Appendix B

FAQs about AI

What is AI?

Artificial intelligence, commonly abbreviated as "AI," has existed in many forms for decades. At its simplest, artificial intelligence could refer to any and all forms of a machine being coded by a human to perform a task. In more recent times, "AI" is usually used to refer to newer, generative types of artificial intelligence, including systems such as Language Learning Modules, chatbots, and agentic AI. Artificial intelligence that creates content using sentient thought, no content or programming from humans needed, still only exists in science fiction.

How does AI work?

AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) generate text responses to your prompts by using probability.[1] AI models use their training data to predict the next word in each sentence, acting like advanced autocomplete tools without any ability to reason or reflect.[2] Knowing how AI works using probability demystifies the tool and illuminates how AI hallucinations, awkward writing, biases, and misinformation occur.[3] Reference the AI Food Chain in Appendix A to see a visualization of the process and some of the issues along the way.

Does AI have an environmental cost?

AI systems require enormous energy costs. In order to run the programming that produces AI content (whether that is text, images, decisions, or procedures), the AI systems deploy probability algorithms that analyze the data that was fed to them during the learning stage or in real time. Running these probability programs is intensive and requires a lot of electricity, which in turn generates a large amount of heat, noise, e-waste, and emissions harmful to the environment. In order to keep the computer systems going without being destroyed by the increased heat, the physical mechanisms are cooled with water. Data centers built to house AI systems thus pose several types of risks to the communities in which they are built, including a strain on utilities and resources, increased cost of electricity, and pollution that contributes to increased social inequality. Sustainability is one of ALA's Core Values, and thus, libraries advocate for responsible development of AI data centers, as well as stringent ethical oversight of AI companies on a national and world-wide level[4].

What does privacy have to do with AI?

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[1] How AI Predicts the Next Word: The Science Behind LLM: https://medium.com/stuvalley-ai-nexus/how-ai-predicts-the-next-words-the-science-behind-llm-de21d7f4a306.
[2] Understand AI: How It Actually Produces Words: https://recursioninstitute.org/how-ai-predicts-the-next-word.
[3] When AI Get it Wrong: Addressing AI Hallucinations and Bias: https://mitsloanedtech.mit.edu/ai/basics/addressing-ai-hallucinations-and-bias/.
[4] ALA Guidance on AI Use: https://www.ala.org/tools/standards-and-guidelines/guidance-use-artificial-intelligence-libraries

ALA Code of Ethics states that "We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted."[5] LPL follows this same code; this is why we take precautions to protect patrons' personal information in our circulation records (see our Electronic Media Policy). AI systems can infringe on privacy during the collection of content—some of the content gathered is considered the private, personal information of the person to whom it belongs, and often, those people were not informed of nor asked to give consent to the sharing of their information. Your information may be gathered by AI systems through not just published content but also private, including internet searches, postings on chat forums, calls on the phone, or any number of other means.

Why does intellectual property matter in relation to AI?

Creating art is a uniquely human endeavor. The mysteries of our minds, hearts, and souls intertwine with our human experience so that inspired individuals create works that express meaning and emotions, whether that is in literature, painting, drawing, sculpting, music, dance, film, or any other artistic endeavor. As can be seen on the AI Food Chain, human endeavors form the basis of calculations run by AI systems when generating a product to match a prompt. Thus, all AI-generated artistic content is simply broken-down and repackaged existing human artistic content. Much of the content in current AI generative systems was taken without the artists' knowledge and consent, not to mention lack of a means to compensate the artists for the profit made from the use of their works.[6]

In the early days of mass AI, this theft of artists' intellectual property was hidden from the end user. If AI systems can gain their content through ethical means—with consent, compensation, and credit all gained and given—then AI systems will go a long way in distancing themselves from this particular ethical knot.

How does AI have an effect on human labor?

As seen on the AI Food Chain, the human contributions to AI training have historically been "uncompensated, uncredited, and extracted as free labor,"[7] whether or not consent was even given. Compounded with this is that the end result of AI is often replacing human workers in their jobs and means to earn a living wage.

Another side effect of mass use of AI is "automation bias," which assumes artificial intelligence is superior to the human mind.[8] This can lead to the decline of critical-thinking skills and the outsourcing of labor to machines which may produce flawed results implicitly trusted by

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[5] ALA Code of Ethics: https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics
[6] Intellectual Property Issues in Artificial Intelligence Trained on Scraped Data: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2025/02/intellectual-property-issues-in-artificial-intelligence-trained-on-scraped-data_a07f010b/d5241a23-en.pdf
[7] ALA Guidance on AI Use: https://www.ala.org/tools/standards-and-guidelines/guidance-use-artificial-intelligence-libraries
[8] Dialogues with AI Reduce Beliefs in Misinformation but Build No Lasting Discernment Skills: https://dl.acm.org/doi/epdf/10.1145/3772318.3790656

humans.[9] Combined with AI's data gleaned from genuine, human accomplishments, that misplaced trust causes individuals to accept works which look creative on the surface but lack the depth of human inspiration.[10] Artificial intelligence can certainly be incorporated into the development or execution of artistic works or other products, such as using Adobe products to draft an early image or remove a background, using music programs to continue a rhythm or find a similar melody, or choreographing a dance and then programming a robot to perform it. However, the use of AI in making a final product with minimal to no human intervention crosses a line. It concedes authority to a machine, degrading human dignity, labor, and art.

AI should complement and enhance human labor without replacing or stealing from it. Examples of this could be AI used in medical testing to detect diseases beyond human calculation or AI used in scientific fields to draft content such as code or equations, again beyond human calculations, with the resulting discoveries contributing to the public good. In those scenarios, humans run the AI systems, interpret the findings, and manage the resulting actions.

Unfortunately, at this time, "AI development is controlled by a small number of companies whose incentives are not aligned with libraries, intellectual freedom, or the public good."[11] Until that power imbalance changes, AI advancements are unlikely to have an overall positive effect on human labor.

AI isn't human, so how can it be biased?

The AI Food Chain shows that AI systems are built on human-created content. This content contains all the biases, stereotypes, and inequalities that are already intrinsic in human history and societies. When AI systems compute results from these datasets, the probability functions will continue to match pieces of information together that already appear together, regardless of whether or not those pairings are hurtful or incorrect, because the AI system is running on probabilities, not ethics or truth. This leads to results of anything from creating images that center white people and white characteristics to data comparisons that center male information to text that excludes experiences of anyone with disabilities or neurodivergence.

The ALA Guidance on AI Use provides a good summary of the negative effects of these biases: "AI and other automated information systems can threaten intellectual freedom when they obscure how information is ranked, extract public or library-created data without clear public benefit, or optimize engagement at the expense of attention, reflection, and independent judgement. AI tools can reflect social biases, encourage overreliance, and weaken users' ability to assess information independently."[12] This is why one of the professional obligations of LPL libraries is to also educate patrons using AI in the accuracy and validity of the resulting content.

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[9] To Trust or to Think: https://dl.acm.org/doi/epdf/10.1145/3449287
[10] The Creative Link Between Words and Ideas is Weakening in the AI Era: https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/jsz58_v6
[11] ALA Guidance on AI Use: https://www.ala.org/tools/standards-and-guidelines/guidance-use-artificial-intelligence-libraries
[12] ALA Guidance on AI Use: https://www.ala.org/tools/standards-and-guidelines/guidance-use-artificial-intelligence-libraries