Forward Together: President's February 2023 Message

Wichita State embraces AI technology as the path forward for innovation and education

Powerful and publicly available artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools flooded the internet in recent months, and they're creating quite a stir.

In the past few months, online tools have gone from being able to write reasonable paragraphs from a simple prompt to producing full essays with citations on more complex topics. They can also compose music, create art, build resumes, and write speeches.

Since the days of H.A.L.'s attempts to take over the spacecraft on "2001: A Space Odyssey," artificial intelligence has kindled

Dr. Rick Muma, president

rigorous debate about its risks and rewards: Is it ethical? How will AI affect jobs? Will machine learning and artificial intelligence create a dystopia where humans are controlled by computer overlords?

AI engines are not new. In fact, at Wichita State, we have already seen the development of businesses based on machine learning and natural language processing engines. On our own Innovation Campus, partners like Deloitte's Smart Factory @ Wichita and NetApp are leading the way in developing AI technologies to improve business efficiencies.

Academically, WSU is rising as a prominent figure in digital transformation research, a growing field that incorporates artificial intelligence and machine learning as integral technologies. The National Institute for Research and Digital Transformation is using AI research and technologies to drive Kansas' economic growth.

While anxieties often pop up around new technologies, if we take a step back and really consider the efficiencies that are borne form this type of innovation, artificial intelligence is truly a remarkable opportunity to streamline and improve the way we live and work.

It's true that these AI engines are disruptive — and maybe a bit unnerving.

But at Wichita State, we lean into disruption as a means to bring new and innovative products, services and ideas that challenge the status quo and lead to better outcomes for people and businesses. By disrupting traditional methods and systems, it drives progress, stimulates growth and leads to the creation of new opportunities for individuals, businesses and society as a whole.

Wichita State has made an institutional commitment and passion for innovation and new technology, and that isn't always comfortable. But it brings with it a bounty of opportunities for new conversations around ethics and provides the foundation for creative problem-solving.

It is with this spirit in mind that we're excited to announce a five-part AI education series — in partnership with AI industry leaders NVIDIA, NetApp and Mark III Systems — which will offer the Wichita State community an opportunity to learn about the basics of AI, machine learning, and deep learning through tutorials and hands-on, guided labs. This virtual series will run bi-weekly through the spring semester and kickoff with Introduction to Machine Learning on March 8.

Embracing innovation and new technology allows Wichita State to stay ahead of the curve and maintain a competitive edge in today's rapidly changing landscape. It also opens up the possibility for interdisciplinary collaboration and the development of cutting-edge solutions to real-world challenges. Ultimately, this commitment to innovation and new technology helps to foster a culture of continuous learning and growth, leading to a better future for all.

We're seeing other institutions react to the advent of ChatGPT and other AI systems with prohibitions and resistance. The way forward at Wichita State is to take these new technologies and tools into our practice and work with them to prepare our students for the world they'll find when they walk out our doors. We can be sure that the world will be heavily empowered and influenced by AI-powered tools.

In the coming months and years we will need to work to help our students and community adapt to the way big data tools change their work while we work with innovators to develop new applications of AI

and machine learning. NIRDT will be a leader in this space, and we will be looking for and supporting innovation and exploration in all parts of the university.

Go Shockers!

Sincerely,

Rick Muma

President of Wichita State University