USM Artificial Intelligence Academic Taskforce

Faculty Development and Curriculum Recommendations

AI Taskforce History

In 2023, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Taskforce was established within the Center for Faculty Development (CFD) to consider course policies in relation to the increased accessibility of artificial intelligence. The initial work of this committee resulted in three options for incorporating artificial intelligence into courses, which were integrated into the syllabus template. Communication of the AI syllabus options to faculty emphasized the relationship of the course policy to the Student Academic Integrity Policy, as well as the best practice of offering explicit and relevant rationales to students about how and why AI would be used or not in courses. The AI Taskforce has continued to provide advisory support to the Office of the Provost and the Center for Faculty Development on professional development initiatives for faculty, staff, and students. Parallel to the work of the AI Taskforce, USM's iTech developed [Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence Guidelines](#), aiming to ensure AI tools and systems are used in alignment with the university's values of academic integrity, data privacy, and transparency while fostering innovation. The ongoing collaborative work of the AI Taskforce serves as the foundation for the recommendations in this report.

Independent Progress to Date

The Center for Faculty Development (CFD), in partnership with the Office of the Provost, prioritized professional development to build an understanding of generative artificial intelligence (AI), discuss the challenges and opportunities across disciplines, and showcase effective teaching practices that incorporate AI in the classroom. In early 2024, USM partnered with the Mississippi Artificial Intelligence Network (MAIN) to offer a series of AI courses developed by Intel and Dell. As part of this collaboration, the MAIN AI Lab was established in Cook Library and officially opened in late fall 2024.

Courses, program development, and academic standards in progress

    A. Office of the Provost
- Facilitated partnership with MAIN, beginning in November 2023
- Oversees the [AI webpage](#), which includes MAIN resources and courses, AI responsible use guidelines, AI Taskforce work, and AI syllabus language
- Oversees MAIN AI Lab, currently located in Cook Library, 204

B. <u>Center for Faculty Development</u>
- Offers one-time workshops focused on AI throughout the academic year, including the spring 2025 series *AI Conversations: Ethics, Education, and Industry*
- Hosted Dr. C. Edward Watson, coauthor of *Teaching with AI*, during Fall First Week 2024, for a keynote address and interactive workshop for 150 faculty and staff.
- Upcoming interactive workshops with José Bowen, coauthor of *Teaching with AI*, for faculty and staff, tentatively scheduled for April 9-10, 2026
- Ongoing collaboration with the Academic Integrity Director to support faculty and student awareness of AI detection and the academic integrity policy.

C. <u>College of Arts and Sciences (CAS):</u>
To date, various initiatives have been developed to create courses and programs that address the need to prepare students for AI readiness in CAS. Courses currently in different stages of development include:
- CSC 512: Introduction to Artificial Intelligence,
- CSC 632: Artificial Intelligence, and
- COM 453: AI for Communication.

Over the past two years, the School of Computing Sciences and Computer Engineering (CSCE) has revised or developed the following courses, which are primarily for students within the school's majors.

- CSC 606: Machine Learning
- CSC 628: Machine Learning in Cybersecurity
- CSC 648: Deep Reinforcement Learning
- CSC 741: Machine Vision

In June 2025, Governor Reeves announced the launch of the Mississippi AI Talent Accelerator Program (MAI-TAP), which includes support for USM's School of CSCE. The MAI-TAP project includes a Maritime AI Innovation Lab, a master's degree in Robotics and Intelligent Systems, and critical GPU infrastructure. CSCE is currently developing an Artificial Intelligence Foundations Badge, Maritime AI Applications Badge, and Artificial Intelligence Minor for students with coding interests and experience. All programs are currently in the permission-to-plan stage, which means they will likely be added to the 2027-2028 academic bulletin, assuming no delays.

D. <u>College of Business and Economic Development (CBED)</u>

AACSB, the accrediting body for the CBED, has prioritized AI integration and focus. As a result, a college-level AI Taskforce was established by the dean of CBED. This group has collected data and provided AI educational opportunities for CBED faculty by investigating AI tools, distributing surveys to students and industry professionals, and integrating AI tools with a focus on career readiness. CBED has not yet developed classes for all business programs, but discussions are underway on how best to address this opportunity to educate students. The dean has provided faculty with the opportunity to engage with the paid version of ChatGPT and supported workshops from AI software groups. An aspirational goal of CBED is to provide students with access to premium versions of AI tools.

E. <u>College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS)</u>

The School of Library and Information Sciences (SLIS) is collaborating with University Libraries on a shared position inclusive of AI support. No other initiatives in place at this time.

