POTEACH.LEARN.SHARE

Teaching in the era of gen AI

Episode 6: Leading through change: (Pt. 2) Addressing the challenges of gen AI

Episode description

In part two of this three-part episode, the conversation turns to the hard questions gen AI raises for teaching and assessment. Moving beyond promise and possibility, the guests examine practical and structural challenges facing universities, including privacy, ethics, access, and uneven adoption. They highlight a deeper pedagogical concern: increasingly "frictionless" AI tools may undermine the productive struggle essential to learning, critical thinking, and skill development. The discussion explores what this means for course design and assessment, calling for structural changes that emphasize process, dialogue, and applied learning—while acknowledging faculty workload pressures and the temptation to revert to traditional exams. The episode concludes by underscoring the importance of grounded, community-based faculty support, shared resources, and practical examples that help instructors adapt without starting from scratch.

Listen to Part 1

Transcript

Jasmine Parent: Welcome to Teach.Learn.Share, a podcast that thoughtfully explores teaching and learning practices in higher ed. I'm Jasmine Parent, an Educational Development and Digital Learning Designer. This podcast is brought to you by Teaching and Academic Programs at McGill University, also known as TAP. We're recording today from Montreal, Quebec, on unceded land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabeg nations. We honor their stewardship as we live and work on these lands.

So, welcome back to another episode of our fifth series: *Teaching in the era of gen AI*. I'm here with the co-host of this series, Adam Finkelstein, the Associate Director of Learning Environments.

Adam Finkelstein: Thanks, Jasmine, happy to be here! So, we're about to dive into part 2 of this 3-part episode where we interview Associate and Vice Provosts of Teaching and Learning from three of Canada's leading universities, Professor Chris Buddle from McGill University, Dr. Simon Bates from University of British Columbia, and Professor Susan McCann from University of Toronto.

Jasmine Parent: So, in part 1, we discussed the opportunities that gen AI is offering teaching and learning in higher ed. That episode explores gen AI's potential in fundamentally reshaping things like assessment, course design, student support, accessibility, and many other institutional practices. Our guests often used the word "catalyst," which was a word that invites the community to re-examine these long-standing assumptions about teaching, learning, assessment, and what our core mission is as a higher ed institution itself.

In this episode, we are going to be intentionally switching gears. So, this part of the discussion is a little bit heavier and it's where things get a little more grounded and, in some ways, that may feel a

little more uncomfortable. We're going to be digging into the challenges, including structural barriers, the hurdles of assessment redesign, faculty workload, and that very real tension between these powerful new AI tools and how learning actually happens.

Adam Finkelstein: Absolutely, Jasmine. And, you know, one of the really interesting things that … that keeps coming up is this idea of friction. Or another way of putting it is thinking of this cognitive dissonance. Because, like, on the one hand, we want students to struggle. We want students to have a little bit of uncertainty, and we want them to be able to work through some of these problems. But then on the other hand, we have AI coming in, which is meant to streamline, and make things efficient and fast and easier and … and simpler for individuals to be able to get to some of those great ideas. And … and that's a real cognitive dissonance that we have to kind of weigh against each other. Like, where do we intervene to say, okay, you know, we want students to struggle here, but here we want them to accelerate and make things easier with AI. And so, you know, this is one of the most difficult dichotomies to work through. And … and this episode and … and many of our episodes that we're talking about here talk about this friction because we really don't want our students undercutting their own learning process. We really want to make sure that they're taking advantage of the tools that they have, but not hurting themselves, as well.

Jasmine Parent: And I'm just going to point out that this part of the conversation isn't meant to be anti-AI. It's just really meant to be reflective and thoughtful about how, where, and when these AI tools should be used. So, let's jump back into the conversation.

Adam Finkelstein: So, usually I'm the one talking about opportunities and … and all the … all the wonderful things about AI, but now, I get to pose the opposite question, which is great … which is, sort of, based on a lot of these opportunities, there obviously are a clear number of challenges, and you even alluded to a number of them in your comments. I think one of the next things in the next five years is, you know, what structural barriers at our universities do we need to try and shake up and break down to be able to get past some of these challenges that you … you might identify?

