

HOW AI COULD CHANGE THE WAY WE TEACH AND LEARN – A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

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An Interview with
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Brent Anders, PhD, is the Director of the Sovorel Center for Teaching and Learning as well as a lecturer, researcher and former Director of Institutional Research and Analysis, Center for Teaching

and Learning at the American University of Armenia. He holds a doctoral degree in education (focusing on online learning, educational technology and instructional methodologies) and has written multiple books, research articles and blog posts on these subjects. Focused on the need for AI in education to better position students to succeed in a fully integrated AI world, Anders is the author of the recent book, *The AI Literacy Imperative: Empowering Instructors & Students, and 9 Point Action Plan: for Generative AI Integration into Education*. He also has an educational YouTube channel focusing on instructional technology and AI in education (<https://www.youtube.com/@sovorel-EDU>).

Q: How do you see AI changing teaching, learning and assessment in higher education by 2030?

Brent: Generative AI has been out for two years now. The issue is that there's still confusion. And the reason that there's still confusion is because higher education has not taken any form of leadership in this area — not a single bit. So they've been doing the "wait and see" strategy, the "I don't know if it's important" response, even though all sorts of different organizations from the UN, from different countries have all come out and expressed that AI literacy is an imperative that is going to drastically affect all of society — that if you want to be competitive in the workforce, you must have these skills.

So that's already out there, and that's based off research, most of which was conducted by higher education professionals. The UN comes out, World Economic Forum comes out with these things. They are not just promoting opinion. They are sharing data and analysis based on research.

So, what has academia done? Really nothing, right? They're still working on it. They're still developing,

thinking about it. Academia goes slow, but the thing is that these are already happening, already going on in the workplace. So as far as AI affecting society, it's already massively affecting it and will continue to do so.

I know people that are professionals in the field of business, architecture, design, artists, even writers. I know professionals in all those different fields. Every single one of them uses AI. They use AI in some way within their process to enhance their capabilities. So that's all the professions I know, right? All these professionals. Now going back into academia, I still don't see that as an understood reality. I don't see that. So there's many courses where they don't even talk about AI. They don't incorporate these things. I think it's a massive issue that really needs to be addressed.

Q: What needs to happen in higher education to increase the effective use of AI for teaching, learning and assessment?

Brent: I have been working as a consultant for many different educational institutions around the world, trying to help them develop AI literacy and helping them understand there are specific actions that need to happen for us to move forward with this. There are different steps that need to be taken. Of course, policies need to be developed, but even then, those are all opportunities to bring everyone together to learn about AI. Well, what is this policy going to cover? How do we view it? What do we think about it? What do the students think about it? These are opportunities to have sensing sessions while at the same time discussing what AI is and how it's going to impact teaching and learning as well as jobs and society.

Now, one big thing — and this ties back to academic leadership in general — is that there needs to be some sort of leadership guidance. That really needs to happen for multiple levels. I don't mean an edict from some sort of person controlling everything. I just mean a provost or president to say to all in their institution that "AI is a very important thing we need to embrace. I am encouraging you to explore it. I'm encouraging you to see if this is something that can be incorporated within your course so students can

develop these important necessary skills because of the world around us.” By giving that type of guidance, encouragement and support, that helps the faculty to then turn around and go, “Oh yeah, I have been hearing about this AI thing, I didn’t know if it was important enough for me to spend my time on. So now I’ll look into it, because I’m getting this from my provost, from whoever is the program chair, or from the dean. All those people are encouraging me to do this. Yes, I’ll start to incorporate. Now, because I’ve heard this from both faculty and even students.” That’s the momentum we need to see. Right now, we don’t see it.

I teach professional communications to business and English students. Sometimes my students come into class, and they have never had a class that explored AI and its potential and limitations. It was always viewed as something negative. And here I am in my course saying, hey, I need you to use it to do this, that and then this. They ask, “Why are we doing it?” I explain this is a necessary skill you all need to have. This is another one of those things that I think leadership guidance is something that really needs to push this moving forward.

Q: How do you respond to the concerns about academic integrity and cheating?

