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COMIC BY SETH WALLEN, CONTRIBUTING ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Daily OPINION

Editorial

UConn's AI for ImpaCT initiative does more harm than good

On June 6, the University of Connecticut's Office of the Provost released an email announcing their decision to integrate artificial intelligence into UConn's curriculum. The movement, known as "AI for ImpaCT," aims to prepare students for AI's increased presence in the workforce through new courses and partnership opportunities. The Editorial Board strongly condemns our university's newly publicized shift towards artificial intelligence, as it is in direct opposition to UConn's mission of helping students grow intellectually.

What does the new AI initiative entail?

Much of this initiative surrounds the University's curriculum. Earlier this year, the Board of Trustees approved the first graduate "AI + X" model with the Graduate School's certificate in AI for Business. Similar programs in other disciplines are expected to follow. The coming academic years will see the introduction of programs dedicated completely to artificial intelligence. An undergraduate major in AI is expected to launch in Fall 2027, preceded by an undergraduate minor in AI which could launch as early as this year.

The changes aren't limited to the classroom. According to the Office of the Provost's email announcement, UConn is expected to implement a variety of "online and non-credit offerings, employer partnerships and micro-credentials that could potentially support both current students and members of the broader community." Specifics among partnerships and offerings remain to be seen.

With the new AI policy comes new leadership. David Bergman, an associate dean for faculty and research and a professor of operations and information management, has been appointed as the Provost's special advisor on AI. Bergman will chair an AI council made up of students, faculty and staff. A smaller AI Executive Committee comprised of members of the AI Council will work with the special advisor between meetings of the larger AI Council to advance initiatives.

How are students impacted?

Many arguments exist against the use of generative AI in daily life; these concerns are compounded in an academic setting. Implementing artificial intelligence in outlining, brainstorming and presenting (all seemingly more ethical uses than outright cheating) does not constitute proper usage. Using AI as a replacement for work ethic at any point in the education process is a blatant waste of time and money. Rather than sitting with newfound information and genuinely learning, students can "turn off" their brains and let ChatGPT or Claude bear the weight of thinking. A college degree is what you make of it — relying on artificial intelligence instead of expanding your own denotes your degree to a mere piece of paper.

The increased push for professors to integrate AI as an outlining tool in class assignments disregards the purpose of learning to outline and organize one's own thoughts. Similarly, AI should not be used as a tool for discussion or research. Gen-AI chatbots frequently exhibit sycophancy and hallucinations — they trap users in an echo chamber and cite misinformation as facts. These traits are antithetical to the very nature of higher education. How can students be expected to diversify their viewpoints and absorb information if the learning tools promoted to them are incapable of opinions and verity?