F. <u>College of Nursing and Health Professions (CNHP)</u>

In CNHP, discussions are underway within some programs as AI integration with the health professions field continues to grow. The course HP 375: *Artificial Intelligence in Health Professions* is in the planning stages and moving through curriculum councils for approval.

G. <u>University Libraries (UL)</u>

UL has been reviewing a <u>new feature</u> in its *Seymour Info* platform (catalog) that utilizes AI to assist in searching for information within USM's print and digital collections, rather than content on the open web. This feature provides a more controlled search result and may be more practical for students than ChatGPT in many cases. UL is partnering with the School of Library and Information Sciences (LIS) on a shared faculty position to teach courses for SLIS and to help lead AI initiatives at UL. The search so far has not yielded viable candidates, and stakeholders are considering restructuring the arrangement.

H. Graduate School

The Graduate School is currently approaching AI through the lens of academic integrity. The Graduate School is working on a statement for graduate theses, dissertations, and doctoral projects restricting the use of generative AI. At the request of graduate students, a statement has been developed that can be included

in their final projects, forbidding the use of these projects for training generative AI models.

I. Honors College
    The Honors College has offered numerous interdisciplinary sophomore seminars focused on AI in recent semesters, and the courses have proven to be popular with our students. Like the Graduate School, the HC has also revised the *Honors College Undergraduate Thesis Manual* to provide students with explicit parameters with regard to AI.

AI Taskforce AY 2025- 2026 charge

Although these early initiatives have laid a strong foundation for integrating AI at USM, the rapid advancement of AI and its growing role in the workforce require ongoing focus on AI-related practices and training within higher education. In August 2025, President Paul tasked the AI Taskforce with four charges on a scaffolded timeline to provide recommendations for addressing AI at USM. The recommendations below respond to charges 1 and 2 and reflect the work of the AI Taskforce in relation to faculty development and curriculum, answering the charges of President Paul to provide:

1. Recommendations to the Provost, Deans, and general administration on a path forward to assure that all baccalaureate graduates have a fundamental understanding of how to utilize Artificial Intelligence/machine learning (AI literacy).
2. Development of career readiness and workforce-relevant AI competencies. Recommendations to the academy (deans, school directors, faculty) on how to best integrate the utilization of AI as it applies to the specific post-graduate professions our graduates will enter. Development of pathways or best practices on how our faculty can help our students develop specific applied AI skills that they will need in the world of work.
3. Recommendations to the administration on any infrastructure needs the university may need to develop to achieve the above-listed outcomes.
4. Recommendations to the administration for establishing appropriate quantitative and qualitative metrics to assess AI literacy.

Context on AI Taskforce

Subcommittees and integration

To support the multifaceted charges to the AI Taskforce, two subcommittees were formed: 1) Faculty and Staff Development and Curriculum, and 2) Infrastructure. The Faculty and Staff Development and Curriculum subcommittee developed recommendations to

address curricular and faculty development needs. The faculty and staff development and curriculum-focused recommendations were prioritized within the overall recommendations, considering the timeline needs for course proposals and approvals in shared governance processes. The following recommendations should be considered in partnership with the forthcoming recommendations for infrastructure.

Curriculum and Faculty Development Recommendation Process

In September 2025, the AI Taskforce engaged in the information-gathering process outlined below to address the focus faculty and staff development and curriculum.

- Review of peer and aspirational institutions' approaches to embedding artificial intelligence into curricular offerings.
- Discussion of needs and potential outcomes for USM students highlighted the need for general digital literacy among first year and transfer students.
- Brief interviews with campus stakeholders to gain an understanding of different needs and concerns across colleges, and a collated list of AI initiatives, projects, and courses that are in progress across the institution.
- Discussion of the recursiveness of the curriculum offerings and infrastructure.

Relation to Infrastructure Subcommittee Recommendations

The subcommittee structure enabled the AI Taskforce to thoroughly examine multiple aspects of AI in higher education and ensure alignment with USM's priorities and President Paul's directives. The AI Taskforce meets regularly to coordinate and integrate recommendations across faculty and staff development, curriculum, and infrastructure. Many elements of these recommendations are interconnected, ensuring a cohesive approach to advancing AI at USM. The final infrastructure recommendations are expected to be completed in spring 2026. Below are key components that require cohesiveness and integration across faculty and staff development, curriculum, and infrastructure initiatives.

- Coordination of technology for AI instruction and integration, including an enterprise license, tiered access considerations, and data and security.
- Hiring an AI Director with responsibilities to include identifying personnel responsible for course design, implementation, and assessment of AI courses, with additional responsibilities to be defined as the infrastructure recommendations are refined.
- Continuation of the AI Taskforce as an advisory body to the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost.
- Establishment of a Laptop Loan Program to ensure access to technology for students. While students may have a regular device for their coursework, the

software capacity for student devices varies. The laptop loan program should be considered for continuation and rejuvenation to enable students to access more sophisticated software, AI tools, and other course-level resources.

