

Final Sabbatical Report
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AI in Communication and Media Studies: Bridging Academic Learning and Career Readiness

My sabbatical project focused on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the Communication and Media Studies curriculum, with particular attention to preparing students for an evolving professional landscape. The project began from the premise that AI is rapidly changing communication and media industries and that our curriculum must evolve accordingly. Throughout the sabbatical, I explored emerging AI tools and professional practices, engaged with colleagues, alumni, and industry professionals, and considered how AI literacy, ethical use, and career readiness can be more intentionally incorporated into the student experience.

One of the most important outcomes of this work has been a clearer understanding that AI competency is becoming an essential component of career preparation. Conversations with alumni and professionals working in communication and media reinforced that AI is increasingly embedded in professional workflows, including content development, research, audience analysis, strategy, marketing, and creative production. These conversations further demonstrated that simply teaching students about AI is insufficient. Students need opportunities to learn how to use AI thoughtfully, critically, ethically, and effectively as a professional tool. Preparing students to enter competitive communication and media careers now requires helping them understand both what AI can do and how human expertise, creativity, critical thinking, and judgment add value alongside these technologies.

The sabbatical also strengthened my conviction that a blanket “no AI” policy is no longer sufficient. AI tools are becoming increasingly embedded in the technologies students and professionals already use, including writing, design, productivity, and learning-management platforms such as Canvas. As these tools become more integrated and less easily separated from everyday academic work, faculty need to move beyond simple prohibition and instead provide students with clear, thoughtful guidance about appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI. This is particularly important because students are navigating different AI expectations in every course. We owe students transparent policies that explain not only what is permitted, but why, and that help them develop the judgment needed to use AI responsibly across academic and professional contexts.

The sabbatical also generated opportunities for collaboration and dissemination that expanded considerably beyond the scope of my original proposal. Most significantly, this work contributed to the development and planning of the CSU/Ai4 applied research conference, creating an opportunity to bring together faculty and industry partners to explore AI. The project also led to a subsequent course-release opportunity to work with Nathan Evans and the CSU Chancellor's Office as an AI thought partner, collaborating with Centers for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) across the CSU system. This work has allowed me to extend the questions explored during my sabbatical beyond Communication and Media Studies and contribute to broader conversations about how CSU campuses can respond thoughtfully and strategically to AI.

Research, professional conversations, exploration of emerging tools, and ongoing engagement with colleagues have also informed revisions to my own teaching. I have continued developing approaches for integrating AI into Communication and Media Studies courses not simply as a technology students encounter, but as a tool they learn to evaluate and use within authentic disciplinary and career contexts. This includes incorporating AI into professional communication, media production, research, career exploration, skills development, and preparation for the job-search process.

Ultimately, the sabbatical reinforced the urgency of preparing students for a workforce in which AI will increasingly be part of their professional lives. It also expanded the impact of the original project from individual course and curriculum development to campus- and system-level conversations about AI, teaching, and career readiness. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity the sabbatical provided to dedicate sustained time and attention to this important and rapidly evolving area of teaching and learning. The experience has allowed me to more intentionally integrate AI skills, tools, and ethical considerations into my courses and has strengthened my commitment to ensuring that our curriculum evolves alongside the professions our students are preparing to enter. Moving forward, I will continue incorporating opportunities for students to develop practical AI literacy alongside the critical thinking, creativity, communication, and ethical judgment that remain central to our discipline. My goal is to ensure that our graduates leave Sonoma State not only prepared to enter the workforce, but also able to demonstrate the contemporary skills and competencies that will make them competitive and marketable in an increasingly AI-integrated job market.