

# A Student led Artificial Intelligence Forum

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has rapidly become an integral part of modern society, with widespread applications emerging as recently as 2023. Its influence on education has been profound, eliciting diverse reactions among academics. While some institutions resist AI integration, believing they can consistently detect and prevent its use, others have embraced it as a valuable teaching tool. This paper presents the outcomes from the inaugural AI forum held at our college, showcasing student feedback, faculty observations, and plans for future forums.

In collaboration with faculty, students from our college hosted a blue-ribbon panel forum to engage in meaningful dialogue about the future of AI. The forum featured student-led discussions focusing on three primary areas: (1) the impact of AI on the workplace, specifically addressing concerns such as "Will I have a job?" (2) future developments in AI and what's next, and (3) the convergence of AI with other emerging technologies. After introductions, panelists shared their personal journeys with AI, leading into in-depth discussions of these key themes, followed by an engaging Q&A session with students and faculty.

This paper presents faculty observations, insights from student surveys, and reflections on the overall experience. It underscores the significance of the forum for our college community and explains why such discussions are both timely and essential. Testimonials and survey responses provide further context, highlighting the broader academic community's reactions to the evolving role of AI in shaping the future.

## Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force in modern society, influencing a wide range of sectors, including education, healthcare, manufacturing, and creative industries. The rapid advancements in AI technologies over the past few years have sparked widespread interest and debate, particularly within academic communities. The Transformer model [1], and scaling [2] unveiled the capabilities of GPT-3 as being able to achieve more generality, which have profoundly shaped our understanding of AI's potential. These groundbreaking works, among others, have laid the foundation for the current wave of AI applications that are reshaping how we live and learn.

While some institutions have been hesitant to embrace AI, viewing it as a challenge to traditional teaching and evaluation methods, others have identified its potential as an innovative tool for enhancing educational outcomes. This dichotomy underscores the importance of fostering informed discussions about AI's role in academia and society at large. For instance, the educational implications of generative AI, have been emphasized to bring both opportunities and challenges to the classroom [3].

However, not all perspectives align with the idea that AI will be a revolutionary force. There have been strong critiques to large language models like GPT-3, highlighting concerns about bias, environmental impact, and overhyped capabilities. Critics argue that AI, while impressive in specific applications, may not fundamentally transform society to the degree its proponents suggest. These discussions are essential in grounding expectations and ensuring that the deployment of AI aligns with ethical and sustainable practices [4].

Recent developments, such as OpenAI's innovations with GPT-4.5 (O1) and GPT-5 (O3), have reignited these debates. OpenAI's blog posts on O1 and O3 reveal breakthroughs in efficiency and multimodal learning, further advancing the capabilities of AI systems. These models demonstrate enhanced performance in generating human-like text, image recognition, and problem-solving. Their release has intensified discussions around the responsible integration of AI into education and other fields, as these tools become increasingly versatile and accessible.

At our college, the inaugural AI forum provided a unique platform to examine these critical issues. The event served as a confluence of ideas, bringing together students, faculty, and industry professionals to discuss the implications of AI on education, the workplace, and the future of technology. The forum highlighted a spectrum of perspectives, from optimistic views on AI's potential to address global challenges to more cautious stances emphasizing ethical dilemmas and societal risks. By exploring insights from foundational AI research alongside practical applications, this paper synthesizes reflections from participants and identifies actionable strategies for future educational initiatives. Through this analysis, we aim to contribute to the ongoing dialogue within the academic community, particularly in the context of engineering education, where understanding and leveraging AI's capabilities are increasingly essential.

## Student led AI forum

Student-led initiatives like this inaugural AI forum are especially significant given AI's status as a rapidly growing and relatively new field with profound implications for the job market and education. By taking the lead, students not only engage directly with the complexities of AI but also position themselves as proactive learners and future professionals in a world where understanding and leveraging AI could define career trajectories. This leadership fosters critical skills such as adaptability, interdisciplinary thinking, and ethical decision-making—qualities that will be invaluable as AI continues to disrupt traditional industries and redefine professional roles. Moreover, with the education system itself grappling with how to integrate AI into teaching and evaluation, student-led discussions ensure that the curriculum evolves to meet the needs of those it serves. By exploring AI's potential and its limitations, students not only prepare themselves for the challenges and opportunities of an AI-driven job market but also contribute to shaping an educational framework that equips their peers to thrive in this dynamic landscape.

Eight students were selected among the members of the college's tech club, who were responsible for leading and moderating the panel, as well as coming up with the questions and discussion topics for the forum.