Prof. Chris Buddle: So, one of the big challenges that we all have to grapple with, we, institutionally, let's say, is this question of … of access, privacy, data management, cost of the … of the tools, etcetera. We all have to grapple with this because this is a real challenge because we … and I …I love Simon's point about accessibility and the opportunity that … that AI has around accessible learning, but it … it … we have to navigate with the … with the real hard costs and the ethical questions that we have to grapple with. We haven't done that yet at … at the … at the universities generally, or in society generally. There's some really big questions that we need to grapple with on the … on the ethics of what we're doing.

And I think one of the biggest challenges, and … and Adam, you and I have talked a lot about this, is … I think there's a fairly bimodal distribution in uptake and experience, let's say, in the … in the use of generative AI, from early adopters, heavy users, people that are thoughtful about it, to other groups that want nothing to do with it, and they think it's the end of the world, etcetera.

So, we have a gulf, and I think one of the challenges is going to be to find a way to … to … to fill that middle that's … that's really right now, I think, an area of … of real opportunity. So, those briefly, I think some of the challenges that I see, Adam.

Prof. Simon Bates: In … in terms of challenges, one of the things I worry about a lot, and I know that's shared across many faculty members, across many institutions, is … is this going to be a good

thing for teaching and learning, or could it inadvertently erode some of the very critical thinking skills that students come to university to develop, to hone, and to master in particular disciplinary contexts?

And that's not an easy question to answer at the moment because we haven't done the experiments. We haven't seen the evidence. There's some signposts that would maybe lead us to believe that … that too much of this and not used thoughtfully in a way that supports evidence-based practice that is good for learning can actually be detrimental.

One of the things I have observed in the last couple of years is the developers of these tools are trying to make it easier and easier to get what you want out of them, to the point where now, it will choose the model for you. You don't even have to think about what particular model you're going to use. So, they're being designed as increasingly frictionless experiences for people in terms of interactions, right? This might be automatically offered to you after a web search or after doing one particular task. That's in real tension to what educators know about how important friction is in learning, how important desirable difficulty is, how important struggle is in learning, in real mastery of something.

So, I think having those two things in … in real tension really means that we have to be very, very thoughtful about, again, I'll go back to this … this phrase that's almost become a mantra for me: "How, where, and if" these tools are incorporated into courses and into assessments. And there is very, very strong evidence, I think, or increasingly strong evidence about maintaining spaces where you don't want students to over rely on these tools for fostering exactly the sort of human and interpersonal skills that we've been talking about.

In … in terms of structural barriers, we're talking about assessment redesign, we're talking about learning outcomes, we're talking about program learning outcomes that define what kinds of graduates we will be graduating within our disciplines. This … this process at every university I've ever interacted with is slow, and it is deliberate. And that, again, is in stark contrast to the pace at which these tools and technologies are advancing.

So, Chris mentioned, you know, sort of private … privacy, ethics, institutional control, if you like, where is the data? I'll add a couple of other ones to that. I think there's a … there's a real challenge in the … in the opacity of these models. They're not transparent at all in terms of how you get what you get out of them. And I am no computer scientist, but I've dabbled enough to understand that … that this is a real challenge. It's not easily transparent why these LLMs and tools produce the outputs that they do, or indeed why they produce the hallucinations or the concerning outputs that they've also been … been shown to do.

And then the last challenge I'll flag is one that actually came loud and clear through feedback from our students—and that is environmental concerns about the increased use of these tools. And … and that led us a little bit on a journey. We … we'd not really thought about that. We … we did some work to try and understand.

And of course, the sort of environmental footprint of single queries is minimal. It's when you aggregate it over millions or billions of queries. And the fact that these are concentrated in particular, you know, sort of geographical locations where data centers happen to be located.

But it turns out, Chris mentioned the pandemic. One of the things that did change after the pandemic is we … we now routinely rely on video conferencing software like Zoom and Teams, and

… and I don't think as our institution, we've really understood the extent of our digital footprint in environmental terms for the ways that we now work. AI use is a part of that, but it's only one part of it. It's set to grow, certainly, over time. But that's an example of a challenge that really our students prompted us to think deeply about. And it was quite a revelation to realize, yeah, we've not really done any accounting for the digital environmental footprint of the university in … in the world that we now inhabit post-COVID.

