

# Universities need to embrace AI, not shun it

KARLEEN PENDLETON JIMÉNEZ

As a university professor, the spectre of artificial intelligence, or AI, is everywhere these days — so much so that I taught a class on the subject. When I asked my students why they signed up, their answers varied, from wanting to know what the technology can do, to those who were tired of professors telling them not to use AI.

That latter point is understandable. As entrepreneurs, lawyers, engineers and designers jump into AI feet first, schools and universities slam on the brakes, nervous about the implications of the new technology.

The fear driving the anxiety: What if students stop learning how to write? If a machine can write an essay in less than a minute, while you struggle for a couple hours, why would you bother?

But the response to that fear doesn't have to simply be outright refusal. Educators might instead need to embrace AI, rethinking how we evaluate and teach in light of a transformative new technology.

It is true there is a looming problem, often brought up by my colleagues and others: what if the act of writing itself helps with critical thinking, informed arguments and organizing our thoughts? Will we lose those, too?

One answer: When I was a kid I was told television would stop us from thinking — then video games, then social media, then smartphones. But people haven't stopped thinking, and I've stopped falling for the alarm.

Yes, it's a problem that AI tech has a penchant for saying things that aren't true, a trait now known as "hallucinating." But maybe the prevalence of AI-generated content could counterintuitively help.

After all, when we have to be extra vigilant about falling for fake news or misinformation, perhaps we will make our critical thinking skills stronger rather than weaker.

In our AI class, we began with a quote from "Frankenstein" to help us think about the implications of creating artificial life. I think Mary Shelley's lesson book was less about the monstrosity of artificial intelligence, and more about the danger of human arrogance. The good doctor Frankenstein refused to have a meaningful relationship with the monster and this is what actually led to his demise. We underestimate Shelley's clairvoyance at our peril.

What I saw in class were students in search of meaningful relationships with AI. Instead of an easy cut and paste from ChatGPT, one of my students spent hours back and forth between English and Spanish AI software, crafting a gorgeous series of stories that captured an immigrant man's learning adventures in Canada.

It was just one example among many that suggest a blanket ban on AI would cut off many learning opportunities. Another student used an AI PDF reader to examine the effectiveness of a research method. She and her patient AI tutor conversed into the night, each sharing their insights and misunderstandings about the article.

A student who identifies as non-binary challenged AI to create realistic and affirming images of trans peoples, disrupting AI's white, male, thin, heterosexist default.

A student who works as a college professor showed how AI saved weeks of labour for metal design while contributing to environmental responsibility.

It isn't just students who can benefit from the use of AI technologies. Across campus, one of my colleagues just won a grant to work with AI to develop affordable water quality testing. Another uses AI to help geography students critically analyze generative conclusions around climate change.

What's clear is that AI contains an elaborate promise that both threatens, and threatens to improve, our lives. Whatever the case, it's also clear it's not simply going away.

There are dangers far more worrisome than cheating on assignments: environmental damage, the theft of art, the impact on labour, or more extreme worries about life itself. But the sheer scope of possibilities is why I think it's not a question of allowing students to use AI or not.

Rather, it's on us educators to dive in with our students — to use it meaningfully, critically and cautiously. Yes, it will require us to rethink a great deal about education.

But if we do it right, we may be able to solve important problems or create something great — not just what already exists, but beyond what we can imagine today.

KARLEEN PENDLETON JIMÉNEZ IS A WRITER, FILMMAKER AND PROFESSOR AT TRENT UNIVERSITY.



AI chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT have exploded in popularity, and upended post-secondary education in the process.



THOMAS FROESE

Commenting on Canada Day and this "Elbows Up!" banner in front of a Niagara Region home, Thomas Froese writes, "It's been good political rhetoric. But it's second-rate table manners. And even in hockey it's a shaky way of going about things."

## People have a way of trumping politics



THOMAS FROESE  
OPINION

I'm out for some fresh air, in Niagara, eating breakfast in a historic house with creaky floors and vintage cameras older than I am.

Beside me are Raymond and Dorothy. I learn that they've travelled from Maine to explore Quebec and Ottawa before arriving in Niagara Region.

Raymond's hat has a maple leaf. Dorothy often wears a Canadian flag on her lapel. It's us and our eggs and coffee and conversation. They ask about a nearby house with a Canadian flag and an "Elbows Up!" banner out front.

Yes, I took a photo, I say, before explaining the meaning.

Days prior to that, breakfast is with about 500 others at Carmen's Event Centre, a community prayer breakfast to pray — imagine — for our community leaders and our economy and our larger societal fabric. There I'm reminded what it means to be human as much as Canadian.

Because people feel less grounded in our time of quickening change, broad strokes, not just in Canada. Prayer is another way of getting out. The demons, it seems, hate fresh air. Prayer somehow changes us inside as much as it changes things

out there.

Days prior to that, my meals are in Pennsylvania at a reunion, years coming, for friends and youth who as children ran through the banana patches in East Africa while growing up there. Now, my own kids included, they're running to career studies and freshly-minted adult lives.