The panel on AI took place on September 25th 2024, and was sponsored by the XXXX School of Engineering Science and Technology and the XXXX School of Business. In an effort to foster meaningful dialogue about the future of AI, students and faculty from our college collaborated to host a blue-ribbon panel forum. This event featured student-led discussions and expert insights, structured around three primary themes:

1. The Impact of AI on the Workplace: This theme addressed concerns about job security, encapsulated by the question, "Will I have a job?" Panelists explored the transformative potential of AI in various industries and its implications for future employment.

2. Future Developments in AI: Discussions went into the trajectory of AI innovations, focusing on emerging trends and technologies that are likely to shape its evolution.

3. The Convergence of AI with Other Emerging Technologies: This segment examined how AI intersects with technologies such as blockchain, quantum computing, and extended reality, envisioning a future of integrated advancements.

After opening remarks and introductions, panelists shared their personal journeys with AI, offering diverse perspectives that enriched the discussions. These narratives set the stage for indepth explorations of the key themes, culminating in an interactive Q&A session with students and faculty.

The panelists, Dr. Tamara XXXX, Dr. James XXXX, Dean XXXX, Devon XXXX, and Sierra XXXX are introduced below.

Dean XXXX

Dean XXXX is a college professor with over 25 years of teaching experience in computer science and mathematics. Dean was given his first Artificial Intelligence course back in 2002, with students using the Lisp programming language to implement a Minimax lookahead strategy for the classic board game Othello. Since then, he has taught classes, conducted personal research, and written stories involving AI. Since the boom of ChatGPT and other large language models, Dean has focused his attention on the ethics of AI and its potential ramifications on society. This semester, Dean is teaching a 400-level computer science course and a 100-level first-year seminar focusing on the use and ethics of artificial intelligence. In his free time, Dean likes to collect comic books, perform firespinning, and explore the vast rivers and trails of the Pennsylvania wilderness.

## Dr. James XXXX

Dr. James XXXX is a Professor of Strategy, Cybersecurity Management, and Law at XXXX, and the founding Dean of the XXXX School of Business from 2016 to 2019. He teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in his areas of expertise. His research interests include ethical AI, intellectual property implications of AI, and the risks of negative social disintermediation and disruption arising from the rapid and uncontrolled advances of AI. Besides his research and service, he founded and is CEO of XXXX., based on proprietary methodologies to control insider threats (US patent # XXXX).

# Dr. Tamara XXXX

Dr. Tamara XXXX, XXXX (ret.), is an Associate Professor of Cybersecurity and Strategy at XXXX, an affiliate researcher with Cybersecurity at XXXX, and a Board member for the XXXX, an international think tank. While on active duty, Dr. XXXX's thought leadership informed the standup of XXXX, where she developed artificial intelligence strategies to support the strategic deterrence mission for Joint Space, Cyber, and Global Strategic Operations. Her work at the XXXX in Amman, Jordan, earned her the 2011 Information Operations Officer of the Year. More recently, Dr. XXXX was a member of the 2020 "Dr. Evil Task Force" with the XXXX, identifying future threats from AI and other emerging technologies to inform DoD investments. She holds a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from XXXX, an M.S. in Engineering Management from the XXXX, and a Doctorate of Business Administration from XXXX. Her research expertise includes cybersecurity, AI, emerging technology, and information warfare.

## Sierra XXXX

Sierra XXXX is an AI & Machine Learning Applied Scientist at XXXX, an ed-tech company leveraging AI to create, classify, and analyze educational content. With a BA in Linguistics and an MS in Artificial Intelligence, Sierra brings a unique perspective to the intersection of language and AI. Her work focuses on effectively utilizing AI to both generate and assess content. Sierra is particularly interested in addressing the biases and ethical concerns surrounding AI, both in its current applications and potential future developments, as well as exploring ways to better incorporate truth into AI systems. Her multidisciplinary background allows her to offer insights into the technical, linguistic, and societal implications of AI.

## Devon XXXX

Devon XXXX, is a December 2023 graduate of the XXXX cybersecurity management program. He was awarded first place in the Northeast Decision Sciences Institute 2024 undergraduate research competition in Cambridge, MA. His research proposed the use of AI in video game design. He was awarded the Powder Mill Fellowship, and is actively engaged with the York community blending digital art and AI. This fellowship is allowing Devon to work as a game developer. He is focused on creating "Echoes of the Abyss," a 2D pixel game that integrates AI into every stage of the game design process. Part of his work includes collaborating within the Digital Art and Artificial Intelligence (DAAI) major, where he is bringing AI tools into art classrooms, enriching student experiences and transforming their perspectives on AI's capabilities. With experience in various LLMs and image generation models, Devon is pushing the boundaries of AI in art and game creation.

