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AB 2370
AND THE FUTURE OF AI IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION:
Balancing Innovation with Human-Centered Teaching

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Last June, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill 2370, which Sabrina Cervantes authored and the Faculty Association of California Community Colleges (FACCC) sponsored. The rapid advancement of large language models, adaptive learning systems, and AI-powered educational platforms has raised both excitement and concern within the academic community. These artificial intelligence (AI) tools now can generate detailed lesson plans, provide personalized feedback to students, and even engage in complex subject-matter discussions, leading some to question whether they eventually could replace human instructors in certain roles.

Joseph E. Aoun, in his article "How Higher Ed Can Adapt to the Challenges of AI," discusses AI's transformative societal impact and the critical role higher education plays in preparing students for this AI-driven world. Aoun compares AI's rise to the automobile's impact in the 20th century, emphasizing the need to harness AI's potential while mitigating its risks (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2024, July 1). The debate over the potential replacement of community college teachers by AI systems has intensified as more AI programs have emerged and demonstrated increasingly sophisticated capabilities in areas traditionally dominated by human expertise.

However, this technological progress has also galvanized educators, unions, and policymakers to advocate for the irreplaceable value of human teachers. They argue that while AI can enhance educational experiences, it cannot replicate the nuanced understanding, emotional intelligence, and adaptability

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that skilled human educators bring to the classroom. This tension between technological potential and the essential human element of education has fueled a multifaceted discourse on the future of community college instruction.

As this debate unfolds, it encompasses not only questions of educational quality and effectiveness but also broader societal concerns about job security, the nature of human-AI interaction in learning environments, and the ethical implications of increased AI presence in education. The stakes are high— the outcomes of this debate likely will shape the future landscape of community college education and potentially influence broader trends in higher education. The ongoing discussion surrounding AI's role in community college education focuses on California's legislative responses, stakeholder perspectives, and the broader implications for the future of higher education. California's recent legislative actions, the perspectives of educators and researchers, and the implications for higher education constitute a comprehensive overview of the evolving relationship between AI and community college education, in current developments as well as potential future directions.

The gravity of this issue was underscored as early as 2018 when the Little Hoover Commission released its report Artificial Intelligence: A Roadmap for California. The report painted a vivid picture of AI's potential to revolutionize various aspects of society, including education. It envisioned AI applications enhancing student learning, increasing graduation rates, and improving overall educational outcomes. However, the report also emphasized the need for strong privacy protections, robust data misuse laws, and collaboration among government agencies, academic institutions, and industries to ensure the ethical development and use of AI.

This backdrop has delineated California as a key battleground in the debate over AI's role in education. Recent legislative actions in the state have sought to respond to concerns about AI replacing human instructors, particularly in community colleges. These initiatives reflect a growing awareness of both the potential benefits and risks associated with AI in education.

The Legislative Landscape

The signing of AB 2370 into law was a major step in defining the role of AI in California Community College teaching. FACCC's collaboration with lawmakers on AB 2370 and related bills demonstrates the academic community's engagement with this issue and the steps that educators are taking to ensure that AI does not replace human faculty in community colleges. The bill amends Section 87359.2 of the Education Code to require the instructor of record for a community college course to be a human who meets the minimum qualifications for the position. However, the bill says nothing about using AI for grading or tutoring (Staff, 2024).

This legislation prohibits AI systems from acting as primary instructors in community college courses, ensuring that live, human instructors remain essential in the classroom. These legislative actions reflect growing concerns about the potential impact of AI on education and employment in the teaching profession.

California is taking a proactive stance on AI regulation with this three-pronged approach. First, the legislation prioritizes human teachers and ethical education by banning AI as a sole instructor. Second, it reflects broader concerns about AI's impact on jobs by protecting educators from displacement. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of human interaction and responsible AI use by asserting the irreplaceable role of teachers and viewing AI as a supplementary tool. This initiative aligns with California's larger movement to address potential risks and ethical dilemmas surrounding AI advancements.

The debate over AI in education has not been confined to California legislative chambers. Educators and their representative organizations have been vocal participants in this ongoing discussion. For example:

- The National Education Association (NEA), representing educators across the United States, has proposed a policy emphasizing retention of human educators as central to instruction. This stance highlights the irreplaceable nature of interpersonal interaction between students and teachers, underscoring the union's commitment to preserving the human element in education, even as technology advances.
- The NSF AI Education Act of 2024, introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-Washington) and Jerry Moran (R-Kansas), aims to expand AI and quantum education opportunities through NSF scholarships (2024, June 5).

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- The AI Education Empowerment Act seeks to equip educators with skills to teach AI concepts effectively (Stephen Lynch, 2024, June 3).
- The White House proposed the AI Bill of Rights in Education proposal as a framework for responding to concerns about AI in education (2023, November 22).
- The Brennan Center for Justice tracks various AI-related bills in the 118th Congress, covering aspects such as high-risk AI restrictions, evaluations, transparency requirements, and regulatory oversight (Levinson-Waldman et al., 2023).

The Role of AI

AI can free up valuable time for educators by handling administrative tasks, while also providing students with helpful resources to kickstart projects. However, the true strength lies in the complementary nature of human and artificial intelligence. Teachers, with their irreplaceable capacity for compassion and fostering emotional well-being, can leverage AI's capabilities to create a truly effective learning environment. This allows teachers to focus on developing critical thinking skills and fostering emotional growth in students, ultimately empowering them to become strong learners.

