

Scholarship Learning Community (SLC)

Title: AI, Ethics, and Society

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Description:

The goal of this Scholarship Learning Community (SLC) is to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to explore focused research questions related to the societal impact of AI technologies and ethical considerations for the development and deployment of these technologies in different domains. More specifically, this SLC seeks to build capacity within DePaul for interdisciplinary research in its focus areas, eventually leading to further cross-college and cross program collaboration on research projects or grant proposals, especially those with a societal impact.

The activities of this SLC will also be complementary to the efforts by the DePaul AI Institute to promote interdisciplinary AI-focused research at DePaul culminating in a series of university mini-conferences on AI-related thematic areas. The first conference during AY 2024-2025 will have AI, Ethics, and Society as a primary focus. Connections to the AI Institute initiative will help provide synergies that can continue to support the results produced by this learning community.

The SLC will organize a series of focused discussions and presentations on specific themes. Examples of specific themes include but are not limited to the following (specific themes selected will depend on the research interests and expertise of group participants).

1. **The impact of AI on societal inequities and social stratification.** This theme will involve the exploration of how AI technologies could exacerbate or mitigate social inequalities including in economic outcomes (including the impact of automation on the labor market), educational opportunities, access to healthcare, and fairness in criminal justice and law enforcement. This theme will also involve the exploration, and the mitigation, of the sources and risks of algorithmic and data bias, which can perpetuate existing social inequalities and lead to discriminatory outcomes, affecting marginalized groups disproportionately.
2. **AI and democracy.** This theme will involve the exploration of the impact of AI on the spread of misinformation, especially in the context of political discourse. New AI technologies have been used to create fake news items, manipulate public opinion, and even interfere in electoral processes. This phenomenon is also having a negative impact on the public trust in the media and other institutions and has deepened political polarization. The rise of AI-generated content has also precipitated new legal and ethical dilemmas since current laws are not equipped to handle issues like consent in the creation of digital likenesses or the accountability frameworks necessary to govern AI's use in public discourse. These are examples of key issues that can be explored in this theme.
3. **AI, cultural differences, and perception variability.** People's perceptions of AI are influenced by various factors including trust in technology, the breadth of its applications, and perceived vulnerabilities. Research related to this theme can explore how divergence in perceptions can

affect public acceptance and the direction of AI development. People's trust in AI also varies depending on the technology's application area, suggesting that a nuanced approach is required when integrating AI into different cultural and societal contexts (such as in healthcare, law, automated vehicles, etc.). There is also growing concern about AI's fairness and usefulness across different societal contexts. The study of how AI can account for end-user perceptions and risk assessments at both individual and societal levels is critical to ensure that AI technologies are developed and implemented in ways that are considered ethical and equitable in diverse cultural settings.

Other themes that may be explored include:

- AI governance, regulations, and ethical compliance frameworks.
- Impact of AI on privacy and individual autonomy.
- Impact or promise of AI in sustainable development.
- Philosophical implications and the future of AI ethics.

Activities and Desired Deliverables:

Activities of this learning community will include 1 ½- to 2-hour meetings in a seminar format during the months of October, November, January, February, March, April, and May. In each meeting there will be two to three presentations based on pre-selected themes by volunteer participants. Each presenter will also provide a list of questions for further exploration, and a set of scholarly resources for those interested in more information. Each session will also include Q&A, and discussion. Presenters will have the opportunity to select a specific research problem related to one of the specified themes or propose novel research questions related to another theme not listed, but broadly dealing with ethical and societal implications of AI.

The desired deliverables of this SLC will include the following:

1. Recordings of the presentations and discussions in each session (to be archived on the DePaul AI Institute Web site).
2. A plan to develop one or more focused interdisciplinary small group meetings to explore specific research problems that emerge from SLC discussions (including collaborations on potential external funding opportunities).
3. Focused and detailed descriptions of several specific research problems, along with related lists of research resources that can support other DePaul faculty with research interest in the societal and ethical implications of Artificial Intelligence.