# **Survey results**

Leading up to the forum, we conducted a survey with faculty, panelists, and students at the college regarding AI usage. The survey included questions about AI use for academic or personal tasks. Figure 1 depicts usage of AI by faculty/panelists and students, painting a picture of a widely adopted technology, where all faculty responders do use the technology as well as the majority of students.



Figure 1. Survey response on AI usage by (a) faculty and panelists (b) students.

The wide adoption of AI, however, comes without being paired with proper training on how to use AI responsibly. Figure 2 depicts the percentage of the surveyed student and faculty/panelists who have received formal training in using AI.



Figure 2. Survey response on formal AI training by (a) faculty and panelists, (b) students.

With the ever-increasing capabilities and adoption of AI, training and guidance must meet this demand, and a forum like the one discussed herein might be a strong opportunity to start this important conversation in our Campuses.

# **Insights from the Forum**

Students and faculty observations were collected to provide a holistic view of the forum's impact and its key takeaways. These reflections highlight a diverse range of perspectives, from students' concerns about how AI might shape their future careers and education to faculty insights on the challenges of adapting teaching methodologies to incorporate AI effectively. The observations discussed both the opportunities AI presents, such as enhanced learning tools and career pathways, and the ethical and societal challenges it introduces. Together, these reflections offer a comprehensive understanding of the forum's success in fostering dialogue, raising awareness, and preparing the academic community for an AI-driven future.

## **Faculty observations**

Faculty members noted the forum's success in bridging gaps between academic theory and practical application. They highlighted the importance of fostering critical thinking and ethical considerations in AI-related discussions. Additionally, faculty observed increased student enthusiasm for understanding AI's role in their respective fields.

Faculty 1:

"As engineering educators, we're no strangers to "the next big thing." Over the decades, we've adapted our curricula to accommodate the rise of CAD software, the spread of the internet, and the proliferation of 3D printing. But Artificial Intelligence is different. Ai is not just another tool to add to the engineering toolbox—it is a paradigm shift, one that promises to reshape not only how we engineer but how we think about engineering itself. This forum was a powerful reminder that we, as educators, cannot afford to lag behind in understanding and teaching AI.

The pace of AI development is staggering. Tools that seemed like science fiction just a few years ago are now widely accessible, and their capabilities are growing exponentially. In this context, failing to integrate AI into engineering education isn't just a missed opportunity—it's a disservice to our students. As AI becomes more capable of automating calculations, simulations, and even creative tasks, the role of the engineer is evolving. Our students must be prepared to engage with this shift, not as passive users but as informed leaders who understand both the power and the limitations of these technologies.

This forum underscored how essential it is for educators to stay ahead of the curve. The discussions made clear that AI is not in a distant horizon; it is here, and it is advancing rapidly. Students are already encountering AI tools in internships and projects, and they are looking to us for guidance on how to navigate this new landscape. If we do not rise to the challenge—if we continue teaching as though AI is just another trend—we risk leaving our students unprepared for the most significant technological shift of their lifetimes.

AI has the potential to be the single most transformative force in engineering since the Industrial Revolution. It is not just changing what we can build; it is changing how we think about building. For educators, that means rethinking not only what we teach but how we teach it. Forums like this one are critical because they help us confront this challenge head-on. They give us a space to reflect, to learn, and to adapt—because if we're not keeping up with AI, we're already falling behind."

#### Faculty 2:

"Faculty concerns regarding AI were likely somewhat different from those of students. Nonetheless, there are areas of overlap. The primary reason for putting this reflection together was to explore how AI is being used by our students, understand their concerns, and gain insights into its broader implications. While there is no shortage of books and opinions on the topic [5-10], there is still no consensus on the best ways to integrate AI into education or how to mitigate its potential for misuse.

Moreover, the discussions among our panelists reflected a similarly complex and sometimes even dysfunctional relationship with AI. One panelist does not use AI and fears its implications, echoing concerns raised by Mo Gawdat [6]. In contrast, others leaned toward the perspectives presented in Life 3.0 and The Singularity Is Nearer [7-8]. One panelist firmly stated that AI will never possess emotions or genuine feelings. My

own perspective aligns more closely with the views expressed in Kahn's Mastering AI [9] or Narayanan and Kapoor's AI Snake Oil [10].