Prof. Chris Buddle: Simon, if I could add one little piece to something you added about the im … importance of the difficulty of learning and that AI tools, you know, will … will impact that to some degree. I was just talking to a student yesterday who raised this as a concern that students have.

They … they see very clearly that learning and education is not meant to be easy. There is a struggle component that's part of personal development and growth that comes with learning. So … so, students are worried about that too, which I thought extremely interesting. There are no shortcuts to … to good education and learning, right, that's … that's the whole point, and they see it.

Prof. Simon Bates: Just to … to follow up on that, that's one of the reasons why, back to what I was saying about the imperative to engage students as partners in these conversations because they … they … we've heard the same things from … from our students.

One of the … the members … that we set up a student AI council to make sure that we were tapping into, you know, wide range of perspectives and feedback. And … and one of them expressed it as, you know, "I want to be able to use these tools. I understand how important they're going to be in my degree and in the profession that I want to graduate into, but I also don't want to cheat my future self," which I thought was a fantastic way of putting it from a … from a student's perspective. So, yeah, they understand some of these challenges very, very, very well.

Prof. Susan McCahan: So, yeah, I was going to pick up on that point around friction. So often in higher education, the technology that we have access to, especially as things are changing rapidly, is repurposed from some other use. And so, you know, whether it's an LLM that has been released really as a kind of a social chatbot, or whether it's a system that was designed for some industry or corporate process that we repurpose into a teaching technology or a collaborative technology of some kind … and so, things like AI tutor systems and so on, I really worry don't have enough friction. They were designed or were enabled for making it relatively easy to get the answers or hints or something for a problem in a course.

And I was really struck by some research that I heard about recently in a seminar that I attended, which showed that when a AI tutoring system was given to students who could access that tutoring system when they felt they needed it, it was less effective than if the tutoring system itself was designed to only intervene when it was very clear the student was stuck. Because students were sort of asking for help too soon, right? It's a bit like going to the gym on your own versus having a personal trainer. You go on your own and you kind of let yourself off after a few reps. Your trainer is going to push you a little harder and is not going to let you get away so easy.

And so, that friction is actually critically important. And I think we're at a liminal moment in this technology where the tools we have are going to seem so, sort of, rudimentary and simplistic, you know, a few years from now. I am hoping that as we learn about what we're losing in terms of peer-to-peer explaining or communication across difference or other things by using these systems, that that starts to get built back in to more nuanced systems as we develop them.

Because I really do worry about things like the loss of, you know, if I have to frame a question for somebody, for a TA, for an instructor who's coming from a different culture, and I have to interpret an answer that is coming from a different perspective, that in and of itself is a really valuable lesson to learn, aside from the content that's being shared. And so, this is something that I'm thinking a lot about.

In terms of, like, structure, you know, to some degree, some amount of impedance is actually valuable in that it keeps us from following a hype cycle. We don't want to go up that hype cycle, and oh, my goodness, today there's another technology, let's adopt that. And then tomorrow there's another technology, let's adopt that.

We are trying our darndest to navigate through that … that … both the peak and the trough that comes with new technologies and trying to find a middle ground through it while and at the same time navigating a really wide range of feelings about this technology—everything from it is destroying higher education to it is an incredibly enabling technology.

The reality, of course, is right down the middle somewhere of, you know, when used wisely, it will be useful. And when used badly, it will be bad. And how we develop an understanding of … of what is on one side of that line and what's on the other, and personally, how each … each individual in our community develops that is part of what we're working on really hard.

I think there's a lot of skepticism about the trustworthiness of this from staff and from faculty. We've told them not to be … not to trust the outputs they get. And then we've told them to use it and try it out. And so, I think, you know, that … that has people really concerned about it. We've told them that we are very concerned about overuse and then we make tools available to everyone in the community, including students. They are asking: isn't this … isn't there something hypocritical about being concerned about students developing critical thinking skills, but you've made, you know, tools like Copilot available to everybody? I get that. I … I, you know, it is about navigating, again, through the hype cycle, not following along with it.

