

Artificial Intelligence: Interdisciplinary Pathways Merging Innovation, Ethics, and Societal Impact

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Lake Forest College has launched a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) minor, which reflects a growing recognition that AI is not just a technological phenomenon but also a cultural, ethical, and societal one. Two professors, Professor Davis Schneiderman and Professor Sara Jamshidi, play central roles as co-chair representatives of the new AI minor.

Faculty Inspiration

Professor Schneiderman, an English professor specializing in digital humanities, described his motivation for starting the minor: “If we don’t want to wake up in a world designed solely by corporate interests, we need to think about AI as a humanistic subject of study.” Schneiderman, who has directed three Mellon Foundation grants focused on technology and the humanities, explained that for him, AI must be studied alongside history, literature, and ethics as part of a broader liberal arts education. Similarly, Professor Jamshidi, whose Ph.D. in mathematics led them into applied AI research and governance, was influenced by their collaboration with TrustVector, a Chicago-based company that evaluates AI’s role in healthcare. Through this collaboration, Jamshidi “came to understand that AI Governance is so large and complex that it needs to be taught in school.” In her words, the course and later the minor were a “natural outcome.” Together, their perspectives shaped a minor that emphasizes interdisciplinarity, ethical awareness, and responsible innovation.

Course Objective

The AI minor at Lake Forest College offers two tracks: AI Studies (humanities, ethics & big questions) and AI Governance (standards, oversight & real-world application). These tracks are designed to prepare students for a world increasingly shaped by automation, with an overarching goal not only to teach technical literacy but also to foster ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving. As Jamshidi described, the governance pathway trains students to “review, assess, and draft governance frameworks for AI and data management systems, ensuring these technologies align with ethical standards and societal values.” Similarly, Schneiderman emphasizes accessibility, highlighting that students without coding backgrounds should still become conversant in AI so they can understand how it is being deployed and confidently discuss its use in professional settings. The minor was designed to be intentionally flexible, inviting students across all disciplines to participate. For example, a Psychology major might examine how AI shapes mental health care delivery, whereas an English major could critique how generative tools reshape authorship. With this minor, the emphasis is on producing thoughtful leaders who understand the intricacies, risks, and potential of AI, as opposed to producing coders.

Teaching Strategy

Professors Jamshidi and Schneiderman emphasized applied, hands-on learning. Students will encounter case studies, policy drafts, debates, and collaborative projects that mirror real-world challenges. In the AI Governance course, Jamshidi explained that students will critique frameworks such as the EU AI Act, design governance proposals for different sectors (healthcare, finance, etc.), and participate in debates where they represent policymakers, developers, or affected communities. These projects and exercises highlight the ethical boundaries of utilizing AI.

Schneiderman’s humanities-focused courses follow an “augment, not replace” teaching model, encouraging students to utilize AI tools while critically reflecting on their limitations. “I believe students benefit

from multiple perspectives,” Schneiderman explained, “and I want them to learn to use the technology ethically—but to use it.” This approach shows a critical yet open approach to AI and its evolution, which students can expect to be reflected in the previously mentioned courses.

Innovation and Interdisciplinarity

A distinguishing feature of the program is its interdisciplinary scope. Specifically, AI Governance integrates ethics, law, policy, technology, and society. Jamshidi stressed that this interdisciplinary approach is crucial because “AI governance concerns so many stakeholders, like users, developers, policymakers, and the public at large.” Schneiderman added that Lake Forest’s program is the “first of its kind” in explicitly framing AI as a liberal arts subject. This allows students to merge humanistic inquiry with technical understanding as they navigate the complicated and varied landscape of AI.

Student Experience

The program is purposefully designed to be welcoming to students from diverse academic backgrounds, ensuring accessibility to all who are interested. Students will have the opportunity to connect their primary majors with AI as they engage in group projects, applied research, and ethical analysis. For example, a student studying education with an interest in systemic inequality might apply their knowledge to assess bias in AI grading software. Similarly, a business major could evaluate governance frameworks for AI within financial systems. By the end of their respective courses, students are expected to have developed technical literacy, analytical reasoning, and policy-writing skills, in addition to the ability to collaborate across disciplines with a wide range of students. As Jamshidi explained: “By the end of the course, students will develop technical literacy, analytical skills, ethical reasoning, policy and communication skills, and collaborative problem-solving.”

Future Direction

Both faculty members acknowledged that AI evolves so rapidly that the curriculum must constantly adapt. Jamshidi rewrites significant portions of the AI Governance syllabus each semester to keep up with regulatory and technological shifts, a trend that will continue as global conversations around AI expand. Looking to the future, while the program has no plans to become a fully-fledged major, it is expected to incorporate more classes and strengthen collaborations with external organizations. Through these evolutions, the core mission will remain the same: to equip students with the insight and responsibility to guide AI’s role in society. Schneiderman echoed the urgency of this mission, stating: “We are all living in the ‘age of AI,’ whether we like it or not, and we must engage with the way the technology is reshaping our world.” Jamshidi offered a complementary reminder to students: “Grow and develop yourself because these are the things that make you distinct from AI. You are original; lean into it.”

Conclusion

The AI minor at Lake Forest College is more than a new syllabus, it is a philosophy of education for the modern age. By blending innovation with humanism, ethics with policy, and technical literacy with creativity, the program embodies the multifaceted approach of liberal arts while addressing one of the most urgent issues of our time. For Professors Schneiderman and Jamshidi, the message to students is clear: AI will shape the world around us, but it is up to this generation to shape AI in return.



Figure 1. Increased prevalence and interest in Artificial Intelligence (AI) depicts need to learn and understand how to ethically use AI in and outside the classroom.

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