We all gather near Pittsburgh in the borough of Sewickley — Mario Lemieux and Sidney Crosby live there — with one host family feeling so self-conscious that they take down their American flag. Old Glory, gone, even on Memorial Day weekend, so that my family, the only Canadians in the reunited group, won't be offended.

Or consider this, the stranger, an American museum curator, who, upon learning we're Canadian, hugged my wife for a long moment before apologizing for the U.S. president. Gosh.

Nearing Canada Day 2025, these are the experiences showing a glass that's half full as much as half empty. If we keep this in mind, never a given, it will help our way forward.

Because people have a way of trumping politics. Not through power as we commonly understand power, but through the routine flow of daily unfoldings. This is life's charm. You're especially reminded when looking across the table at someone with butter on their chin.

Of course, these days it's easy to

get our elbows up. It's been good political rhetoric. But it's second-rate table manners. And even in hockey it's a shaky way of going about things.

You may give your opponent a good bruising which, sure, can give you some terrific, if not short-lived, satisfaction. But you might get an elbowing penalty or a black eye in return.

Or you might simply lose focus on the goal — to use your smarts to get the puck in the net for your team.

Long-serving New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman said as much in a recent interview with Steve Paikin on the "TVO Today Live" episode "Canada, the U.S., and Elbows Up Globalization."

Friedman's advice for Canada on Trump? "Wait him out." People aren't made to last forever. Politicians even less so.

So about that photo of the Niagara front porch with the "Elbows Up!" banner?

When I took it the owner, strangely enough, came out with his own flying elbows and belligerent expression. (OK, I might have put a toe on his property. Even so.)

The point is that it's also easy to fall into cultural ruts. Nobody hears their own accent. So let's not spend more energy explaining to ourselves or the world what we're not. (Yes, yes. "We're not American." Got it.)

It's more hopeful to develop our identity with the higher aspirations of who we are, and, with any amount of luck and grace, who we will still become.

This is what makes Canada so worthy. And there's no need to apologize for it.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

## Our state of disrepair goes beyond looks

GEORGE OLDS

Hamilton has a well-earned reputation for dilapidation.

Teviah Moro's article 'Not a good look for the city': Hamilton council's demolition debate (June 20) and its accompanying photos are sad proof.

It's more than just "looks." The concerns around the safety of boarded-up dwellings are valid. Such edifices devalue the surrounding properties.

No one wants to live near or be forced to see boarded-up dwellings in their neighbourhood, be it in Stoney Creek or in the upper city.

Such eyesores are hardly unique. Half-torn-down churches in the middle of the city — are coming up on nearly a decade now. See also 50 and 68 Charlton Ave. W. — burned years ago and not repaired are still boarded up.

See Jamestown, which has been derelict for years. Shouldn't a "strong mayor" have the authority to tell CN to shove all their delays — the rail yards were there when Jamesville was still functioning as housing, after all.

It's as if the City of Hamilton has no building standards whatsoever, let alone any enforcement if any such standards exist. Nor is it limited to dwellings.

We've "won" CAA's Canada's Worst Roads contest four years in a

row. And, it's not just the roads.

I hereby nominate the north-south crosswalk on the west side of James at Bold for the worst crosswalk award. Pedestrians, beware the six-inch deep ruts, divots and depressions, the rough, unlevel "pavement" (actually extremely pebbly asphalt, poorly laid down and since melted) — replete with "matching" wavy painted lines, which look like someone painted them while on drugs.

How bad is that corner? It's so bad a three-foot-long pothole there is so deep that portions of actual rails from the long-buried Hamilton Street Railway's north-south route on James Street are now visible to the naked eye. As is the rust on the rails, by the way. And the loose — wait for it — asphalt used in its ... er, "upkeep?"

Never mind the look. I bet cyclists really hate that hole. The good news is this piece of Hamilton's "historical trivia" may thrill a local tour guide like Liam Heinhold. He told me there's only one or two other places in the city where you can still see sections of the actual embedded rail. He's leading a walking tour called Discovering the TH&B Railway on July 13. I hope he adds this location to the tour. I was thrilled to give him the tip.

I am not thrilled when I trip on Hamilton's shamefully maintained roads and crosswalks and side-



GEORGE OLDS

We have potholes so deep portions of actual rails from the long-buried Hamilton Street Railway's north-south route on James Street are now visible, George Olds writes.

walks. My car is not thrilled with any of the potholes along every damnable kilometre of Charlton Avenue, either.

This is as much of a safety issue as it is a "not a good look for the city" issue. But boy do these things look awful.

So, city hall, I'm talking to you here. Do better. Fix things faster. And do a better fix. Asphalt is not an appropriate solution to every hole, especially on sidewalks; sometimes it makes the situation worse.

Will it take some lawsuits? But please don't fix it until after Heinhold has had a chance to inform people and let them witness this shame for themselves.

GEORGE OLDS LIVES IN HAMILTON. FOR INFORMATION ON DOWNTOWN HAMILTON WALKING TOURS, VISIT ATTAWA.CA.