I find this diversity of opinions fascinating; it underscores AI's complexity and makes it an even more compelling subject of research and application. While faculty members are often drawn to the latest "shiny object," AI is not merely another passing trend; it is poised to be transformative across education, research, and many other sectors of society."

Perhaps the most pressing concern among faculty is students' increasing reliance on AI for homework and assignments, which may hinder long-term retention of course material. I have already observed a growing tendency among students to rely on short-term memory (i.e., the frontal lobe) to get through exams rather than engaging their long-term memory (i.e., the hippocampus). This shift will likely necessitate a paradigm change in teaching and assessment strategies.

Repetition may become more critical, and traditional evaluation methods, such as closedbook exams and other "old-school" techniques, may regain prominence as we assess and refine our current pedagogical approaches. Given the rapid evolution of AI, faculty must remain adaptable, continuously evaluating the impact of these technologies on student learning and academic integrity."

#### **Student observations**

Students expressed enthusiasm for the forum as a unique opportunity to engage deeply with the implications of AI in their academic and professional lives. Overall, student observations revealed a spectrum of reactions to the forum. Many expressed a heightened awareness of AI's potential to reshape their future careers, alongside concerns about job displacement and ethical dilemmas. A significant number of students appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with experts, citing the interactive format as a key strength of the event.

#### Student 1:

"One day this semester we were given the opportunity to attend York College's first AI symposium. Here we were able to hear the thoughts and experiences the panel had regarding the topic. I appreciated the varying professions and opinions each panelist had. A computer science professor, a professor in the business school, a previous student now focused on making video games with the aid of AI, someone who worked/works in defense, and a panelist who actually works with AI on a daily basis all shared what they had experienced. I found it interesting how these opinions varied. Throughout the duration of the panel, there were varying questions asked about what AI is, how it is viewed by each panelist, and most importantly, what they predicted for the future. I found the panelist Sierra's version to be the most 'real' in my opinion. I think even though AI is constantly progressing, it is still learning—causing it to be 'dumb' in a sense. I wouldn't necessarily think the other panelists were 'fearmongering,' but I feel as though the ending segment of AI overlords was a little over the top (albeit pulling from Sci-Fi literature).

All-in-all I felt as though this panel was interesting and meaningful in its contributions to important questions of how AI can be used, what we expect, and what we can predict. We will never truly know what the future will be with AI, but I think it is incredibly important to understand it as it is right now. Whether it be homework help or 'intimate friends,' AI proves to be an incredibly useful tool to a lot of people. With this fact, it is incredibly important to understand both its strengths and its flaws."

#### Student 2:

"I attended the AI panel on September 25, 2024, and thought it was quite an interesting experience, to say the least. There were many topics explored, including ethics, dangers, possible repercussions, the arts, and much more. The topic I would like to dive into most is the ethics of using AI. The idea brought up about how AI like ChatGPT pulls information from its database, which can come from anywhere, and then you can just use it definitely got me thinking. The ethical grey area, it seems, is that we have always been required to cite sources when referencing or using someone else's work, but you can't exactly cite ChatGPT's provided answer. This causes an issue because we don't know from where or who this information is coming from, and once their work enters ChatGPT's network, it never leaves. The people who initially did this work will never receive the credit for it, and that causes issues when control of your intellectual property is a constitutional right. How could you possibly control what happens to your intellectual property when ChatGPT is spreading it and never saying who or where it came from? This is where we could see a change in the formula for AI. We could and should see these AI engines disclose from who and where the information they are pulling is from when it gives an answer containing intellectual property. This is obviously easier said than done, but there has to be a solution to the ethical problem with AI, and hopefully this problem is solved sooner rather than later in order to uphold the integrity of intellectual property usage."

#### Student 3:

"There were a few topics from the AI panel that really stuck out to me. I thought the company in Mexico where all the robots were doing the manufacturing was very interesting since the only people employed in the plant were those who had to maintain the robots. This seems to be the direction our society is headed in and made me consider some of the implications. As more jobs are taken by robots, that leaves many people with a threatened ability to find work. Theoretically, this could progress to a point where most people do not have to work anymore. If this were to happen, then how would people earn money? Perhaps stipends from the government would be a solution, but that's a very dystopian idea and its application could become dangerous. Hopefully, that idea is far from what will occur in the future. We truly do not need 1984 and Fahrenheit 451 to become reality. However, I do think that it is important to acknowledge the dangers of AI so they can be mitigated to the best of our ability. On a more positive note, it could allow for a larger emphasis to be placed on the arts. I do not think most people would like robots to take over the music industry, for example. AI could have a role, such as being a tool in the songwriting process, but it absolutely should not replace singers. That would

