Memo

To: Senate Steering Committee (AY 2022-2023)

        Britt Rios-Ellis, PhD
        Provost

        Amy Banes-Berceli, PhD
        Associate Provost for Operations

From: Sam Srauy, PhD
        Associate Professor of Communication and Academic Computing Committee
        (2022-2023)

CC: Kathy Dailey

RE: End of the year report. Academic Computing Committee (2022-2023).

Dear Provost Rios-Ellis,
Assoc. Provost Banes-Berceli,
and Senate Steering Committee:

I respectfully submit this report as chair of the Academic Computing Committee for the academic year 2022-2023. This report memorializes our work during this term along with some recommendations. We formally met as a team on five occasions and continued our work across the University's Google Spaces application. I would like to report on the major project and the on-going committee support work in which we engaged.

Major Project
As you know, ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence/machine learning technologies have caught the public imagination recently. Public discourse in mass media surrounding the technology have tended to reflect a growing concern for the threat that such technologies constitute towards what counts as "a person's individual work." In particular, this discourse evokes the challenge this and similar technologies have to the work of universities, including our own. As an institution of learning, how shall we understand the products of these technologies in relation to students' outputs?

In our work, we identified a few other units that are also engaging with this issue: the Dean of Students' Office (Michael Wadsworth) and CETL (Sarah Hosch). We have also identified the Kresge Library as a necessary partner in these discussions and will bring them into the discussion in the next academic year.

While our committee is still in the process of wrestling with this concern, we do have some observations we can provide at this time.

Perhaps the most important observation is <u>these technologies are permanently a part of the sociocultural (and, therefore, academic) environment.</u>

We cannot nor should not regulate AI/ML out of existence within our community.

<u>What should concern our institution is not the technology, as such, but the way in which the technology is used.</u> We noted that if we are to question the legitimacy of AI/ML tools — in the abstract— in the university environment, we must contend with what constitutes AI/ML. As we understand, AI/ML is a generative, procedural technology that produces content with a user's input. This happens by way of feeding the machine learning component with an ever increasing sample of human products in an attempt to produce an output that is akin to what a person might produce.

1) AI/ML outputs are the results of human inputs. As these inputs (e.g., human written texts) necessarily contain the <u>dominant discourses that circulate within societies, we should expect the pre-existing biases to be embedded in the outputs.</u>

2) The social space in which the technology is trained may not have the nuance or intellectual rigor that is expected from our students. Therefore, we ask: <u>Are the outputs likely to be sufficiently rigorous in its academic knowledge to be used nefariously?</u> If such outputs are poorly argued or academically flimsy, would a hypothetical student submitting an AI/ML work as their own be a threat to the standing of other students?
   a) If, as such time in the future, this is no longer the case, there would be a larger philosophical discussion about the nature of human knowledge. That would be, of course, outside the scope of this body.

3) How should we consider such a student submission? <u>Would it not constitute an act of academic dishonesty, in the same sense as plagiarism?</u> **If so, the university's existing academic integrity policy covers such issues.** Indeed, in our work, we have uncovered that other universities also take such a view— it is an act of academic dishonesty that would be covered by institutional policies.

4) How shall we understand if a student uses such AI/ML outputs as a starting point for their own work? If, as we have noted, the outputs are insufficiently rigorous, the hypothetical student would still need to work the product into an appropriate class submission. That means <u>the student would be using the technology merely as a tool.</u>

This itself is not an issue for concern, per se, as <u>the student's knowledge would presumably be evident in the subsequent reworking.</u> Indeed, tools such as Grammarly, Google's search algorithms, and spell check/grammar check tools commonly found in word processing software (e.g., Microsoft Word or Google Docs) have employed these technologies for years. We have always understood that using technology to correct spelling is not academic dishonesty, for example.

5) <u>This technology and its use constitutes new potential for accessibility.</u> We note that for many non-native speakers or first-generation higher education students AI/ML may provide a useful tool to start an assignment, as often the act of starting may be daunting. All languages have culturally specific idiosyncrasies. Grammarly, for instance, provides an extra hand to students navigating unfamiliar spaces. Such help is aligned with Oakland University's embrace of inclusion.

6) <u>The technology is unavoidable</u>. For instance, I am currently writing this memo in Google Docs, an application provided by our institution. By default, the software suggests phrases and words based on the content of the sentence I type. This feature cannot be disabled in these software. As I am typing, the software makes some useful suggestions and some less than useful predictions. I still need to rework the suggestions. I am, by definition, using AI/ML technology. But this is also clearly my own work as I am reworking the text. I do not believe we would reasonably call this academically dishonest.

7) Generally speaking, the purpose of an assignment is to assess or exercise a students' understanding of subject matter knowledge. <u>Faculty assignments are already asking students to engage with material that AI/ML could not know.</u> As we assign class work, what the expectations and context of that assignment are only understandable in the context of the class. Let us suppose, for instance, we create an assignment that is designed to assess a student's understanding of a concept, and that concept is later challenged or recontextualised. Let us also suppose, the challenges to that concept would be addressed subsequently in the semester. Then a student whose paper already addresses that advanced concept might suggest a closer investigation because that student presumably would not know that yet. <u>The body of human knowledge is dynamic. AI/ML may have access to that larger body of knowledge. But it could never have access to the specific context of an instructor's class.</u>

8) Assessments are, therefore, always contextual. <u>To the extent that context needs to be buttressed by faculty may need to be at the instructional design level.</u>

The notes we have provided herein are the present state of our work. Please accept these ideas as the present state of our work and not a final submission of our ideas.

Minor Projects
The Academic Computing Committee is also tasked with keeping a pulse on the needs of various university stakeholders. As such, UTS, CSITS, eLearning, student representatives, and faculty members (i.e., the committee) also roundtable the needs, confusion, and issues that constitute our regular work. This continues to be fruitful.
- In the beginning of the new academic year and on a regular basis we intend to reach out to academic units via open-ended solicitations. We intend this as a way to keep abreast of

stakeholder needs.

One area that we wish to present is the issue of access to technology. We note that beyond the academic units, there is a question of access to technology among students and other campus stakeholders. Currently the university regularly cycles personal computing equipment, as is the case with all institutions our size. While we do have student checkout of equipment at the Student Technology Center, the amount of computing gear available is insufficient for the needs/demands of our students. Moreover, as we cycle our equipment, we regularly find use for them by other members of our community. But we don't know if there is sufficient access for them. For example, we have no idea if AP has access to these renewed equipment.

We therefore wish to ask you: As we cycle through our equipment, are we able to provide these computing gear to students either via the Student Congress (i.e., Student Technology Center) or for sale directly to them in an as-is condition? This would help ameliorate the needs of our students and community members.

This concludes a summation of the work outputs for our committee in the 2022-2023 academic year. Again, I appreciate your time. Please feel free to contact us with any questions and suggestions. We welcome the opportunity to continue to serve the campus community in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Srauy, PhD
Associate Professor
Academic Computing Committee Chair