Brent: It is interesting you even bring that up because that is how I first got my exposure to it. I got called in by the provost and he asked me to write a white paper dealing with different steps that we can do at the university to help address academic misconduct. I found some areas on the Internet that had pre-Chat GPT AI available so that a student could use it to write a portion of their essay. It wasn’t perfect, but it was pretty good. And so that’s when I realized AI was going to change everything and I devoted myself to really learning a lot more about it. This is what I’ve come up with as far as thinking about cheating. There are a few different aspects here. One is very straightforward: cheating is wrong. But then it’s a matter of, ok, what is the cheating part? Because it has to go back to what is the student learning objective (SLO), right? What do we want our students to learn? In my class, one of the SLOs is they can create a business proposal. In developing and writing

that business proposal, I advise them to use AI as much as they want. Go in there and tell the AI, write me a business proposal. I have no problems with that. It can be 100% written by AI. Now, I’m going to evaluate that. So I am very much interested in you being able to create that product. Why? Because I’m not teaching you English. I’m not a freshman seminar instructor teaching you essay writing. I want to see that you can create this product and see it as a potential business. It better be correct. It better be formatted right. It better not have any “hallucinated” and false information. It better have proper resources and support references because I’m checking all these things. And the thing is even now when I have students use AI 100%, they still don’t get it all right. I still don’t have perfect papers. Why? Because they’re still not fully understanding. I then give them feedback. They develop it. What I’m more interested in is now that they’ve put this report together, I have them do an oral presentation. And that’s when I’m really evaluating them because now they have to show me their mastery of understanding. I also ask them questions. AI can’t help them there — they have to prove they “own” their proposal and fully understand it. Now the AI can definitely help them prepare and be able to understand and learn and all these different things. My point is we need to understand both the “why” and “what” in terms of what we are teaching and evaluating. That’s the way I see it.

Q: What do you see happening five or six years from now with AI in higher education?

Brent: Five years is a huge amount of time for AI in teaching and learning, and I think it would be more realistic to predict something a year, two years in advance, given the very slow rate of advancement in higher education right now. 2025 is going to be the year of the robot, so that’s going to affect everything. We’re already talking about artificial general intelligence (AGI) — in which AI is equal to human intelligence — and now we’re also talking about quantum computing. We are already living in the future. So, I see a combination of all three of those in the same year to be astronomical in terms of the impact on society.

The first thing is understanding. I'm always looking at what I should be teaching my students to prepare them for the real world out there right now and I can see there's all sorts of debates about the purpose of higher education. Yes, I want to develop a great critical thinker. Yes, I want to develop a good citizen and with, you know artistic visions and appreciation — 100% yes. But let's also be realistic and know we have to prepare them for the workforce, and we have to get them ready to be productive, competitive, innovative at work. In thinking about that, I have to think about what the future economy is going to look like. What are they going to need as far as skills and subskills? With agentic capabilities already online — that is, the ability to accomplish goals independently — AI will be able to do many complicated tasks that can do research and make decisions. So now I have to understand that, in a world filled with AI agents, what's going to be the purpose of my students when they arrive in the workforce? What are they going to be required to do? One is that they are having to be able to manage AI agents and continuously build their capabilities. So, they need to know aspects of AI, what's going on with the AI, management aspects like that. That's important.

Regardless of how many robots or AI agents we have, there's still going to be human interaction, human-to-human contact. They need to have skills mastery as far as what's going on, but then they also need to be able to express that to other people, to talk about what is going on with their agents, what's going on with their business. Communication skills, empathy, compassion and all these different soft skills come to the top. They still need to have foundational knowledge, that's for sure. That never goes away. But as far as the way we do a lot of things right now, I think that's going to sort of flip around because it isn't going to be about sort of, hey, yes, this essay is perfect. Now I'm going to give you 100%. No, it's going to be, hey, this essay is perfect, which I expect. So now I'm going to give you 20% on this. The rest of it is going to come from applying it. The rest of it is going to come from being able to talk about it, to discuss it, to answer questions about it orally and through an interaction, these application skills. So that makes me think that in college, in university, if we want to remain relevant,

what we need to focus on is creating experiential learning opportunities.

This means it's going to be much more of "I spent this time at the university, and I gained all this experience. Yes, the knowledge is out there. Yes, I got smarter, but I also spent so much time applying this. I went through simulations. I went through real-life things." So it really needs to switch completely away from lecturing. This hour-long lecture — that should be something that completely goes away. And it's funny because I still run into professors that will argue with me and say, no, no, lecturing is great. I loved lecturing when I was a student. No, maybe you were self-motivated. Maybe you love the topic. But the lecture has been shown repeatedly to be the worst way to learn something. The more we can create these experiential learning opportunities, more hands-on, more situations where we have emotional connection and real application of the information, I think that's got to be the future in order for us to be competitive and thriving.