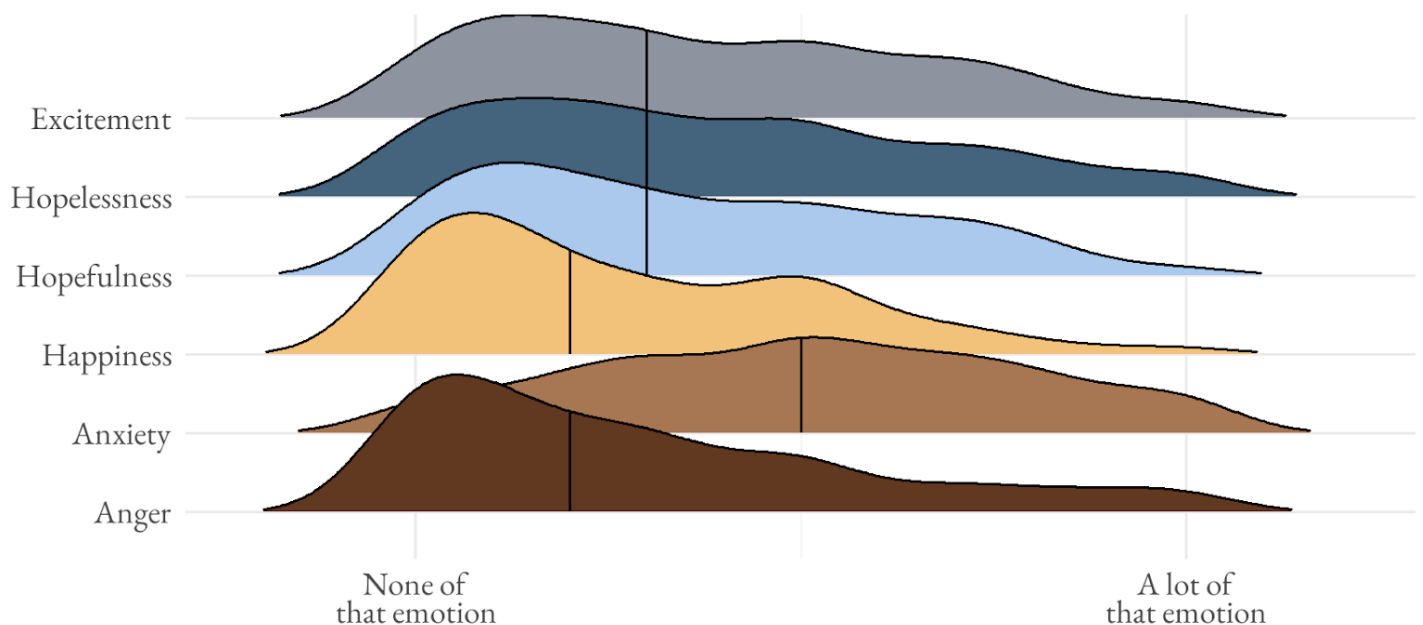
Source: October Faculty Survey.
Note: Black lines are medians.

Instead, a sense of practicality and deep concern for their students pervades the responses. Faculty are unsure if AI integration in their courses "will give our students a competitive advantage" – a third agree, but the plurality (**42 percent**) say they don't know. But there is essentially no disagreement (only **5 percent**) and very high agreement (**76 percent**) that "AI is likely to play an important role in my students' careers." This may be the most remarkable result of all – all divisions of the college agree about this with differences of less than ten percentage points among them. There is a bit less of an embrace of the "need to leverage AI to better prepare our students for the workforce" (**61 percent** agree and only **10 percent** disagree). Still, these are not the makings of a culture war.

