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Editorial: The Impact of AI on Christian Higher Education: A Call to Lead

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EDITORIAL

The Impact of AI on Christian Higher Education: A Call to Lead

Andrew S.I.D. Lang

*T*his editorial argues that Christian educational institutions should view AI as a powerful tool that can enhance and enrich the learning experience. Instead of banning the use of AI in writing assignments, institutions should teach students how to use these tools effectively and ethically. This requires a new essential core literacy for both students and faculty: AI literacy—the ability to understand, evaluate, and effectively engage with AI technologies. Additionally, the editorial emphasizes the need for Christian institutions to take a leadership role in addressing ethical considerations related to the adoption of AI, by offering guidance on fundamental moral issues and prioritizing the education of their students on the ethical use of AI from a Christian worldview. Finally, the editorial calls for the creation of AI institutes, formation of ethical AI coalitions, and sharing data, research, and resources among institutions to ensure the development of unbiased and moral AI models in the future.

Part One: AI in the Classroom

Ars Est Celare Artem

The release of free and user-friendly artificial intelligence (AI) models capable of generating original content (generative AI) has given rise to concerns and fears regarding its potential impact on education. These fears have come to the forefront of public discourse with the recent public release of OpenAI's ChatGPT on November 30th, 2022 (OpenAI, 2022).

As with many new technologies, generative AI applications such as ChatGPT have prompted predictable hysteria. Some pessimists believe that these tools will bring about educational collapse (Weissman, 2023), massive job displacement (Mok & Zinkula, 2023), and public bewilderment and manipulation that will need governmental regulation (Grady, 2023). Some have even claimed that these models have achieved self-awareness and are sad about it (De Cosmo, 2022; D’Agostino, 2023; Roach, 2023).

While Christian educational institutions (who prioritize the formative development of students, encompassing spirit, mind, and body) will always have an important relevance for society (Brown, 2022; Paige, 2023), ChatGPT is causing disruption in education because many faculty members are concerned about students using AI to complete their writing assignments. This is because AI-generated text is novel and difficult to detect. One hard-headed response to this is to ban its use completely (Elsen-Rooney, 2023; Jimenez, 2023). Others have updated their integrity policies (Levin, 2023) or designed ways to make traditional assignments AI-proof (Klein, 2023)—good luck with that. But these responses are misguided.

Magistri et Discipuli

The era of relying solely on strong writing skills to produce high-quality writing has ended, and as a result, we must adapt our approach to education. It is time to shift our perspective from viewing AI as a threat to recognizing it as a powerful tool that can enhance and enrich the learning experience. Rather than prohibiting students from using AI writing tools, we should teach them how to use these tools effectively and efficiently. By embracing the potential of AI in education, we have the opportunity to equip our students with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their purpose in life. As Christian educators, this is a calling we must answer (Villasenor, 2023); however, it’s not just about technical proficiency. It’s equally important to equip students with an understanding of ethical considerations when using AI, such as avoiding bias and promoting responsible decision making. This will produce not only highly skilled professionals but also responsible leaders (Lang, 2023).

Thus, we need a new essential core literacy for both students and faculty: AI literacy—the ability to understand, evaluate, and effectively engage with AI technologies. By fostering AI literacy, we can help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate and analyze the information presented to them by AI tools while also recognizing any biases or limitations that may be inherent in the underlying algorithms (Mock, 2023). This will enable students to make informed decisions, challenge assumptions, and develop their own ideas, even in the face of new technologies that may seem more intelligent than they are.

Part Two: The Intelligent Campus

Ālea lacta Est

The die has been cast and the impact that AI will have on higher education will be profound, revolutionizing operations at every level from the boardroom to the classroom. Quick pivoting and swift action are essential because things are moving quickly and falling behind could mean being left behind.

The integration of transformative AI-based tools in academic institutions can bring numerous and immediate benefits. Financial aid allocation can be optimized through AI to enhance retention rates while AI-powered algorithms can be utilized in marketing, recruitment campaigns, fundraising, and alumni engagement. Additionally, AI can be used to identify at-risk students and automatically alert faculty and advisors when a student is in danger of dropping out. These systems can be integrated with student health and wellness services to support those dealing with stress, anxiety, and other personal challenges. By implementing these measures, universities can establish intelligent campuses that thrive (Kravitz, 2023, 27:54).

However, to truly harness the potential of AI, universities must embrace its unprecedented capabilities that already far surpass those of human beings. Institutions must adopt a forward-thinking mindset that leverages AI's capabilities to not only enhance human abilities but also surpass them, rather than simply replacing them through automation (Brynjolfsson, 2022).

Non Ducor, Duco

Christian institutions have an opportunity to lead the way in addressing ethical considerations related to the adoption of AI. Christian thought leaders can play a crucial role in offering guidance on fundamental moral issues, including ethical principles that should be incorporated into AI systems (Brown, 2022; Paige, 2023). Christian institutions should create AI institutes, form ethical AI coalitions, and embrace this transformative technology by becoming leaders through sharing data, research, and resources with each other. Additionally, they should prioritize educating their students on the ethical use of AI from a Christian worldview and encourage graduates to work in the AI industry. This will help ensure the development of unbiased and moral AI models in the future.

Without assuming the mantle of leadership, there is a genuine danger that AI may become infused with the same critical-theory-based biases already prevalent in our society and entrenched in many secular institutions. President Biden recently signed an executive order that “directs agencies to ensure that their own use of artificial intelligence and automated systems also advances equity” (Hall, 2023). It would be tragic to witness AI—a technology with immense potential to change the world for the better—being sacrificed on the altar of ideology. In the worst-case scenario, AI could become a platform for anti-Christian philosophies, where certain Christian ideas are censored, and others are classified as thought crimes.

Thus, Christian institutions must develop a robust understanding of AI both in technical expertise and domain knowledge. This requires fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration across departments, particularly among faculty. A spirit of experimentation, learning, and collaboration is essential to developing and implementing new solutions and ideas. The future of Christian higher education depends on how institutions choose to approach the integration of AI, and the potential benefits are immense for those who lead the way.

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