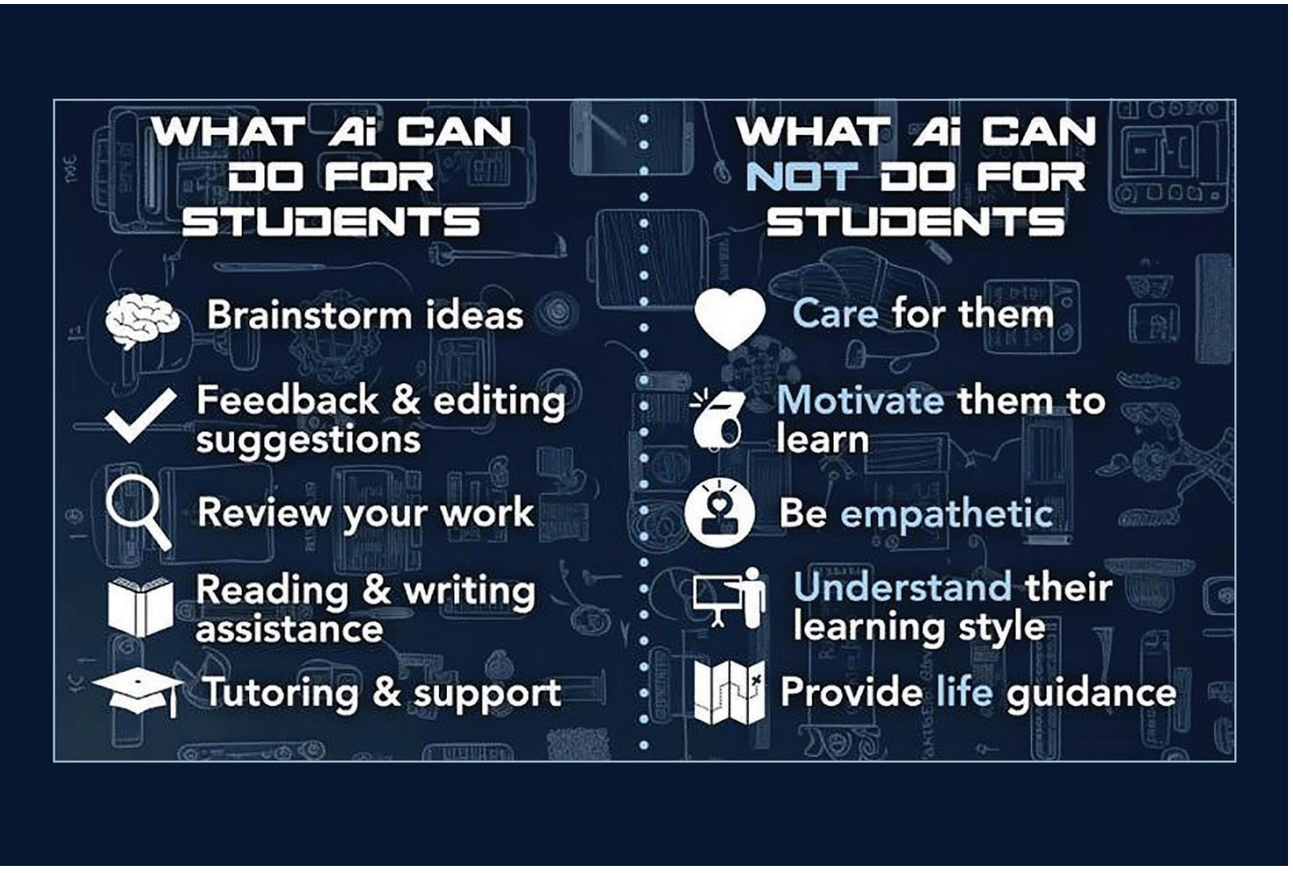

Figure 1. 5 Things AI Can and Can Not Do for Students by C. Hooker, December 5, 2023, Tech & Learning magazine.

As Carl Hooker (2023) pointed out in his "5 Things AI Can and Can Not Do For Students" article in Tech & Learning, AI programs can enhance the learning environment in certain areas, as the accompanying figure shows.

These points underscore the irreplaceable human elements of teaching, such as emotional support and fostering critical thinking skills. Research shows that AI has the potential to enhance the capabilities of good teachers and to help identify areas in which less effective instructors need improvement. However, the consensus among researchers is that AI cannot replace the essential human connection and mentorship by dedicated educators.

Looking to the Future

As community colleges navigate the integration of AI and other technologies, finding the right balance between technological tools and human instruction will be crucial. The legislative measures in California and other states suggest a trend toward ensuring that human teachers remain central to the educational process, with AI serving as a supportive tool rather than a replacement.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward online and hybrid learning models in community colleges, likely increasing the use of AI technologies to support students in virtual settings. As integration of technology advances, community colleges need to adapt their policies and practices to ensure that human instructors remain at the forefront of education while leveraging AI to enhance learning experiences.

Moreover, as AI becomes more prevalent in educational settings, resolving ethical concerns will be paramount. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the potential for AI to exacerbate existing educational inequities must be carefully considered and rectified through policy and practice.

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Conclusion

The narrative of AI's role in community college education is still unfolding. While AI technologies offer significant potential to enhance education, current legislative actions, educator perspectives, and research findings all point toward a future in which human teachers will remain irreplaceable.

The path forward will require ongoing collaboration among educators, policymakers, and technologists to harness the benefits of AI while preserving the essential human elements of teaching and learning. By doing so, community colleges can position themselves at the forefront of educational innovation while upholding the fundamental values of human-centered education. As we navigate this complex landscape, the goal remains clear: to create an educational environment that leverages the best of both human expertise and technological advancement, ensuring that the future of community college education is both innovative and deeply human. ■