But some of that, sort of, impedance that keeps us from going all the way up and all the way down is a good thing. What is problematic with, I think, the structures that we have in place is that they are all very much built, and this is right down to the infrastructure of our technology, is built on algorithmic deterministic systems that operated in a very specific kind of way and that we relied on operating in a very specific kind of way.

And that model, that, sort of, mental model of the way systems operate is not true anymore in this. And so, that sense of loss of control, I've … I've sort of … there's, I think, a parallel between the probabilistic nature of this technology and a sense of loss of control because probabilistic systems feel so much less controllable than algorithmic systems.

Jasmine Parent: Great. Thank you to you all for your responses to the challenges. Let's bring this to a level where we more or less, sort of, see these tensions surface, especially for faculty and staff—course design and assessment. Which elements of our current models of course design and assessment practices work well and which need to be adapted when dealing with gen AI?

Prof. Simon Bates: I think one of the major issues is around assessment redesign. And as Chris said, you know, assuring that the work that is handed in, the work that is done, is actually the work of a student and is their own work.

And again, quite rightly, this is not a new problem. It's just been somewhat supercharged with the easy availability, the barrier to access tools that will essentially do the learning task for you completely is now so much lower for students. So, I think that's one of the … the major challenges.

Initially, so, I think this is changing, but it's taking time. I think initially, there are a number of approaches from trying to ban use. Indeed, some institutions actually tried to ban use of these technologies completely, only to … to fairly quickly reverse that. But I think many of the approaches that … that faculty initially felt they had to do was really make what's been termed "discursive changes" to assessments rather than structural ones, which is you're relying on, you know, you're appealing to students good nature to do the right thing because you have no way of monitoring or checking or, I don't like to use this word, but "policing" whether or not they've actually followed those discursive changes.

What we really need is structural changes to assessments, but that's hard. And it, you know, relates to faculty workload, as well. It's hard to do it for one course. Many faculty teach four, five, six, seven courses a year. That's an unbelievable workload to try and do that thoughtfully across that number of different courses.

And to recognize that probably the changes you made 12 months ago are not going to have a very long shelf life. They probably need to be revised and adapted regularly. And regularly could be as frequent as every time you give the course.

One of the courses that I've taught on over the last few years is a small group first-year scientific writing seminar where the initial essay tasks that we set for first-year, first-semester students are kind of 600-word, you know, problem, statement, evidence kind of thing.

Exactly the kind of thing that even three years ago, the early versions of ChatGPT could do certainly a passable job of generating. So, we've had to revise that and as the tools have evolved, we've had to revise that pretty much every year to the point where this year, we're experimenting—there's that word again—with the idea of in-person discussions with students about high stakes assessments, like term papers and essays.

So, mini vivas as a … a sort of touch point of the … the assurance of … of learning. So, I would say we see in responding to those … those challenges, we see more process-oriented work rather than simply focusing on product and basing a lot of the assessment on product. Dialogic and applied activities. So, one of the projects we've been working on extensively is interactive ethical case studies in health disciplines. So, it's a version of the … the simulations that we were talking about.

And a lot of effort put into many of our arts and humanities courses in assessment design and classroom activities that explicitly surface why writing matters and where these tools should be incorporated and where they shouldn't.

Prof. Susan McCahan: You know, I think a lot of the learning outcomes that we have always wanted our students to achieve remain essentially the same. And in fact, perhaps even more important, the concept of a critical critique of the output from an AI, from the media that they are seeing, from, you know, whether it's video or images or text, being able to critically analyze that and think carefully and apply their judgment to it.

It remains, I think, very substantially not only the same, but perhaps even more important. And so, those key outcomes are … are ones that I think we're going to be doubling down on, in fact. And the

difficulty is then how do you teach and measure those in a environment in which the … the technology is so pervasive, right?

I do think we're at a liminal moment in this. I think sooner or later, there will actually be, sort of, a more Montessori kind of environment. You know, in Montessori, you don't put kids into big classes to take high stakes exams. You watch them learning, and then over that period and the way in which they engage with the material, you make a … assessments and judgments about what they're getting and what they're not, and how they're doing on things.

