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**UWM librarians focus on ways to use artificial intelligence tools wisely**

Written by Jennifer Walter

We have access to a seemingly endless amount of information on the modern internet. But with this abundance comes a host of problems, like finding the exact information needed for a project or knowing when a source is accurate and credible.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools can help students and scholars sift through vast amounts of information. After all, these applications were designed to work with huge datasets. But with programs like Chat GPT still in their infancy, the challenge is for students and instructors to learn to wield these emerging tools responsibly and ethically.

That’s where librarians come in. “When campus is looking for guidance around information and information use, they’re looking to us in the library,” says Kate Ganski, associate director of user services at UWM Libraries.

With the rise of AI tools, librarians in the user services department have immersed themselves in the new technology to understand how it works, how best to use it and where its limitations lie. They’ve created a roadmap for students and faculty seeking to use these tools in their work. Through digital resources, training sessions and one-on-one consultations with instructors and staff, the library is setting the standard for AI use in academic research.

“We really feel like it’s critical that we’re actively engaged in this space so that when folks come to us for assistance, we’re ready and able to be there for them,” Ganski said. Like other technologies that came before – the internet, search engines and social media – guidance and expertise can help people navigate the new information landscape.

**Watching and learning**

When ChatGPT was released to the public in 2022, UWM librarians watched closely as students and faculty became more curious about the new tech.

“At first, I kind of thought of it more of like a parlor trick,” Ganski said. She wasn’t sure if the tool would have a lasting impact. But then “there were just these stories that it was actually helpful, and it was doing this amazing stuff that people could use to get work done.”

Heidi Anoszko, an instructional design librarian for UWM Libraries, says ChatGPT seemed reminiscent of chatbots they used in college. But in the past, these tools were used mostly for entertainment. When ChatGPT popped up, Anoszko was faced with a familiar piece of technology, but found its capabilities had changed.

“When people were starting to use it practically and it caught on that you could generate lifelike assignments (and) responses to varying degrees of quality, I think that’s when it started to really sink in that this is actually something that we’re going to need to contend with in the long term,” Anoszko said.

This realization kicked off a dialogue in the user services department. In early 2023, Ganski co-hosted a brown bag session for library staff and shared some podcast episodes with the group on how AI was going to affect the information industry. These early efforts focused the library team on educating themselves on the ins and outs of AI.

**Putting knowledge into action**

The user services department is primarily focused on educating students and faculty around information literacy and library resources. “People associate librarians with just working with the books,” Ganski said. “Most of us in user services can go a whole week without touching books because we’re very, very focused on engaging with our students and our faculty and staff whom we serve.”

UWM librarians offer in-person services at the research help desk on the first floor of the library for on-demand help, in addition to remote assistance. The librarians also schedule in-depth consultations with faculty and students for larger assignments.

Beyond individual help, the team also plans classes and programs that help prepare students for research, including resources and training on new tools like AI.

In spring 2024, Ganski and Anoszko led a class through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for faculty and grad students about how to use AI in research. They also [published a digital guide](https://guides.library.uwm.edu/ai) that faculty can access at any time.

In both, the librarians showcase how to approach AI through the lens of information literacy. This means asking the right questions about the information produced by generative AI programs and knowing how to figure out where information is sourced. It also means being aware of AI bias and inaccuracies, as these programs are still relatively new and often make mistakes.

“The goal of information literacy is not so much to teach people how to use a new tool or how to make sense of a new type of information or piece of information, but how to weather those changes,” Anoszko said. Even though generative AI is the hot new tool today, there will come a time when another piece of technology will take its place.

What doesn’t change is the need for information literacy – for students and instructors to be able to interpret information accurately and know what’s trustworthy.

**Curiosity coaches**

Much like a university has student success coaches or career coaches, “we’re the curiosity coaches on campus,” Anoszko said. They’ve seen students and faculty express curiosity about AI and know that there’s a need for on-demand guidance.

When it comes to AI tools, Anoszko sees that students and faculty are primarily curious and don’t necessarily want to use them nefariously. Ganski notes that many folks are also using AI without understanding how it works or what it’s capable of.

To set students up for success, the user services department’s teaching and learning team is working on implementing AI-focused guidance for early student education. The department is building a curriculum for first-year writing programs about how to incorporate AI ethically and responsibly. When the curriculum debuts in 2025, it will be “a nice testbed” of blending information literacy instruction into writing classes, Ganski said.

Like any new technology, AI comes with positives and negatives for the academic space. What matters most is how the tools are used. And the way to make sure students and instructors know how best to approach it is to have knowledgeable librarians ready to guide them.

To get through these changes, people have to remain curious, Anoszko said. “To remain critical and curious – and that is the library’s bread and butter. That’s what we do, and that’s what we’re happy to guide people through.”