Faculty Across Divisions Agree About AI in Students' Futures

'AI is likely to play an important role in my students' careers.'
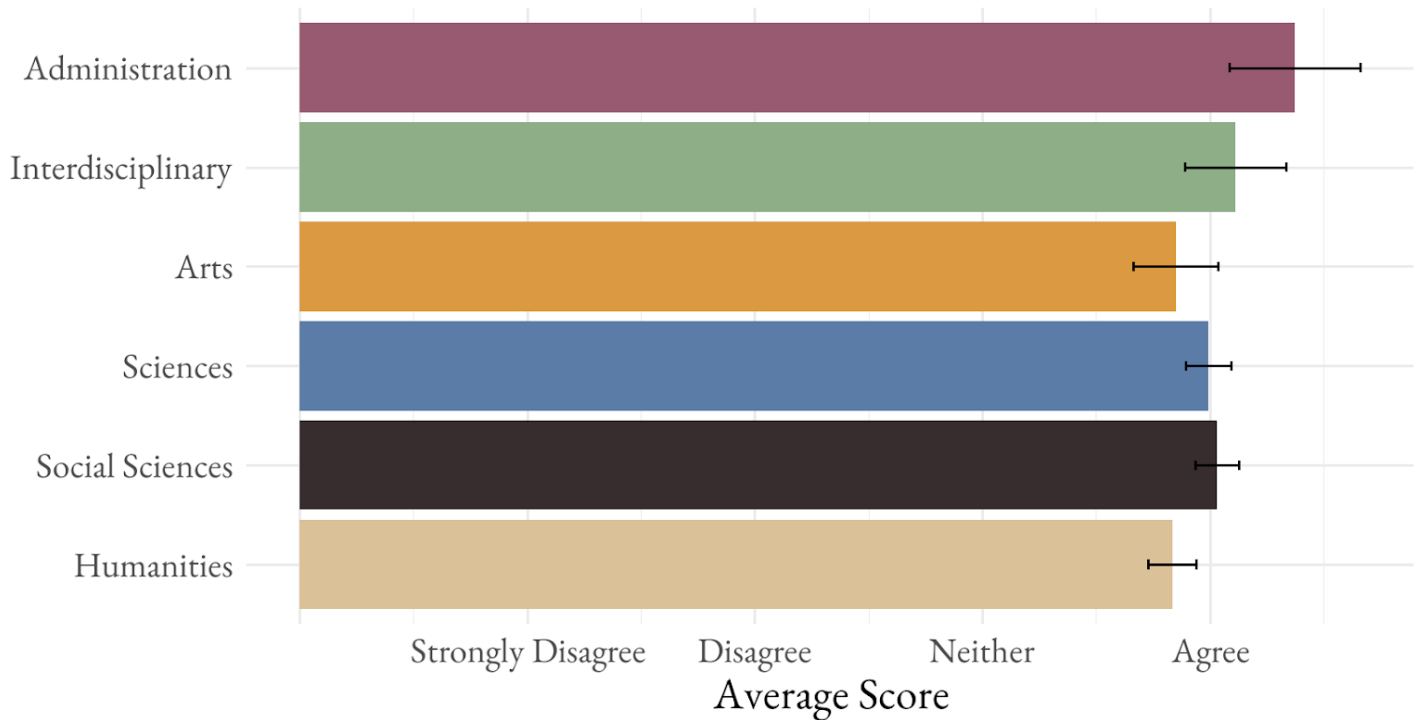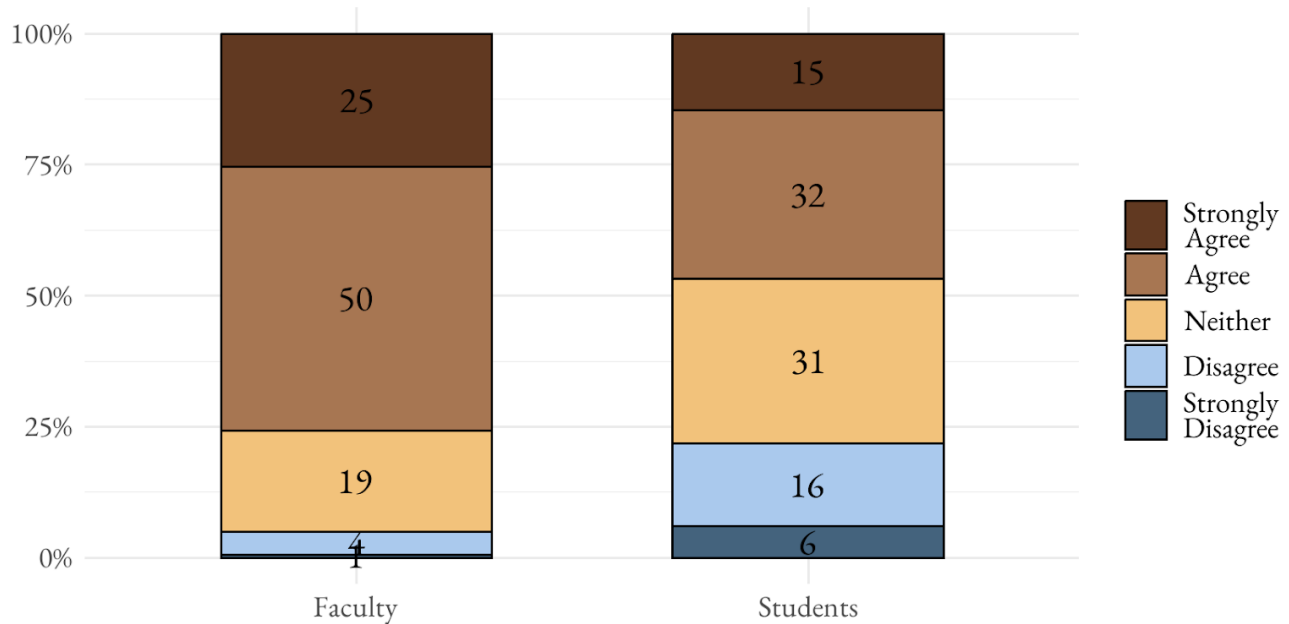

Source: October Faculty Survey.

Faculty are quickly realizing that there is effectively no technological solution to reliably detecting AI use and that "Nobody wins in an academic-integrity arms race." Faculty in the GLCA schools are on the same page. Respondent faculty also have almost no appetite for authoritarian solutions – only **6.5 percent** suggest we need to ban students from accessing AI. It is fascinating to see faculty pessimistic about catching AI users (only **24 percent** agree they can catch AI users). At the same time, about 500 students surveyed at Denison University were much more likely to believe they would be caught (**44 percent** agreed). That will quickly change.

Faculty More Convinced About AI's Role for Students

'AI is likely to play an important role in my [students'] eventual career.'

Source: October 2023 Surveys.

The practical or perhaps resigned orientation of faculty toward AI is tempered by the black box – early tests of various chatbots found disturbing racial and other biases, and companies will not release information about their proprietary algorithms. This practice, of course, runs counter to academic values of openness and peer review. So it is no surprise to find faculty concerned about student privacy (**53 percent** agree) but more so the potential for AI to amplify existing biases (**73 percent** agree). A serious stumbling block to further AI buy-in from faculty is the need "...to have transparency in the algorithms and data used by generative AI tools in education" (**85 percent** agree).

How faculty think about AI will change as the technology evolves and student use becomes more sophisticated. What is unhelpful at the moment is the all-to-easy adoption of polarization and culture war metaphors borrowed from American politics to characterize faculty reactions. At least in this corner of academia, though faculty differ in some respect, most are taking a practical approach, prioritizing the likely needs of their students and their desire to provide a meaningful education while considering the ethical ramifications of generative AI as it develops quickly.