I think that AI is going to play a critical role in that kind of Montessori type assessment. I mean, we … we surveil students in rooms for exams, but I think, you know, we can call it surveillance, but I think it is going to be that type of engagement in the learning experience being sort of monitored or, you know, when it's all in the AI, we have the opportunity to have the AI actually provide feedback on student engagement with the process and with each other.

I mean, as students are conversing with each other, you can imagine things like design teams, where one of the members is an AI. And that AI there … is there not only perhaps to help the students get unstuck as they, you know, sort of, go through things, but also to provide the instructor with some feedback on what are the areas where, you know, students in general are struggling or what are the areas where particular students or a set of students are struggling with material.

So, I think we are in a moment where we are relying on old forms of assessment. We haven't quite figured out how to adjust those old forms of assessment to the world we're in. But there are, I think, entirely new things that will be emerging that we just, you know, haven't come into focus yet, haven't come into, sort of, being yet but will become part of our environment.

It's like asking—what is a learning management system going to look like in the future? I … I don't think a learning management system is going to look like documents in folders that students go and access in a course shell. You … you know, it's … it's going to look way more like a collective chat system that has students connecting with students but also connecting to course material through a large language model and probably a range of different models that are incorporated into that course shell.

And so, there's just some fundamental aspects of what a classroom, and what learning and assessment look like right now that are going to be very different, I think, a few years from now. But they will be recognizable to us, right? They will look like trying to … to develop critical thinking skills. They will look like trying to assess, you know, competencies and subject matter expertise. And it will be critically important that students have that as they are assessing the output from … and the … the AIs that they are co-working with in their careers and in their lives in the future.

Prof. Simon Bates: I do think these technologies offer a very different landscape for the way technology can be integrated into course design. So, if you think about in the before times, as a faculty member, you … you had a … a pedagogical goal for … for your course. You had something you wanted students to be able to do.

So, you know, you went to the teaching and learning center or the … the … the IT folks in learning technology and said, "I want a tool that will do this." And they said, "No, you can't have that" because A, "it doesn't exist," or B, "it's too expensive," or … or C, "we've got this thing that kind of does what you want, but not quite; would you use that one instead?" And … and so that was a barrier to innovation.

Now, we're in a paradigm where faculty can imagine building their own tools. Doesn't mean they need to have the expertise to do it, but those goals can actually be realized by building, in a … in a, sort of, component by component way, the tools that that faculty member in history needs for their course.

And I think that's … that's fundamentally going to change the way we think about learning technology. It's not buy the enterprise system and teach people how to use the quiz function in *insert name of LMS here*, and … and just accept the limitations that comes with it and the things you can't do. But it will be, no, if you can imagine it, then we have a team of people who can help you build that, and that will be reusing components that we already have from previous projects.

And … and just to ground that in our own institution, we've actually carved out a separate team into a new unit we call the Learning Technology Innovation Center that has exactly that mandate to support faculty innovation with this kind of bespoke tooling, which doesn't require faculty to be, kind of, technical experts or AI experts. They bring the pedagogical expertise, and they imagine what they want to be able to do with … with those tools and build it, and help them deploy it securely.

Prof. Susan McCahan: Yeah, and …and I would add to Simon's answer there to say, I mean, we have something a bit similar here and we're in the process of building what we're calling an "AI Kitchen," which has some components or I … I guess characteristics similar to a fabrication lab, like a makerspace, that would have support for faculty, both for research and teaching, but also for operations, administration, and so on. But, you know, I think we can ask the question—what happens when everybody can code? Because now everybody can code.

You know, when we look at what's hitting our firewall, next to ChatGPT and maybe one or two other LLMs, the … the next thing on the list is … is a coding assistant. It is very clear that more than just our developers are doing coding here using AI assistants.

Prof. Chris Buddle: This is so interesting. Thank you, Susan and Simon for the … the thoughts in my head. There's many, and they're both exciting and terrifying, for sure. I … I just want to add a couple pieces on course design.

