# Let's Talk AI: Building Awareness and Understanding Together

Summary from the Tufts AI Literacy Forums, November 21st & 22nd 2024[1]

"I think Tufts needs a university level conversation about what is expected of students in the classroom as well as what students can expect from Tufts at graduation. AI has thrown the overall mission of the university into high relief."
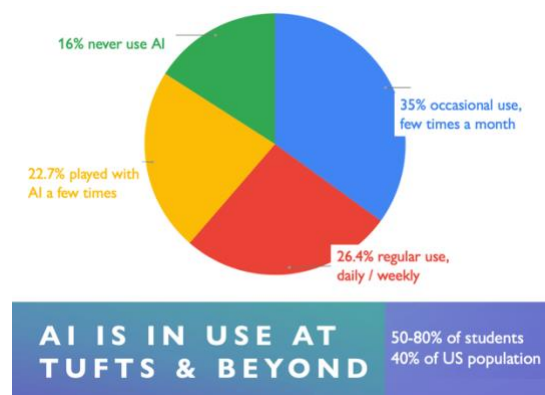
AI use at Tufts, 85% of the 166 individuals registered for the forums, reflections national trends. Though biased towards those joining an AI conversation, this is consistent with the 2/3rds of incoming students who report using AI and the ~80% of undergraduates and ~40% of US workers reported in surveys. The significant minority of the community who never uses AI (15% registrants/30% incoming students) is smaller than those (60% registrants /40% incoming students) who are using AI at least monthly.

While the present usefulness of AI varies (~50% find it helpful for their work, 22% not), over half of attendees & 80% of incoming students believe that AI may play a significant role in their future work. Many registrants believe that AI tools give professional advantages and more than half of the incoming students thought those using AI tools would have an academic advantage.

Registrants voiced numerous concerns about AI, including its environmental impact and misuse of intellectual property, and negative impacts of using it on learning and exposure to biased content. Additionally, 20% of forum registrants worried about accusations of dishonesty or cheating, a concern echoed by ~85% of incoming students who fear its use could lead to accusations of plagiarism or academic misconduct.

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[1] This summary represents the perspectives of ~65 faculty, ~60 staff, and ~35 students: ~100 individuals attended, ~80 joining online and ~40 in person, and an additional ~70 individuals contributed their perspectives only through the registration survey. The handouts (2024-11-21 Online, 2024-11-22 In Person) & the slides were also shared with participants.

Training and guidance around AI use, including its application to disciplinary contexts and curriculum development, is wanted by the community. These comments aligned with the 70% of incoming students who want instructors to demonstrate how to use AI tools to learn. Moreover, many voiced a desire for a cohesive Tufts-framework for making decisions around boundaries of AI use, including Academic Integrity Guidelines, citation, research, and professional practices.

"When I turn to AI, it's often time because I don't have the right conditions to do my heart-work, and so AI tools help me survive the moment but not address these bigger picture/system-level questions."
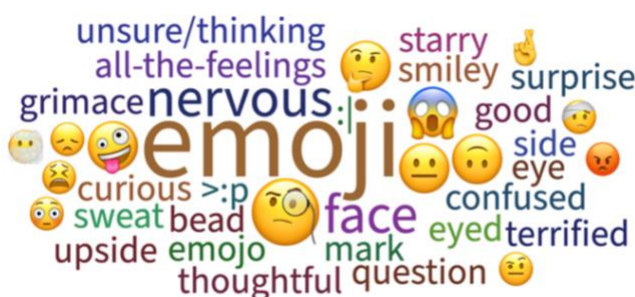

Figure 1 Wordle of attendees feelings about AI

The first forum discussed the uses of AI across Tufts schools and the roles. Administrative tasks are being aided by AI tools that summarize meetings, lecture notes and course feedback forms. Technical tasks, such as coding and data analysis are being supported by AI tools. As a frequent writing companion, AL tools help to generate ideas, outlines, drafts, and to correct grammar and flow for essays, papers, lab reports, statements for promotion/review, letters of recommendation, emails & more. AI is also being used to develop teaching materials, as an interactive tutor, and even as an emotional support companion. These uses algin with the incoming student survey, where of those using AI, 50% indicate using it to help them learn new things, 40% to revise and improve writing and 9% to help with a disability - a use highlighted during the forum discussions.

As the first forum concluded, attendees called for balancing individual agency with consistency across Tufts schools. Resources – such as training and protected time - to learn practical skills to apply these tools and to explore their ethical and environmental implications is needed. Attendees particularly wanted to understand how AI tools could enhance our capacities without undermining critical thinking, creativity or learning.

"I worry that AI will impact the way that my students work, which might mean that the skill development I teach will not be important."

The in-person forum built on the prior discussions, drawing on the shared notes and the ~20 participants who attended both forums. Conversations revealed a multitude of

perspectives: some seeing AI as transformative and calling for its integration into our work, while others drew on concerns about its impact on learning, privacy and sustainability and advocated for more limited and cautious interactions with AI.

Key themes emerged:

The opportunities of AI as a learning tool: Participants were excited about AI as a personalized tutor, customizing education to individual learning needs and helping individuals address ADHD, social anxiety, procrastination, and other challenges. Discussions highlighted AI's potential to assist with writing tasks, improve language and communication, and experiment with new ideas.

Challenges to Authenticity, Learning and Creativity: Concerns were raise about uses of AI without critically evaluating the output, learning the material, and failing to develop/undermining skills of critical thinking and reflection. Participants also worried that an "AI voice" might be overriding individual creativity and personal expression.

Balancing ethical and environmental concerns: Sustainability was a reoccurring theme. Discussions touched on AI's energy and resource consumption, the human costs (labor practices, appropriation of intellectual property, bias, etc.) of its creation and issues of data privacy and security implications corporately owned AI tools.

Guidance and Support from Tufts: There was a call to develop a nuanced set of guidelines for safe, ethical, mindful, informed uses of AI that would provide both room for individual agency and offer consistency across Tufts and for University-supported education for all faculty, staff and students widening awareness of guidelines and helping community members develop critical AI literacy skills.

The second forum concluded with brainstorming Tufts-specific principles of AI literacy. To address the current ambiguity arising from individuals varied use of AI, Tufts must in alignment with its values, establish clear guidance for secure and ethical engagement that protects individual privacy and minimizes harms, and provides a universal basic understanding of AI for all members of the Tufts Community. This is necessary embrace the rapid pace and complexity of AI, while reflecting on the emotional and societal impacts of AI.

> *"The world's citizens [need to understand], what AI can do and what it cannot do, when AI is useful and when its use should be questioned, and how AI might be steered for the public good... This includes the knowledge, understanding, skills, and value orientation, that together, might be called AI Literacy. "* - UNESCO, International Forum on AI & Futures of Education, 2020