# OPINION

STAFF COLUMNIST

**PENELOPE WILLIAMS**

## An AI academic standard

On Oct. 15, Terence Tao, the world's most prominent living mathematician, said that AI has brought about the end of the "romantic era" of mathematics — that from now on, computers will make mathematical discoveries instead of humans. This statement comes in the wake of OpenAI agents solving 372 outstanding open math problems over the course of a few weeks and, in just 88 hours, resolving two statements of the particularly notorious Navier-Stokes Millennium Prize problem. Those statements had previously stood unsolved for 90 years.

Following OpenAI's discoveries, Tao and 27 other Fields Medalists — alongside over 8,000 co-signing researchers — released an open letter criticizing current AI use in math. Other professional mathematicians have similarly lamented what they perceive to be an unequivocal threat to not just their careers, but their entire field. For they have been forced to come to terms with a new, disconsolate truth: that AI, barring serious regulation, will render human intelligence in mathematics obsolete.

This prompts important questions, which are increasingly pertinent to college education: how are we to approach the notion of AI's superiority when educating future scholars? Should we train students to use AI tools so they are sufficiently prepared for contemporary research, or should we focus solely on developing students' ability to think critically, originally and creatively?

A college is not a college, and its education is not education, if it values the former proposition over the latter. While AI proficiency is gradually becoming a requirement for effective contemporary research — see Yale Professor P. M. Aronow's argument on this subject — its inherent subsumption of human intelligence should be met with restriction, rather than encouragement. In other words, while training students to streamline tedious processes with AI better prepares them for modern research, schools should not use that as an excuse to remove instruction of such processes from their curricula.

These processes are intrinsic to college education: they teach students how to think critically and authentically understand course material. Removing them is thereby dangerous. For there is such a thing as too much progress. If we change proven, effective pedagogy to match the constant forward march of AI, we'll ultimately reach a point where no one learns anything at all. What would the purpose of college be then? The moment students have to sacrifice original thinking for its artificial counterpart is the moment the university fails as an institution.

In addition, we cannot accurately gauge what sort of AI training would maximize career readiness. Perhaps the greatest hallmark of AI is its unpredictability — we have no idea how it will change, when it will change and when the effects of its change will be consequential for each of our respective fields. As a result, it is unintelligible to contort ourselves — by, for example, majoring in something we think will "survive" the advent of AI purely on a basis of its "immunity" — to fit the molds of uncertain future circumstances. Take computer science. Just a few years ago, CS was one of the United States' most popular, fastest-growing majors. However, due to AI's ongoing streamlining of many CS jobs, the field's unemployment rate has elevated significantly. Its rate of selection as a course of study is correspondingly in decline. These changes, particularly with regard to the job market, would have been almost impossible for a prospective CS major to predict back in 2018.

The treatment of CS exhibits another harmful idea, one which has come to somewhat dominate the college subconscious: that we should consider the "worthiness" of degrees not by their intrinsic, human value, but rather by their capacity to generate a high return on investment. Finance is better than philosophy because you can go straight to a premier investment bank. Engineering is better than pure math because it makes it easier to get a well-paying job.

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But no major is better than another. All that matters is that we derive genuine, personal value from what we choose to learn here. Examining courses of study solely through the lens of ROI is not only futile, given AI's unpredictability, but totally contrary to the reason Yale exists in the first place: "to create, disseminate, and preserve knowledge."

We must not lose ourselves in this age of artifice. Now more than ever, we are obligated to be human. This means doing what means most to us. Maybe that's a job at Goldman, maybe that's not. Regardless, we should do things not for money or fame or any other extrinsic value, but because we truly care about them — because they bring us a degree of peace in our endless chaos, because they bring us closer to those around us and most importantly because they bring us closer to ourselves.

After all, how else are we to live in a world that really doesn't seem to want us to?

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STAFF COLUMNIST

**KIKA DUNAYEVICH**

## Love and loss in the anthropocene

To many people, the green world is a dead world. We are becoming ecologically illiterate, blinded to the flora and fauna with which we share our lives, and this speechlessness about our surroundings is suffocating us.

Researchers at Northwestern University found that the number and frequency of nature words in the Oxford English Dictionary catalogue — a repository of quotes and excerpts compiled from popular literature, poetry, letters and diaries from the 14th century onward — started declining precipitously in the 20th century, both for generic references to "trees" and specific individuals like "blue spruce" or "black walnut."

When researchers examined the digitized database of Google Books from 1900 to 2000, they found a 22.3 percent decline in the frequency of tree words — huckleberry, alder and oak, et al. — between the first and second halves of the 20th century. Flower names — marigolds, magnolias, snap dragons, etc. — declined 23.4 percent over the same span of time. The frequency of nature words in lyrics from the top 100 songs for each year between 1950 and 2011 declined by a cataclysmic 63 percent.

The resolution of the living world in our art and our literature, in our language and our culture, in the stories and narratives and dreams and hopes that we write and sing to ourselves, to our friends and to our children — the clarity with which we see and describe life — has blurred.

We lost our words, were literally made speechless, as the leaves and fruits and fronds and shoots that once filled our eyes, our hearts, our minds and our lives withered away. Since 1900, 1.1 billion hectares — more than 4 million square miles — of woodland have been stripped from the surface of the planet. Our cities have expanded 40-fold since 1870, and now our strip malls and highways and parking lots outweigh all of life on Earth. As the forest was flattened into gridlines and the sun was blotted out by office buildings, we stopped speaking and reading and writing and thinking about the specifics of living things. This tragedy makes learning to recognize the creatures still beside us evermore urgent.