We've talked a long time in our unit, other units, about how, you know, teaching and learning … moving away from the traditional lecture style into small group learning. And I … I actually think that AI tools are going to … or AI is going to, again, be a fulcrum or a catalyst for … for a course design that's going to be much more oriented around that kind of space, which I think is very, very exciting.

The question of how to assess and … and how to, sort of, think about learning outcomes, I agree very much with you, Susan, that in many ways, what generative AI is going to do is reinforce the importance of some very fundamental elements of teaching and learning, the importance of learning outcomes, the importance of program outcomes, the importance of just having clear expectations for … for students. Without clear expectations, without going through the thought process of designing in or designing out … you can't be neutral. It's not about being … there's … there's no opportunity to be neutral on … on the impact of generative AI in course design and assessment.

And briefly on … on assessment, I … I think your ideas are so interesting, Susan, about this sort of Montessori style. I've never … never really thought of it … about that, but it is a super exciting way to

think about how … what is assessment really for? What are we really, quote, "testing?" And if … if we … if we realize the disruption that generative AI is going to produce, it … it forces us to ask that question, which is so, so interesting and healthy in a university context.

How we do it … how do we think about TA time? How do we think about, you know … are there tools available that can assist with more traditional kinds of testing? Yes, there are. They're going to get better. There's, you know, that opportunity.

And I guess on a more, sort of, less than positive side, the number of instructors that I think are going to go back to pencil and paper in "gymnasium style" of exams … that's not the right path. But that's a path I think we're going to go through before we come out the other end and realize there's going to be better ways.

So, I think we institutionally have to recognize that there will be a bit of a pendulum switch back, and we know this is already happening in that many instructors will say the only way I can then properly assess students is in a very traditional "gymnasium style" examination setting where there are no technological tools available.

That's the … the wrong answer to a difficult question. So, the … we're going to have to go through that before we come out the other side, I think. Anyway, great thoughts. I … we're going to have to have another hour, Jasmine and … and Adam, on this one.

Prof. Susan McCahan: We're already seeing the increase in requests for room bookings for in-class assessment. It's already evident in the data.

Adam Finkelstein: Definitely. And to … to follow, just to follow up from that, I mean, you've talked a bit about, you know, Simon, you were talking about burnout is really an issue with faculty, the issue of changing assessment and everything in course design. What kind of things do we need to do to support faculty?

Prof. Susan McCahan: I mean, I think our teaching and learning centers have been really critical in all of this work, you know, we are doing … there's materials online, there are drop-in sessions, there are workshops, there are many, many opportunities for engagement there and helping faculty start down that path.

It does not need to be that you start, you know, redesigning your class from square one, from scratch, all of your classes at the same time. I … there are adjustments you can make to some of your course materials and assessments that starts you down the thinking about things differently. And I would encourage faculty to start there.

I think the other thing is making sure that the tools that are available are actually helpful and not just, you know, that there are actually helpful tools and helpful people available to them. But I … I don't want to underestimate the value of conversations within departments.

I have probably now given, I don't know, a hundred or more presentations within individual departments from art history to anthropology to sociology, civil engineering, chemical engineering, like, all over the university. Today was music. And inevitably in that room, there are people who are feeling really … it may not be an understatement to say despondent about the technology and the impact that it is having on student learning and … or the perception of student learning. As Simon said, our students are all over the place.

Now there's this perception—all students are using it. Not all students are using it. In fact, there's a lot that are very, very hesitant to make use of it and actually don't want to. They want to do all the heavy lifting themselves, right?

And then, there are faculty who are, like, you know what? I've tried using it with my students. And here's what happened. And here's how I've changed things. And once you get some people in the room speaking up about that, the dialogue moves away from the conversation with me and moves to conversation between colleagues. And that's the best place—you know, getting the writing centers involved with the faculty in social sciences and humanities, getting the folks through teaching centers or in other disciplines engaged in those disciplinary conversations. Because I do think that a lot of this change is going to happen from the grassroots up.

Our job is to either get out of the way or be helpful. But if we're not being helpful, just get out of the way of that conversation so that those norms of practice and those support systems at the local level, which may be the person sitting in the office next door to you, have some room to flourish.

