



Last month, close to 100 faculty gathered in the library on a Friday to participate in the first [Research in the Age of AI Symposium](#) which featured twenty faculty members across vastly different departments. Kinesiology faculty member Kate Hamel kicked off the event to what she described as a “curious group,” split evenly into three groups of 1) power users, 2) moderate users, and 3) others who are just learning about AI. She detailed [a recent article in Nature](#) on the effect of AI on research and research grants and likened AI to a powerful new drug that advanced medicine but also had significant side effects that should not be ignored. Hamel indeed set the tone for what I find most valuable about a university setting, a space for open discussion of contentious topics to better understand something that feels uncomfortably disruptive.

Students too are engaged in the debate over AI, perhaps with more intense emotion than what I witnessed at the symposium. At President Mahoney’s monthly meetings with Associated Students, several students demanded more classes on AI while another segment of the group called for the wholesale rejection of AI due to its racist content and environmental impact. What I found most interesting was that while faculty across academia have expressed worry about students plagiarizing with AI, a few students expressed equal outrage regarding faculty using AI to take short cuts in preparing class materials. As AI generates much heated conflict among us, [it remains a development that cannot be ignored](#).

Professor Gaurav Suri from Psychology delivered the symposium’s keynote address. He had me on the edge of my seat as he explained how AI, similar to the human mind, is “[emergent](#).” He drew the analogy of a colony of ants finding the shortest pathway around an obstacle as similar to neural networks in the brain as well as transformer networks in machine intelligence. (My summary above gives little justice to his weighty talk.) His lecture moved me, more evidence of the incredible teaching that takes place on this campus in which faculty explain complex ideas in an accessible manner. Perhaps the most surprising point that Suri shared was that the majority of students in his class were suspicious of his class introducing AI, illuminating again the transformative work unfolding in the classroom.

We remain a complex campus in which we can simultaneously hold opposing viewpoints as we push towards the single goal of inquiry. Faculty members who had written an [op-ed piece adamantly opposing CSU’s investment in AI](#) were also researchers on a National Science Foundation Grant studying AI in society. CEETL Faculty Director Jennifer Trainor raises questions about AI in her [Substack](#) while at the same time [guiding faculty](#) on how to teach students about AI. This is the magic of being in an environment that provokes thought, asks questions, and can sit relatively peaceably in a space between black and white.

What should inspire us all is that our campus community continues to push towards innovation and inquiry amid immensely challenging times both locally and globally. Not only do we have a SFSU [website](#) populated with ever increasing AI events and workshops on our campus, we are simultaneously creating certificates that link directly to jobs, providing more “sticky” spaces to boost retention, and hyping up

SFSU on social media to declare publicly that SFSU is a great place to learn. As Enrollment Management deliberately implements their strategic plan, colleges will also roll out renewed efforts to improve retention.

At a recent retreat, Foundation Board Member Neda Nobari noted “even in the most desperate times, the imagination can build what despair tears down,” as she introduced the poet Rumi to the group for the Iranian New Year Nowruz. Her words stirred in me not just hope for a better world, but also gratitude to be a part of a campus community that refuses to let despair overtake us. I can see it all around us in the classroom, in the curriculum, and in staffing. Faculty and staff continue to forge new ways of being despite prolonged uncertainty and anxiety. These are the two truths that we bravely hold as a community. Our imagination, creativity, and flexibility will be “our way of survival, a way of remembering who we are, and a way of imagining who we might yet become” as Nobari described the role of poetry for the Iranian people.

In community,



Amy Sueyoshi  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