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In times of grief, of loss and of great pain — the pain of a world dearly loved slowly dying — it is more important than ever to understand so we might better know and better befriend living things as they disappear. The tremendous civilizational rift between human beings and all other life may never be breached by one person alone but by learning the language of our environment and the identities of our non-human neighbors, we might better fight against the current of ecological attrition that threatens to sweep away our world. We may learn that the "flowers" in our New Haven yards are a family of late-season New England asters, shining an impossible purple in the shade, that the "tree" East Rock is a white oak with softly rounded leaves, that the thin grey stranger in the salt marsh is a great blue heron, yellow-eyed and stalking small fish.

We need to pay attention to life — have names for the chanterelles growing beneath the huckleberries in California, eyes for the majesty of redwoods ringing the coast, ears for the call of the white-crowned sparrow in the chaparral. If our descriptive understandings truncate at mushroom, tree, songbird, we will live in a degraded world, in an emptier world, a world in which the wonder of reality and the great joy of the web of life is degraded.

We will succumb to loss, growing ever more mute and ever more blind to the loves that we are losing. If the death of our dear ones is inevitable — with more than 40 percent of amphibians and more than 30 percent of mammals and corals threatened by ecological collapse, with rates of extinction in the Anthropocene estimated to exceed the pre-modern era by a factor of 100 to 10,000, with our fields and and forests and shining seas emptier and quieter by the day — then it is better to know who we are losing, better to treasure the creatures still beside us, better to tell daisy from dogwood and swift from swallow, better to recognize the many distinct faces in our backyards while they are still there to be seen.

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STAFF COLUMNISTS

**ALISTAIR BROWNING AND GONI WONG**

## Why internet language matters

You take a photo. Your friend asks if he mogs.

You sit down to lunch. The food's not great, so the guy across from you calls it goyslop.

A woman posts something online, something you don't like. The comments murmur: she's a "foid."

These words mean nothing, empty jokes passed about by the black box of an algorithm. These words mean everything, real-life vehicles for a kind of digital hate that, insipid or not, matters.

Simply put, the way we talk matters — and lately, we've been picking some really, truly awful words.

Over the last ten years, the act of picking out a book, newspaper, or even cable television channel has been replaced by something fundamentally passive: a "feed." For those of us who grew up in this moment, we're certainly well-fed.

Critiques of social media are usually framed in subtraction: declining attention spans, worsening mental health, the atrophy of meaningful relationships. But it can also be additive. When we scroll, we buy things. We import beliefs, passions. And yes, we start to talk weird.

Weird how? Social media trends and internet jokes may seem random. But a closer look reveals an important pattern. A number of seemingly innocuous slang words originate from small hyper-ideological sub-cultures — sub-cultures that typically bend to the far-right.

"Mog" might be jokey slang in 2026. But in the 2010s, there was nothing light-hearted about it. The word dates back to early Incel forums, and the term itself is entrenched in a dark, nihilistic, and deeply hierarchical view of modern dating. "Goyslop," a derogatory term that implies Jewish control over low-quality food, is more blatant. When the laughter dies down, the antisemitism inherent to its use is obvious.

So why the language of grievance? We live in a generation that has attached a large part of its self-identity to the various algorithms and sub-cultures in which they inhabit. The "male loneliness epidemic," an over-wrought term now, speaks to a certain truth; amidst economic displacement, the erosion of social institutions and the fragmentation of political belief, identity is hard to find.

But the identity of the internet is often hollow. It can fester, defining itself on the basis of what it isn't. In the eyes of many, to be a young man today is to pride yourself in "seeing through" the various illusions of modern society, a nihilism that assumes the worst of vast swaths of society: women, immigrants, gays, Jews, the other.

It's easy to read this and think, "so what?" So what if these terms originate in hateful, spiteful places? That's not the way I'm using it. You're a jerk, but I'm funny.

Fair point — these words have changed. They've depoliticized, and it's certainly not fair to describe everyone who uses these terms as raging incels or vicious bigots.

But it's also naive to assume there isn't a taint. That we can somehow import a foul, insidious language without its foul, insidious grammar. Are we really shocked that young men today have fewer friends, greater antipathies, are less likely to date or form relationships? We're not going to claim that ugly, internet-based language is the cause for all of this. But even if it isn't the cause, this kind of language is, at the very least, a kind of permission, or intellectual cloak.

Everything is a joke until it isn't. These terms are facetious until they're not. And we don't have to wonder if the identitarian right uses irony as a deliberate tool to mask their views — they freely pronounce it. Nick Fuentes himself described it in a 2020 video: "irony is so important for giving a lot of cover and plausible deniability for our views." Hate becomes a joke that's repeated over and over until it no longer seems absurd

It's how a legitimately well-educated, intelligent first year student from Yale university can intersperse a political argument with an "ironic" aside — how a discussion of Yuval Noah Harraris's "Sapiens" can include the comment, "Well of course he'd say that: he's a Jew."

Politically, this cultural movement is a growing tidal wave heading for the shores of American politics. An August 2026 Politico report indicated that at least 50 percent of Gen-Z Republican staffers were "groyper-adjacent." Most young Americans reject these views, but as we have outlined, both in terms of rhetoric and belief, the border between the concentrated fanatics and broader mainstream culture is porous.

As a matter of practical advice, these words provide us with a small, hateful dialect that entrenches even our innocence in something dark and guilty. It calls upon all of us to develop a new dialect, founded in the experiences of three dimensions. We're not delusional or neo-luddites. You can probably keep your phone. But throw yourself into reality, even when it hurts. Go out to parties or to church or to dinner or to the mall and talk. For the second time in your life, learn how to speak.

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