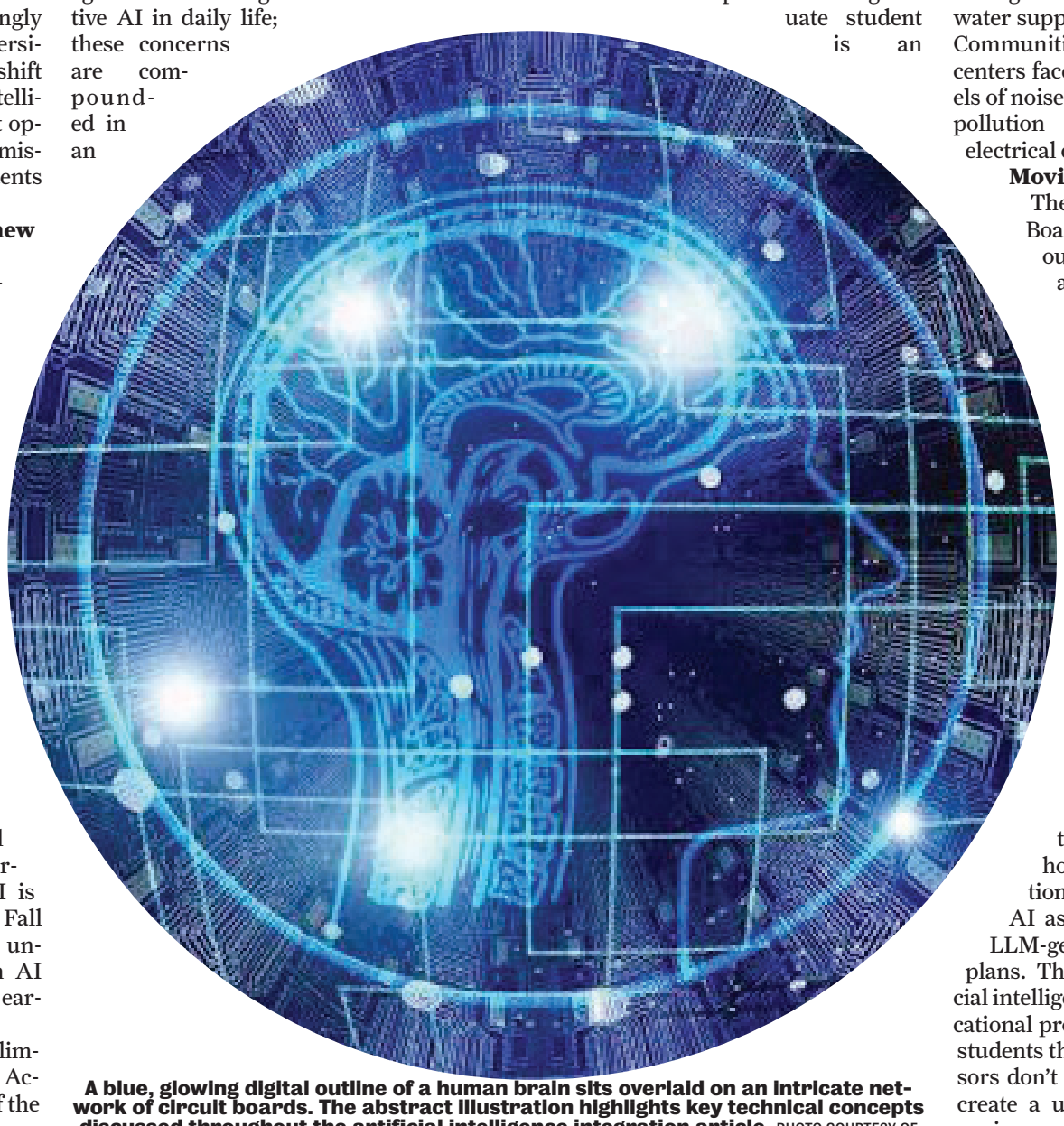
The University must recognize that by placing such an emphasis on AI, they're encouraging students to disregard the amazing opportunities and connections that come with our education. UConn students have access to a number of intelligent, talented professors who have dedicated their lives to their fields of study. Engaging in dialogue with a professor or graduate student is an infinitely more enjoyable experience than sitting at a computer and has the potential to spark lasting connections. Discouraging in-person dialogues in favor of AI is actively harming students' interpersonal skills and our abilities to form valuable relationships.

Integration of artificial intelligence is especially disappointing to see at a university that was founded as an agricultural school. UConn was born out of a mission to "promote the health and well-being of Connecticut's citizens through enhancing the social, economic, cultural and natural environments of the state and beyond." Conversely, an additional program dedicated entirely to studying AI actively harms Connecticut's citizens. The data centers that run artificial intelligence models enact irreparable damage on our planet's water supply and wildlife. Communities near data centers face increased levels of noise pollution, light pollution and increased electrical costs.

Moving Forward

The Editorial Board calls on our university and its faculty to strongly reconsider their alignment with artificial intelligence. Though the decision to embrace AI in learning comes from the administrative level, we wholeheartedly believe that professors hold an obligation to cut back on AI assignments and LLM-generated lesson plans. The use of artificial intelligence in the educational process signals to students that their professors don't care enough to create a unique learning environment for them.

Our university claims that AI for ImpaCT is designed to "support interconnectivity among teaching, learning, research, innovation and societal impact and to encourage safe, ethical and responsible use of AI." There is, however, no safe and ethical use of AI when every prompt is harmful to humanity. There is no responsible use of AI when you're relinquishing your own brainpower to a machine. There is no sensible use of artificial intelligence in education, least of all pouring university funding into a dedicated initiative.



A blue, glowing digital outline of a human brain sits overlaid on an intricate network of circuit boards. The abstract illustration highlights key technical concepts discussed throughout the artificial intelligence integration article. PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS