To: Santi Garces (Chief Innovation Officer)
CC: Aleja Jaramillo (Director of Governance and Policy) & Michael Evans (Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Director of Emergent Technologies)
From: Rosalyn Beckwith, Linwood Blaisdell, Cassidy Zeng, Tiffany Zheng (Northeastern University Students)
Date: April 4, 2024
Re: Final Memo

Our team represents the college community of Northeastern University, composed of students, professors, general faculty, and anyone involved in University organizations. Each team member represents distinct sub-categories within the larger college ecosystem, like the campus clubs Generate and Society of Women Engineers, as well as Greek life. Additionally, our representation of first-generation college students and entrepreneurial communities further enriches our understanding of Northeastern University. However, it is important to note that while we are representing one university, we are also representing college students as a whole.

The focus on the college community stems from its pivotal role as a hub for innovation and learning. We feel that we are uniquely positioned to understand the evolving landscape of AI within an academic setting. Given the significant amount of research conducted in a university like ours, exploring the intersection of AI and college communities offers valuable insights into adoption patterns, user perceptions, and possible societal impacts. Based on our interview with members of our respective sub-communities, it's evident that AI technologies have a nuanced impact on different user groups.

Examples from Interviews

- Mimi, a sorority member, expressed skepticism about the accuracy of AI. Despite recognizing its potential benefits, she remains cautious in using it in her daily life due to past experiences.
- Katie, another sorority member, shared concerns about its ethical implications in creative fields. She highlighted issues relating to plagiarism and the displacement of human creativity.
- Miti from Society of Women Engineers emphasized the importance of AI in academic contexts yet noted its limitations in fields requiring up-to-date information and critical analysis.
- Leroy from Generate underscored the transformative potential of AI in software engineering while acknowledging the need for human oversight and verification.
- Siya, a finance and data science major, highlighted the role of AI in data analysis and content creation within the Entrepreneurship Club, illustrating its practical applications in diverse domains.
- Sophia, a bioengineering major, discussed the potential of AI in genome analysis and genome editing, emphasizing its importance in niche applications.

This exploration of the college communities' relationship with AI underscores the complexity of user perceptions and experiences. By understanding diverse perspectives within our community, we can better navigate the opportunities and challenges with AI in higher education. Thank you for considering our insights!

AI can enhance efficiency and productivity in various sectors, benefiting the college community currently and in future industries. For example, one of our interviewees, Mimi, mentioned that AI could potentially make finding answers easier, which could benefit students and faculty in their research and studies. Although one interesting note is that the technology most of our community is optimistic about is not prominently used in college. Our overarching community was optimistic about AI's role in quantitative disciplines such as data analytics. The most positive feedback for AI was brought up when discussing future industry usages. For example, Miti and Sophia both mentioned that they see AI being used in the bioengineering field in data management by helping to identify different enzymes and genetic diseases. Different sub-communities may have varying perceptions of AI based on their experiences and needs. For example, Katie expressed strong concerns about AI's ethical implications in creative fields. It is important to note that some of our sub-communities, women in engineering, entrepreneurship, and Generate, have a higher concentration of a single major. None of the team members nor the interviewees were humanities majors. Some sub-communities may use AI more extensively or differently than others, leading to different perspectives on its benefits and drawbacks. Mimi, for instance, mentioned using AI for phone calls to her parents, while Katie used it for marketing captions and in a writing-intensive class.

There are concerns about the capabilities of AI systems. Mimi's lack of trust in AI, citing its lack of accuracy, reflects this common concern. In fact, most of the interviewees had a general distrust of AI stemming from personal experiences of receiving partial or misinformation. There was another trend of concern for the impact of AI on creative sub-communities. Interviewees that were not in humanities majors were concerned about AI's impact on creativity and originality in art and design. For example, Katie and Miti's strong stance against AI in creative fields reflects this issue. The community's varying level of education and awareness about AI can also influence its perceptions and concerns. Mimi's evolving concept of AI, from thinking of it in terms of fictional characters like Jarvis to its more practical applications, suggests a growing awareness and understanding of AI technology. The more AI is discussed, the more the college community will be able to identify AI and use it as a tool. Some community members fear job displacement or changes in job requirements due to automation. While this was not a prominent concern from the interviewees, it is important to mention. Siya mentioned that even in the design aspects of her future career in marketing she was not concerned about becoming automated due to AI not having a distinguishable "human touch." And in another interview, Leroy mentioned that he foresees changes in the job description of software engineering to include managing AI, but again he was not concerned about being replaced by it. On the flip side of job displacement, there is also optimism for growth in industries and new job positions. But this growth could disproportionately affect sub-communities within the college community, which is shown in our interviews with the concern for more creative and artistic majors as previously mentioned.

The community may have opinions on the need for regulations and governance to ensure responsible AI use. This was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews but is an important consideration in discussions about AI technology.

Regarding AI regulation, our college sub-communities believe that societal well-being, ethical use, and innovation considerations should be prioritized. Below, we have highlighted some considerations and recommendations based on screening our community:

Values:

- Creativity: Encourage responsible use of AI to enhance creativity.
- Accuracy: Emphasize the importance of AI systems' accuracy, reliability, and transparency in their decision-making processes.
- Innovation: Support developing and adopting AI technologies that drive economic growth and societal progress.
- Honor: Uphold ethical standards, ensuring AI technologies are used respectfully/fairly.
- Learning: Foster ongoing education and awareness about AI technologies, promoting a culture of adaptation and understanding.

Principles:

- Ethical and Responsible Use: Promote ethical development, deployment, and use of AI technologies aligned with societal values and human rights.
- Fairness and Non-discrimination: Ensure AI systems do not unfairly advantage or disadvantage individuals or groups based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status.
- Safety: Implement measures to prevent malicious use and ensure security in AI systems.
- Collaboration and Engagement: Encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders to inform AI policy development.

Concrete Suggestions (with community input):

- Protecting Artists: Enact regulations to label AI-generated art and ensure fair compensation for artists.
- Educating the Public: Launch public awareness campaigns or implement mandatory workshops about AI's limitations and responsible usage, particularly in creativity and science.
- Regulatory Oversight: Establish oversight to monitor AI's ethical use and prevent misinformation dissemination; establish guidelines for liability when accidents happen.
- Supporting Innovation: Provide funding and incentives for AI research that addresses societal challenges.
- Community Engagement: Involve creative and scientific communities in policy development to address their specific concerns.
- Transparency: Require clear documentation of AI systems, including their workings, limitations, and potential biases.
- Privacy and Data Protection: Prioritize privacy and personal data protection, giving individuals control over their data usage.

In conclusion, our AI-focused policy must be guided by values of community well-being, accuracy, creativity, innovation, honor, and continuous learning, while adhering to principles of ethics, transparency, accountability, fairness, privacy, safety, collaboration, and education. By addressing community concerns and implementing concrete suggestions, we ensure that AI benefits society responsibly and ethically.