Opinion

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Freshmen, now's your chance to ditch AI

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When I first entered college as a freshman in Fall 2024, the use of AI was already becoming a problem. Colleges around the country were grappling with the advent of ChatGPT and a host of other generative AI platforms, and so were individuals. Before I left for UConn, I had already resolved for myself that I would not use AI. At the time, I didn't think too much of this stance. Being a writer and involved in the humanities, I saw no use for the technology and had no desire to have AI complete my assignments for me. As my third year begins, however, I have come to see my opposition to AI in a new light. It is not just our integrity that we are fighting for; it is our very minds. If you want to keep your brain intact, it's time to detach from AI before it claims too much of a hold.

Generative AI has unleashed a great paradox upon the world. Theoretically, the technology allows you to produce anything you could ever want – essays, books, even movies – all with a quick prompt. This is part of the reason why many proponents of AI often gush about its seemingly unlimited possibilities. But the output of AI is hollow. AI can train on human words and visuals, but it will never replicate the actual creative element. AI will never have to struggle to find the right words, as I have done several times while writing this article. In losing the struggle, we lose the humanity that should be inherent in what humans create. The ability to create things instantly invalidates the value of their creation.

With this distinct lack of creativity, AI also encourages a dangerous sense of conformity. Being an amalgamation of humanity's past output, generative AI presents what it thinks is normal; it tries to find the average, agreed-upon answer amid all of the data. This conformity, while maintaining a sense of safety, jeopardizes individuality, just as AI's inability to actually create does. You will eventually start thinking and making decisions like everyone else, because AI doesn't really recognize your individuality. In college, individuality is one of the most important aspects. College is about discovering who you are and what you want to be. How can we do that when AI churns out essentially the same results for all of us? How can we exercise individuality when we give the functions of our brain over to a machine?

The challenge of tackling these issues must be faced by every student, and it is a battle we must wage largely without outside help. No one is stopping you from using AI to complete your work, not even UConn. The university has embraced the "possibilities" of the technology, launching AI for ImpaCT, which is intended to "connect and advance AI efforts across our academic, research, operational and public service missions." In other words, according to UConn, AI is here to stay. UConn's Professor Arash Zaghi echoed this sentiment in 2025 when he confidently stated that "You cannot declare war against AI."

At the same time, the tech industry continues its march towards integrating AI into absolutely everything. When I do a Google search, despite my hatred of it, a largely unhelpful AI overview is the first thing to pop up. The companies pushing AI have made the technology inescapable and unavoidable. In their minds, the choice is not whether to adopt AI and not even how; the choice revolves around how much money will line their pockets.

The good news is that freshmen still have a choice. You may have used AI extensively in high school, or you may not have. Either way, college offers you a new beginning. It may seem like embracing AI is the easier, better path. At this point, many UConn courses and career paths involve unavoidable uses of AI. Proponents of AI are right about one thing: The world and the workplace are increasingly revolving around the technology.

Even so, there is still a gap between plunging straight into the AI waters or cautiously treading them. Perhaps it seems practical to try and master AI, to be an expert at finding the right prompt to say, so you can be useful in the workplace. Yet the more you use AI, the more AI takes over your tasks, the more it becomes indispensable. In turn, your role will become equally dispensable, until companies decide they really only need the robot and not the human direction.

However, there is one thing AI certainly cannot replicate, and that is the workings of your mind, with all of its complexities and its creativity. Its ability crash and burn and pick up the pieces is immensely powerful. Your mind can imagine entire worlds without needing a prompt. It may take longer to do things than AI, but it is 100 percent yours. If you keep your mind intact, free of the shortcuts and conformity AI offers, you can fight the war we have been told we cannot win. And you will do it by being human.

On the fig tree and freshman year decision paralysis



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Starting college is kind of like stepping into a forest of fig trees.

If you've read "The Bell Jar" by Sylvia Plath, you'll know where I'm going with this — life is a fig tree and each fig is a potential future. Spend too much time weighing your options, and the figs die, leaving you with nothing.

Entering your freshman year births an entire mental forest. It's probably been drilled into your head that college is an era of crucial decisions. There's a tree for the major that will shape your career, one for the clubs that will earn you connections and opportunities, and one for the people who will support you over the next four years. Faced with that much choice, it seems easy to take a step back and debate the best way forward.

Despite this perceived security, spending eternity mapping out potential futures is the worst thing you could be doing. Take a path even if you're unsure! In most cases, picking the wrong option is infinitely better than inaction. If the major or club you choose turns out not to be a perfect fit, it won't derail your life. Worst case scenario, you're just one step closer to figuring out the best path forward.

A similar sentiment goes for those of you who ignore your fig tree because you're so locked into the five-year plan you've had since high school. Yes, you've picked a fig, but that doesn't change the fact that the others are still there for the taking. Maybe you genuinely love your field of study. If you know it's not in your heart, however, there's no need to worry. You're so early on in life that all of the other avenues are still open!

Oftentimes, a nonlinear path is the best way to find your calling. The average student will change their major three times in their college career. I've made a change to my path of study in each of my four semesters of college and I don't regret a single one. Even the things that didn't stick were worthwhile, because trying them confirmed that I was better off not pursuing them professionally. I never lay awake at night wondering what would have happened if I'd pursued a business degree, because I tried it and I was miserable. That misery paid off, because it motivated me to work harder once I began the things I was truly passionate about.

Even if you're in love with your major, it's important to take classes outside of it. Taking advantage of general education courses is the most convenient way to do this, because they'll count towards your degree anyway. To all the five-year-planners: No, that fun gen-ed will not set you back. Spend some time stalking the course catalogue for niche classes like Intro to World Puppetry. Leaving the echo chamber of your major and expanding your skills is always a good idea. On future job applications, who's going to seem more interesting: the Journalism major who took the same classes as everyone else with their degree or the Journalism major who knows how to date fossils and operate light boards?

If you have no clue what you want to do, now is the time to try everything. Clubs and student organizations are a particularly low-stakes way to explore hobbies and surround yourself with new people. The best piece of advice I can give you is to explore the involvement fair and make a list of everything that sounds remotely interesting. Over the next few weeks, attend at least one meeting for each. As an incoming junior, I'm still planning on going to the involvement fair — not just because I'm tabling and want to bum free candy off my friends at their tables. It's never too late to figure out you love something! Even incoming seniors have an entire year left to explore new hobbies.

Even things you think you'll hate are worth exploring. Last fall, I stumbled into orientation for The Daily Campus because I got bored and wanted to visit a friend. Now, I can't imagine spending Sunday nights anywhere but the little building behind Moe's. So, if your roommate asks you to accompany them to a musical theatre audition or the Moon Appreciation Club, just go!

You don't have to spend your freshman year staring up at your fig tree and wondering if the fruit in your hand is good enough to sustain you for the next four years. Get up, climb that tree, and fill a basket.