Recommendations for Faculty and Staff Development and Curriculum

Overview

Through an analysis of two surveys, one to students and one to industry partners/employers, distributed by the AI Taskforce, the following principles were prioritized in the curriculum recommendations:

- Responsible use of AI
- Clear and transparent policies
- Equitable access and certifications
- Hands-on learning with real industry data
- Ethics and environmental considerations

The AI Taskforce provides four recommendations to address faculty and staff development and curriculum needs.

- **Recommendation 1:** Stakeholders have expressed a need for the university to develop a position statement on AI that reflects diverse perspectives and values. Such a statement would serve as a guiding framework for decision-making and dialogue across classrooms, academic programs, co-curricular activities, career-readiness initiatives, and other campus efforts.
- **Recommendation 2:** Regular training for faculty and staff to stay abreast of evolving AI technology and capacity and evidence-based practices for integration into the learning environment.
- **Recommendation 3**: Creation of two pathways for curricular offerings: 1) AI Fundamentals and 2) Discipline-specific offerings at the program, school, or college level. These pathways should be developed and offered in a phased approach, from optional to required.
- **Recommendation 4:** Establishment an AI Director role to manage curriculum, in addition to the responsibilities outlined in the infrastructure recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Institutional Position Statement

Stakeholders support an Institutional Position Statement focused on AI as a guiding framework for decision-making and dialogue across classrooms, academic programs, co-curricular activities, career-readiness initiatives, and other campus efforts.

The taskforce offers the following samples for institutional leaders to consider and edit.

One sentence version

The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) envisions Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for curiosity, discovery, and integrity-driven innovation, preparing students, faculty, staff, and industry and community partners for academic excellence and workforce readiness in a technology-driven world.

Long-version

At The University of Southern Mississippi (USM), we recognize that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be a transformative force in learning and industry. We are uniquely positioned to ensure that our students learn how to engage with technology in a way that amplifies **curiosity**, drives **discovery**, and empowers students to succeed in their chosen disciplines.

Our commitment to **integrity** and **ethical learning** calls us to ensure students acquire the ability to not only develop the skills in using the technology that are needed within the University and their future workplace, but also to ensure that they develop **critical awareness** of how this technology informs their learning, employment, and the society they live in.

Our approach will foster an inclusive and collaborative environment where **students, faculty, staff, employers, and the broader community** engage in meaningful dialogue and innovation. Through responsible, thoughtful, and strategic integration of AI into teaching, research, and service, we aim to create opportunities that inspire critical thinking and lifelong learning, advance economic development, and prepare graduates who are truly **Ready for Life**.

Recommendation 2: Faculty and Staff Development

Faculty, as classroom leaders and curriculum experts, must remain current with best practices in teaching and learning. Staff, as student support leaders and office professionals, equally need to stay attuned to the effectiveness and ethics of using AI. The rapid advancement and increasing accessibility of AI require both a solid foundational understanding of AI and ongoing engagement with its frequent updates. In addition to mastering AI applications, faculty need time and support to design courses, assessments, and creative lesson plans thoughtfully. To address these needs, the AI Taskforce recommends sustained professional development for faculty and staff through workshops and programming offered by the Center for Faculty Development (CFD), as well as an incentive-based approach to encourage the integration of AI into course development.

As the hub for faculty and staff development, the CFD should provide oversight of professional development related to AI. The CFD should facilitate programming and

collaboration across units. The CFD team does not serve as subject-matter experts on AI; however, they will facilitate programming by organizing workshops and programming, collaborating with the AI Director, and connecting with external speakers.

Additional recommendations for faculty and staff development include:

- Access to curated resources and instructional materials.
- Structured training sessions on AI concepts, pedagogy, data analysis, administrative tasks, and office support (e.g., efficiency and effectiveness) for the range of basic to advanced levels.
- Guidance on the appropriate use of AI detection tools and an approach to managing students' use of AI tools within the context of academic integrity.
- Development of faculty cohort programs to provide peer support for the design of courses with attention to AI applications.

To advance from basic classroom applications of AI to the creation of comprehensive, program-specific curriculum offerings, the AI Taskforce recommends implementing an incentive-based approach to support faculty in course development. This may include providing stipends for participation in cohort-based faculty development programs, redesigning courses to integrate AI as a core component, or supporting attendance at conferences and professional development activities through discipline-specific organizations.