Prof. Simon Bates: Yeah, I'd … I'd say much the same thing. Meet faculty where they are—whether that's individually or collectively in disciplines or … or programs. Exploit, as Susan said, the opportunity for peer-to-peer engagement, connection, learning, commiserations of things that don't work. Failure is a very important part of learning, as we often tell … tell students.

And, you know, centrally within the university, support access to safe spaces. That's our, you know, sandbox I talked about for experimenting. Support exploration and familiarity—programs through the Teaching and Learning Center that are not just the traditional "come to us at 2:30 on a Wednesday afternoon." So, something we've seen huge uptake in is an archive of those recordings because now most of them happen, you know, via Zoom or a platform like that that we call "replays." So, you know, it's almost like "Just-in-Time."

I'm going to hesitate to call it, you know, "learning Netflix" but … because it doesn't have as fancy an interface as that. But you get the idea. It's, like, if you're interested in how to create AI resilient assessments, then there was a couple of workshops on that that you can go and pull up just in time, in a … in a way.

Prof. Chris Buddle: The only other thing I think I'd add is that we need really good examples from a different range of class types that can be shared really broadly. And, you know, Adam and I had a conversation the other day about some work he was doing with an individual professor and a really great idea.

Well, that professor ideally is having the conversations within his own department and the examples that he's using are shared broadly from … from our staff that support teaching, etcetera. It's … we need concrete ideas, concrete examples that are … both work and don't work so that … that we can, kind of, develop a … a repository and so that … so that nobody's starting from scratch.

Because as we talked earlier about the issues around workload, people are taxed out. It's a very difficult time to consider a rehaul, a re … redo of an entire class. So, there needs to be help and support. So, I think … I think collectively all these ideas are … are great and … and we've … we've got to lean into them.

Jasmine Parent: Yeah. So, I think we can all agree that we … we do as a … speaking from a support perspective, have a responsibility to teach AI literacy to faculty. But I … I wonder what you think about the responsibility faculty have to teach AI literacy to students.

Prof. Chris Buddle: Maybe I'll … I'll start since I haven't had a chance to yet. I think there … there needs to be general literacy and opportunity, but I think, you know, Simon, I think you mentioned it earlier that it's not necessarily the job of a … of a professor in discipline X to also know about generative AI in the … in the level of nuance and detail to be able to teach.

I think it's about making sure the university provides the tools and resources for others to … to learn. Literacy is so important in this area. And then to lead by being clear on expectations and clear learning outcomes. And so, I would say that's … that's how I would view it, Jasmine.

It's a great question, but I … I worry a little bit around the expectations we're then putting on … on faculty members that are already taxed and how we think about so many different things that they have to think about in preparation and delivery of … of a course.

Prof. Susan McCahan: Yeah, I think, you know, we're all trying to bootstrap, right? Until we have the generation of scholars coming through and they are coming through who are already entering the profession AI literate because they worked with it in grad school.

You know, we had our teaching center work, I think this is similar in many institutions, work with a set of faculty members from different disciplines to develop a set of student-facing learning modules on this. They are open source, Creative Commons license. We've put them up on the website. I think they've been downloaded hundreds and hundreds of times at this point.

And the … they can be tailored for specific courses, but the point of working with faculty from multiple disciplines in the development and testing of those modules before we put them up was to make sure that they were going to, sort of, speak to faculty who didn't feel necessarily confident in their own knowledge of AI and faculty who felt fairly comfortable, but wanted some off-the-shelf tools to be able to use, particularly things that they felt the institution had, sort of, gotten behind and were designed from an instructional, you know, a good, solid instructional design perspective, rather than trying to make something up off … on their own, off the side of their desk, or, you know, pull something down from a commercial website that may already, you know, that may have an agenda because so much of that material is coming from a company or from a vendor.

And that's worked out, I think, fairly well, but we're already thinking about what comes next because those are very introductory. And I think this faculty who are using it … for some of them, those modules are actually also AI literacy for our faculty as they incorporate them into their courses. But we're … we're already thinking about what comes next because there's got to be more than the … the … what we've done so far.

