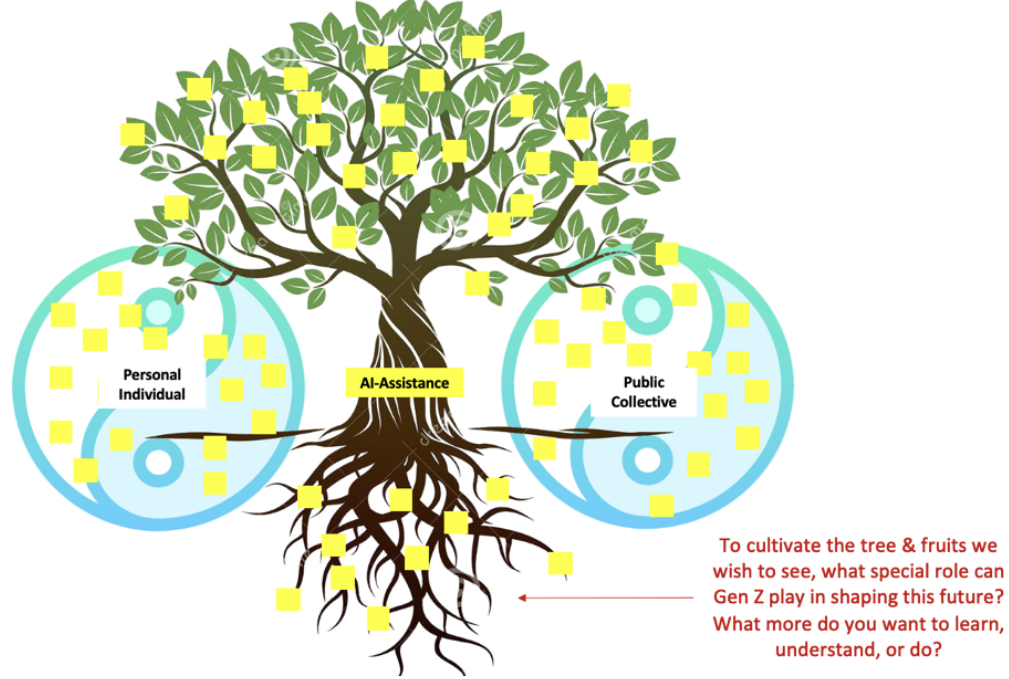


A facilitated group conversation about AI: The smartest person in the room was the room.

What might we imagine the fruits of AI-assistance in the dimensions of civics to be?



On a sunny Friday in early March, 2023, a couple dozen UC Santa Barbara students and a handful of their professors—all of whom have had some exposure to this AI—gathered to explore their collective thinking about ChatGPT and AI in general. They explored how this technology might impact their school life, home life, careers, our civil society, and political future. This event is a baseline discussion led by Gen Z students: the population with the most to gain and fear about the use of AI and AGI in their lives. One purpose here is to understand the current state of mind on campus, and prepare for additional steps to guide the use of AI in the classroom. The other goal is to kickstart additional discussions and research about how AI might damage or, possibly, help repair civic life in the US.

This exercise was a compelling example of the way that emerging technology, and AI in particular, serves not only as a topic of conversation to engage people in a new way, but a way to facilitate that space being opened. Notably, rather than pushing us away from meaningful human interaction, Chat-GPT, both as a tool and a topic, helped facilitate a space where individuals from a range of backgrounds could be heard. In a world that privileges age and experience, AI is a vehicle for Generation Z to exercise agency and opinion; it can be leveraged to both understand and disrupt systems of power.

A great deal of emphasis was placed on recruiting participants from a diversity of backgrounds, and this emphasis was reflected in the voices present. The range of

disciplines included computer science, linguistics, psych and brain sciences, film and media studies, global studies, political science, philosophy, communications, mathematics, data science, as well as language, culture and society. Faculty, staff, and librarians were present as well. Participants with a background in the humanities or social sciences approached the questions we asked in a dramatically different manner than students from STEM backgrounds, and these differences in opinion were compounded by the diversity of age and experience.

Throughout the discussion, thoughts were collected as post-it notes populating a tree and yin/yang symbols meant to represent different aspects of both humanity and technology. We asked GPT-4 to take these post-it notes and weave them into short narratives, starting with the final discussion of the day, an optimal AI-assisted future:

The development of AI has brought numerous positive outcomes. One of the most significant benefits is the instant access to information, which enables people to learn and work from anywhere in the world. AI has also made writing easier and more accessible, while anti-bias AI can help to prevent discrimination and promote fairness. AI training has improved our understanding of different people and cultures, leading to more diverse and inclusive workplaces. Additionally, AI can take on tedious tasks in research, freeing up time for humans to focus on more creative and challenging work.