Recommendation 3: Curriculum Offerings

The AI Taskforce recommends two pathways for curricular offerings: 1) AI Fundamentals and 2) Discipline-specific offerings at the program, school, or college level. The pathways should be developed and offered in a phased approach, from optional to required. The curricular offerings will aim to enhance academic and career readiness in relation to AI. In alignment with the university's position statement, the curricular offerings will amplify consistent messaging of the AI Institutional Position Statement across curricular and extracurricular experiences at USM.

AI Fundamentals Curriculum offerings

The AI Fundamentals curriculum will introduce students to the key concepts, uses, and implications of artificial intelligence in academia. This introductory-level offering will cover four essential units:

1) Basic understanding of technology and variances in AI;
2) Ethical use of AI;
3) Evaluation and critical reading of AI outputs;

4) Practical application of AI, including how to use any AI programs available at USM

Student learning outcomes of the AI Fundamentals offerings can be referenced as CAIL (Critical Artificial Intelligence Literacy). CAIL draws from the [Modern Language Association's "Student Guide to AI Literacy](#)" with suggested learning outcomes as:

- Develop a basic understanding of how AI works
- Understand the policies and frameworks for the ethical use of AI outlined by the course syllabi and at the institutional level
- Apply knowledge regarding how to prompt GenAI to produce useful outputs
- Analyze the fundamental differences between AI communication and human communication.
- Evaluate the relevance, usefulness, and accuracy of AI outputs

Discipline-Focused AI Courses

The discipline-focused curriculum can be offered at the program, school, or college level, and emphasizes application and career-readiness skills in AI. These courses will be developed and designed by programs, schools, or colleges.

The courses are intended to:

- Explore ways that AI is embedded into fields of study that will support a student's readiness for career pathways;
- Be available at both the undergraduate and graduate levels;
- Explore ways to incorporate resources available in Coursera Career Academy;
- Prioritize decision-making for courses to determine if this curriculum belongs at the program or school level.

Curriculum formats and implementation

The implementation of an AI curriculum should be guided by a spirit of collaboration and evolving research practices, with autonomy for academic units to ensure alignment with disciplinary goals and faculty expertise. The AI Taskforce recommends that AI training should mirror delivery of the degree program (e.g., online versus in-person) with attention to balancing the flexibility of learners and the effectiveness of content delivery.

Because most degree programs do not have room for additional credit hours, the AI Fundamentals curriculum should be embedded within existing course structures, such as UNV 100, First-Year Experience (FYE), or college-level options for programs that are not positioned to offer a disciplinary course or are delivered through flexible formats, such as micro-credentials or digital badges. The AI Taskforce recommends that the Undergraduate

Council consider options for integrating AI Fundamentals in a way that is accessible to all students. To summarize, the Taskforce's suggestions are:

- Integration into UNV 100
- Integration into FYE courses
- Stand-alone non-credit module/course

In terms of curricular implementation, we recommend two potential approaches outlined below.

- *AI-intensive courses*
    - Similar to the current writing-intensive course model
    - Units would designate specific courses that would feature AI application(s) in their discipline
    - Guidelines developed would determine how much of the course content should be AI-focused and/or AI-application.
- *AI-designated courses*
    - Similar to the current service-learning course designation
    - Units would optionally designate courses based on faculty interest and expertise
    - Interested faculty would engage in professional development focused on AI

Additional suggestions include:

- Offer Certificate program for Graduate Students- or AI-designated courses with AI broad application courses to prepare students to engage critically with AI as will be appropriate for their time at USM.

Recommendation 4: AI Director role

The AI Taskforce recommends establishing an AI Director role to oversee curriculum management, alongside the responsibilities outlined in the infrastructure recommendations. This position will be essential for staying current with advances in AI, guiding best practices for integration, and assessing related initiatives across the institution. The forthcoming infrastructure recommendations will further clarify and expand the scope of these responsibilities.

Suggested Implementation Timeline

Immediate

- Senior leaders adopt and disseminate an Institutional Position Statement for AI at USM.

- o Designate a curriculum planning team and pilot for the AI Fundamental curricular offering in fall 2026.
- o Provide faculty and staff development on AI.
- o Determine faculty credentialing requirements for teaching courses that incorporate AI.

Short-term

- o Define the AI Director role and integrate infrastructure recommendations with the faculty and staff development initiatives.
- o Hire an AI Director.
- o Assess AI Fundamentals and Discipline-Specific courses for continuous improvement and long-term scalability.

Long-term

- o Develop scalable training and support structures for faculty, staff, and students on AI Fundamentals and integration of AI, including how to use AI, ethical use, and ongoing developments in AI.
- o Design courses and materials that are easily adaptable to various class sizes and modalities.
- o Plan for expansion into additional disciplines and integration with future technologies.
- o Continue to assess courses and initiatives for continuous improvement.