be extremely unpleasant to listeners. Also, even with AI writing lyrics, the dataset it is trained on could cause copyright issues and lawsuits. This copyright issue and AI's use in art was another topic of discussion during the symposium. It is already being used for this purpose and so this already needs to be addressed. It will be interesting to see how this issue is handled in the future, but as the panel also mentioned, it may be advancing too rapidly for anything to be done. Overall, I really enjoyed the discussion, and it was a lot of fun to go with my friends. Ultimately, I would attend something like this in the future both at York College and as I am advancing in my career."

## **Future forums**

Building on the success of this inaugural event, plans for future forums include expanding the scope of discussions to address the growing complexity and reach of AI. While the forum covered critical topics such as ethics, automation, and the arts, it became evident that these discussions merely scratched the surface of what needs to be explored. Future forums will aim to expand participation, inviting a wider range of industry professionals and academic experts, including those working on AI's implications for intellectual property, global economic shifts, and the societal impact of automation.

Additionally, the overwhelming student enthusiasm for shaping and leading these discussions has highlighted the importance of enhanced student involvement. Future events will provide more opportunities for students to present research, moderate panels, and contribute reflections, ensuring their voices remain central to these dialogues.

A more in-depth focus on ethics and equity will also be essential, particularly as AI progresses at an unprecedented pace, raising new challenges related to fairness, transparency, and accessibility. Addressing these issues holistically will help provide a balanced understanding of AI's benefits and risks, encouraging thoughtful engagement from both students and faculty.

Recognizing the unique role of AI in the arts, future forums will continue to explore its potential to revolutionize creative industries, while also addressing concerns about originality, copyright, and the preservation of human creativity.

Finally, the introduction of hands-on workshops will ensure that discussions are not limited to theory but are complemented by practical applications, allowing participants to engage directly with AI tools and scenarios. With AI rapidly evolving, these forums must adapt to address emerging trends and challenges, fostering a dynamic and ongoing dialogue that equips the academic community to navigate and shape an AI-driven future.

# Conclusion

The inaugural AI forum marked a significant step in our college's engagement with the rapidly evolving field of artificial intelligence. Student reflections illuminated a wide array of perspectives, from ethical concerns about intellectual property to visions of how AI could enhance creativity and reshape the workforce. These reflections underscored the transformative potential of AI while also emphasizing the need for critical examination of its implications.

By fostering open dialogue and critical inquiry, the forum equipped participants with valuable insights and skills to navigate an AI-driven future. Discussions extended beyond the classroom, bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world applications. Faculty observations highlighted the importance of integrating AI literacy into curricula, ensuring that students are not only prepared to use AI tools but also to question and shape their ethical and societal impacts. Meanwhile, students' enthusiasm revealed a hunger for more opportunities to engage with these pressing issues, whether through research, leadership roles, or practical applications.

The forum also served as a reminder of AI's duality—its promise to revolutionize industries and improve lives, balanced by its potential to disrupt existing structures and exacerbate inequalities. As recent advancements, such as OpenAI's O1 and O3, push the boundaries of what AI can achieve, academic institutions must stay at the forefront of these developments. This means not only keeping pace with technological advancements but also fostering a space where critical, interdisciplinary discussions can thrive.

As AI continues to transform education and society, forums like this will remain essential. They offer a platform for addressing emerging challenges, from the ethical considerations [4] to the technical breakthroughs driving innovation in fields like engineering and the arts. By encouraging students and faculty to think collaboratively and proactively, these initiatives prepare the academic community to leverage AI's potential while safeguarding against its risks. Ultimately, the success of this forum lies in its ability to spark a larger, ongoing conversation—one that equips students and educators alike to navigate and shape an AI-powered world responsibly and equitably.

Appendix AI panel podcast:

The AI panel was posted in 3 parts accessible via the links below:

Part 1:

 $\underline{https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/part-1-wmd-presents-the-york-college-of/id1572928802?i=1000674872220}$ 

Part 2:

 $\underline{https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/part-1-wmd-presents-the-york-college-of/id1572928802?i=1000674872220}$ 

Part 3:

 $\underline{https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/part-3-wmd-presents-the-york-college-of/id1572928802?i=1000676540228$ 

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