As a result, the pace of human progress has accelerated, and initiatives in the humanities have grown to address problems in the technology sector. AI has also contributed to more leisure time, thanks to better scheduling and reminders, and has been useful in helping people learn second languages. Finally, AI has proven to be an unbiased study helper, providing more personalized and effective educational experiences.

The Room also discussed what we need to do today to help this optimal future emerge.

To help AI develop into a useful tool, there are several things that need to be done. First, AI needs to be linked to Google Scholar, which will improve its ability to access and analyze information. Universities also need to be proactive about identifying potential use cases for AI, as this will help to optimize its impact. Another important consideration is to save space for human

conversation, as it is important to maintain a balance between human interaction and AI usage.

It is also crucial to provide actual training in the use of AI, to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills to use AI effectively. Decolonizing information is another important aspect, as AI must be developed with a diversity of perspectives and voices to ensure that it is inclusive and reflective of the world we live in.

Additionally, there should be open access to transparent LLM's (Large Language Models) and policies for data transparency, to ensure that AI is developed in a responsible and ethical manner.

Before finalizing its vision of an optimal AI future, and the current actions necessary to arrive there, the Room looked at AI's near-future impact on personal life:

AI can assist in various tasks such as building intuition by providing data-driven insights and predictions, streamlining logistics, suggesting effective communication strategies, providing study materials, summarizing data, brainstorming ideas, automating repetitive tasks, and more. It can also optimize commutes, suggest travel itineraries, improve work/life balance, and help with mundane tasks.

Furthermore, AI can provide more digestible information from professionals, assist with answering emails, and help in writing essays. However, it's important to note that AI should not replace critical thinking and creativity, which are essential for effective decision-making and problem-solving.

Despite this optimism, the Room also considered potential harms to personal life:

There are several potential problems that AI may present in the future. False statements and ID spoofing are two significant concerns, as AI has the ability to create and disseminate false information on a massive scale, making it difficult to differentiate between what is true and what is not. Another related concern is revisionist history, as AI may be used to manipulate the historical record to suit certain interests or agendas. The fear of

the unknown is also a concern, as AI is a fast-growing technology that may have implications we cannot yet foresee.

While AI has the potential to learn from risks and mistakes, there is a risk that the joy of learning through experimentation will be lost if AI becomes too risk-averse or overly focused on being optimal. Additionally, there is the concern that AI may lead to the loss of human connections, agency, and spontaneity. This can have significant implications, including job loss, unchecked power structures, and economic dislocations.

There is also a risk of bias with data, as AI is only as good as the datasets it is trained on, which may be incomplete or reflect existing biases. Additionally, legal implications and issues related to public interest and the marginalization of certain groups must be considered. Finally, there is the concern that the use of AI may lead to the loss of the meaning of life, as we become increasingly reliant on technology and lose touch with what it means to be human. It is therefore important to carefully consider these potential problems and work towards developing AI in a responsible and ethical manner.

The Room then turned to civic life and AI's near-term impact on our collective social and political scene.

GPT-4

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to positively impact civil society in a number of ways. Firstly, it can establish an order of priority for information authority and improve access to information, providing more breadth and depth of knowledge. Additionally, adaptive queries can be used to find the best information and services, reducing barriers and connecting people to opportunities of interest. AI can also evaluate positions on political issues and help individuals search out different perspectives on topics, explore different filters, and provide increased transparency through different perspectives from various information sources.

Furthermore, AI can educate people in civic issues and enable a fluent flow of information from different sources, expanding perspectives and providing alternative

views and perspectives, especially from different backgrounds. AI can also provide accessible and easy-to-answer questions, and by creating a fluent translation transformer, can lower barriers of entry to connect people to opportunities of their interest. AI can be programmed to empathize and give accounts of many sides, and adapt to the needs and desires of individuals to direct them to optimal services and information. These potential benefits of AI for civil society demonstrate how it can enhance the functioning of society in a variety of ways.

As in discussions of personal life, while there were points to be excited about, The Room also shared a deep apprehension about the limitations and threats that AI might bring:

Artificial intelligence (AI) poses a significant threat to civil society with its potential to cause various negative consequences. One of these is the political consequences of human agency, as AI can manipulate decision-making processes, leading to an erosion of democracy. AI algorithms can also reinforce echo chambers by tailoring content to users' preferences, which creates a confirmation bias and limits their perspectives. There is no regulation on content, which can add value to misinformation and create creative destruction. Additionally, AI's censored filters can warp society's perspective and perpetuate racism.

