HIAIH Summer 2025 Listening Tour

Introduction:

Over the summer of 2025, the Hastings Initiative for AI and Humanity (HIAH) met with 15 non-academic departments, administrative offices, and centers to understand the impact of Artificial Intelligence on our campus. Our goal was to listen to the opportunities, concerns, and needs of our colleagues to help foster a campus-wide dialogue on using AI thoughtfully and ethically. The tour revealed a community that is curious, cautious, and actively seeking guidance. While some areas are already experimenting with AI, most expressed a strong need for training, ethical guidelines, and clear institutional policies. We share these findings to spark dialogue and guide the Initiative's role in fostering thoughtful, ethical, and community-centered AI engagement at Bowdoin.

Key Themes & Findings:

- **Widespread Interest and Experimentation:** Departments are actively exploring AI's potential for research, teaching, and operations.
  - Research & Operations: The Arctic Museum is using Transkribus to recognize handwriting in historical journals, the Library is exploring tools for digitizing collections and creating photograph metadata, and the Art Museum is exploring how AI could analyze acquisition trends. Some Lab instructors are using AI for predictive modeling in chemistry labs, and some honors students have applied it to image analysis. The Schiller Coastal Studies Center is exploring AI for analyzing remote sensing and environmental datasets, seeing it as a valuable tool for making complex datasets more accessible. The Kent Island Scientific Station uses machine learning to study bird and bee populations.
  - Student-facing support: Some offices are exploring AI's potential to streamline their application review workflows. Career Exploration and Development (CXD) is already teaching students how to use AI to prepare resumes and practice for interviews.

➔ **Urgent Ethical, Privacy, and Security Concerns:** Conversations consistently highlighted the need for a strong ethical framework.

- Sensitive Data and Legal Risks: Partners expressed strong concerns about protecting sensitive student data and Indigenous cultural knowledge in museum collections. The library noted the significant legal risk of users uploading content from licensed databases to public LLMs, which could violate vendor agreements.
- Academic Integrity and Transparency: Faculty and staff are concerned about setting clear expectations for AI use in student work. A related theme is the need for transparency about how faculty themselves use AI, including norms for acknowledgement and citation. Lab instructors noted the difficulty of proving AI misuse when they suspect it and emphasizing their goal of preventing students from using AI to replace critical thinking.
- Equity and Justice: Concerns were raised that access to powerful paid AI tools could create inequities among students. Equity concerns also extended to "tech colonialism" – from the placement of data centers in northern communities to the environmental toll of large-scale AI systems. Schiller emphasized the importance of understanding local community needs and values before implementing AI solutions in rural and working waterfront contexts.
- Copyright and Intellectual Property: The Library flagged an urgent need for guidance on two fronts: 1) how faculty and students can ethically use copyrighted materials when working with AI, and 2) how the college can protect its own scholarship and collections from being scraped by AI models without permission.
- Bridging Perspectives: AI discourse has nationally created a divide between those who see it as an existential threat and those who view it as inevitable progress. It is important to ensure that Bowdoin avoids polarization by collectively and thoughtfully engaging with the technology and equipping the community with the knowledge and understanding to have constructive dialogue.

➔ **Evolving Curriculum and Pedagogy**: AI is prompting a re-evaluation of what and how we teach.

- ◆ New Literacies: CXD emphasized that basic AI literacy is now a necessary workforce skill and is open to integrating AI modules in its bootcamp. The library noted that the challenge for students is shifting from a lack of information to a state of "information overload". The role of librarians is evolving to help students critically evaluate and synthesize information, rather than just find it.
- ◆ Rethinking Pedagogy: Library staff and lab instructors noted that the existence of AI requires rethinking assignment design to prevent "busy work" that students will offload to AI. This raises a crucial question: What uniquely human skills must we cultivate in our students for them to thrive in the age of AI?
    - The tour also revealed AI-free learning environments such as Kent Island, where limited internet access enables students to engage deeply with traditional methods like handwriting and reading physical texts. These spaces offer important models for how we might intentionally design learning environments that balance technological engagement with opportunities for unmediated cognitive work.
- ◆ Preserving Critical Thinking: While some instructors are incorporating AI into higher-level courses, they remain focused on ensuring students develop core critical thinking skills, expressing that the purpose of student writing is the process of thinking, not just the final product. Our conversations underscore that the challenge is not whether to use AI, but how to design learning experiences that preserve curiosity, struggle, and human connection.
- ◆ Renewed Value of Primary Sources: The Library reports that student and faculty demand for Special Collections is increasing. In an environment saturated with AI-generated content, unpublished primary sources are seen as a vital foundation for original, verifiable scholarship.
- ◆ Student Experience: The Center for Learning and Teaching (BCLT) raised concerns about protecting non-native English speakers from unfair accusations of AI-use and highlighted the need to preserve the "messy cognitive process" of learning.

Pathways Forward for HIAIH:

- ➔ **Campus Wide-Guidelines and Best Practices**
  - ◆ Facilitate campus-wide dialogue on academic integrity, ethical awareness, and data security.
  - ◆ Work with the Library and IT to establish copyright guidance, protect institutional scholarship, and ensure privacy in AI use.
- ➔ **Training and Professional Development**
  - ◆ Offer targeted programming for staff, faculty, and students that build skills and imagination around AI.
  - ◆ The demands of AI raised concerns around staffing and training in multiple conversations. Potential solutions include hiring limited-term technology specialists who can help staff navigate new tools sustainably and offering stipends to students who support specific AI-related projects or AI-training.
- ➔ **Foster Cross-Campus and Community Collaboration**
  - ◆ Serve as a hub for connecting people, ideas, and resources; develop an "AI at Bowdoin" map.
  - ◆ Explore partnerships with peer institutions like Colby and Bates as well as local nonprofits (via McKeen Center).
- ➔ **Promote Ethical, Inclusive, and Sustainable AI Engagement**
  - ◆ Program events and discussions of environmental impact and global justice.
  - ◆ Host workshops on copyright, intellectual property, and cultural sensitivity.
  - ◆ Promote and support projects that use AI in service to local communities, ensuring these are developed in close partnership with community members.
- ➔ **Communicate and Showcase AI at Bowdoin**
  - ◆ Use the Initiative's website to highlight successful projects and discipline-specific applications. Continue sharing and creating resources for the website.
  - ◆ Increase awareness and provide training on LibreChat to ensure all community members can use this resource effectively.