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UCSB to host second annual AI Spring Symposium

No matter how you feel about artificial intelligence — love it, fear it or question it — AI is here to stay. In fact, it seems to be evolving daily, with AI systems becoming increasingly sophisticated, capable and ubiquitous.

UC Santa Barbara will be tackling some of the issues around ethical use and practical applications for the ever-changing machine learning landscape when the Artificial Intelligence Community of Practice (CoP) hosts the AI Spring Symposium “AI in Action: Insights from the UCSB Community” on Zoom April 28th through May 2nd.

Daily sessions, which take place virtually and are open to anyone, will tackle topics like chatbots, AI in clinical medical practice and college students’ use of ChatGPT. The event organizers aim to create a space where people can "be skeptical and be inquisitive together" about AI, said co-organizer Lisa Berry.

For Berry, who is co-director of the AI CoP and a senior instructional consultant in the Office of Teaching and Learning, one of the main benefits of the symposium is a chance to gain insight into how others on the campus are handling issues of AI-enhanced education. “I am naturally drawn to asking questions about what people are already doing on campus with AI, what people are curious about and how we can enable people to explore those curiosities in a scholarly way,” said Berry.

CoP co-director and deputy chief information officer Joe Sabado emphasized how inclusive the event is, welcoming participants from on campus or off, with any level of AI expertise. “The idea is, how do we create a community where folks feel like they can participate?” he said. “Last year we had a mixture of faculty, students, grad students and staff all participating without hierarchy. One of our guiding principles is that we welcome every perspective. It's an inclusive hub that fosters collaboration, learning, and ethical innovation. We want to empower our campus community to explore, implement, and shape AI in alignment with UCSB’s mission and values.”

For 2025, the AI Community of Practice has teamed up with the Department of Communication’s biennial Rupe Conference, which focuses on the social implications of mass and digital media. “This year, we have more presentations that are focused on teaching and learning and the ways that university students interact with genAI,” said Berry. “I think the topic is very well aligned with our mission to look at both the ways that people are using AI, but also the academic research about it.”

Berry and Sabado also hope that attendees take some time to connect with one another via in-person meetups outside of virtual spaces. “This year, we are offering more social opportunities,” said Sabado. “They're at the end of the day on Monday and Tuesday, so that people are going to have seen some really inspiring talks and then have a space to talk through them.”

The symposium welcomes attendees who have never used AI tools before, and even those who actively distrust and dislike it. “If you are interested in AI for teaching, for research, for workplace productivity – even if you have never interacted with AI before – this is an opportunity to get your feet wet and ask questions,” said Berry. “Everyone is welcome, regardless of what you think about AI. We're all learning together.”

Tags
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The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.