The economic disruptions caused by AI can lead to deception in politics, as anyone who distributes and recommends content should be held responsible for their impact. AI also has an impact on emotional effects, principles, and regulations, and its influence on news narratives and recategorizing information is a cause for concern. Fact-checking is vital in the face of spreading misinformation and the effects of gaslighting. Therefore, society must be aware of AI's potential dangers and its impact on society, and responsible actors must take steps to mitigate them.

THE DATA:

Below, we've listed the unfiltered outcomes of this collective effort, gathered as post-it notes attached to the tree.

Tree of AI

Fruits of opportunity; What we hope will develop:

Keywords: Progress, Unbiased, Time, Data, Help

- A. the pace of human progress increases,
- B. instant access to needed information,
- C. learning available for people in different places,
- D. AI training for understanding different people,
- E. unbiased study helper
- F. help with 2nd language problems,
- G. create an anti-bias AI,
- H. great for getting started with writing,
- I. take some of the drudgery from research,
- J. rise in humanities initiatives as problems in tech become highlighted,
- K. less work time, more play time,
- L. attribution connection to data,
- M. better scheduling and reminders,

Developing the Roots; What we need to do NOW:

- A. actual training in the use of AI,
- B. policy for data transparency
- C. university needs to be proactive about potential use cases,
- D. AI linked to Google Scholar,
- E. decolonizing information,
- F. save space for human conversation,
- G. open access to transparent LLM's,

Personal Life

Way AI can help us in and out of the classroom:

- A. building intuition using AI to enhance the process in small steps,
- B. decisive, writing/doing work,
- C. synthesizing key points,
- D. coordinating logistics,
- E. brainstorm potential ideas,
- F. how to communicate appropriately,
- G. more digestible information from professionals,
- H. efficiency for school work,
- I. build a schedule based on my priorities,
- J. writing essays.
- K. study helper,
- L. filling out forms,
- M. answering emails,
- N. reference guide,
- O. commute transition times,
- P. scheduling for travel and sites,
- Q. improve work/life balance,
- R. help us with mundane tasks,
- S. redefine transportation,

Ways we don't want AI used around us:

- A. losing the meaning of life,
- B. revisionist history,
- C. will the joy of learning from risks be lost,
- D. loss of jobs,
- E. hard to determine deep fakes/misinformation,
- F. unchecked power structures,
- G. further marginalization of the haves and have nots,
- H. taking away personal agency/choice/spontaneity,
- I. losing space for debate and discourse,
- J. bias with data, finding the best value,
- K. implications of being too optimal,
- L. removing parts of the historical journey,
- M. false statements,
- N. ID spoofing,
- O. fear of the unknown,
- P. loss of human connections,
- Q. fast growing tech,
- R. economic dislocations,
- S. legal implications,
- T. not always in public interest,
- U. incomplete datasets,
- V. boring can be beautiful,
- W. loss of human responsibility for mistakes,

Civic Life

Ways AI can help with Civics:

- A. educating people in civic issues,
- B. increased transparency,
- C. adapt needs/desires from people to direct them to the optimal services/info.
- D. different perspectives from different information sources,
- E. lower barriers of entry to connect people to opportunities of their interest,
- F. establishes order of priority for information authority,
- G. provide alternative views/perspectives, especially from different backgrounds,
- H. more breadth/depth,
- I. expanding perspectives,
- J. access to information,
- K. reduces barriers to connect people to opportunities of interest,
- L. evaluating positions on political issues,
- M. someone can more easily search out perspectives on topics,
- N. fluent flow of information from different sources,
- O. explore different filters,
- P. empathize—program the language models to give accounts of many sides,
- Q. accessible and easy to answer questions,
- R. create fluent translation transformer,

Reasons we may need to protect civics from AI:

- A. adding value to misinformation in society,
- B. no regulation on content,
- C. anyone who distributes and recommends content should be held responsible,
- D. not framing media literacy, news influence on the narrative,

- E. create an echo chamber with confirmation bias,
- F. political consequences of human agency,
- G. creative destruction,
- H. spreading mis-information,
- I. emotional effects,
- J. impact on principles, and regulations
- K. censor filters,
- L. warping perspective in society (racism), deception at all levels,
- M. bias that limits perspective,
- N. economic disruptions,
- O. recategorizing information,
- P. too readily accepted for authority,
- Q. fact checking,
- R. fresh data,
- S. deception in politics,
- T. gaslighting,