Prof. Simon Bates: Yeah, I'd … I'd agree completely. This can't all fall on individual faculty members. Their role is to explore what this means within their discipline, within their course, and to be really, really clear on that to students.

One of the things our students find really frustrating is—why … why do we get so many different approaches across different courses? Well, that's the nature of instructional autonomy, right? That's just how it works. But students deserve to be told very clearly what's acceptable and what's not acceptable in their biology course. And that can be different to a chemistry course.

So, they shouldn't have to bear the burden of … of what I would call general AI literacy support, I think. Where … where does that live? Teaching and learning center has a role. Student academic services, maybe the library, Learning Commons, something like that. Great opportunities for … for collaboration there.

Another reason why it shouldn't be left to faculty is it's going to need to change. So, what is appropriate foundational literacy at the moment is not going to look the same in 12 or 18 months' time.

One of the things we're doing is we're developing a six-week course for students' pre-arrival as part of our academic essentials program that will be designed and facilitated by students. That's how we can scale it to thousands of students as they … as they enter the university.

So, in … in keeping pace with what is required for foundational literacy for students, I think this is a terrific opportunity to engage students as partners in that approach. Many of our students come in eager and willing to be able to do this kind of work. And it's a great opportunity for them to … to engage in that kind of experiential activity and to produce something that has value for their peers.

Jasmine Parent: All right, so this brings us to the end of part 2 of this three-part episode. This one was a pretty heavy one with a lot of content, a lot of conversation around the challenges. Adam, what were your initial thoughts?

Adam Finkelstein: A lot to digest, Jasmine. I mean, I … I think, you know, what … what's really difficult, I think, and this comes out a lot in what the … our guests have been talking about, is this idea of structural difficulties to work through. You know, AI is a … is a … is a disruption on the large scale, sort of like a capital "D" disruption. It's affecting everything everywhere.

There's a lot of these tensions that keep coming up around that … that structural complexity. But I think that's what we do in education is we work through those issues. And we've been in disruptions before, and we've been able to innovate our way out of them.

And I think AI is probably the biggest one we've been hitting yet. And … and our real question is: how are we going to be able to innovate out of them? … and I … and I … out of this …. and I … I think you've seen a lot of examples in the last 45 minutes or so of different ways that we can try to … to begin to innovate our way out of this kind of disrupted space.

Jasmine Parent: Yeah, and I … I think … I really appreciated that the conversation wasn't framed as, like, a dystopia or utopia, and we keep coming back to, you know, trying to resist getting stuck in the hype cycle. And … and it's very grounding to keep coming back to that because we all, kind of, get caught up in it. You know, this idea that AI will destroy higher education or that AI will save higher education … we're kind of resisting both of those concepts.

And I … I … I appreciated Susan saying, you know, whenever AI is used wisely, it's going to be useful. And when it's used badly, it's going to be bad. And that seems pretty simple, but I feel like that was one of the biggest parts that I appreciated the most.

Adam Finkelstein: And it's one of those things you hear often about any kind of technological innovation in … in higher education is, you know, it's not if you're using the technology, it's really how you're using it. And we've seen this for years. You know, it's not if the internet's used, it's how

it's used. It's not if you're doing things online or in person, it's how you're doing things online or in person. So, you know, I think that … that … that is going to keep coming up.

And I think this episode really cements the idea that we, you know, we can't just do business as usual. Business as usual in higher ed is … is never the answer. It's always really an opportunity for us to think about, like, how could we do this better? And this meaning not just our class, not just our teaching, but how can we do higher education better? What can we do better for our students from start to finish? What does higher education mean? And why is it important? And why do we want our students to keep coming back to our universities?

Jasmine Parent: Yeah, and that leads us very nicely into, kind of, introducing the … the next episode, which is part three, where we … we are going to be talking in more depth about how we're going to be approaching, you know, the future, how we're going to be preparing our students for the real world, and what our role is as a … as an institution in society moving forward.

So, thank you so much to our listeners for tuning in, and we look forward to the next part of the conversation. We hope to see you there. Until next time.