

THE CAMPUS CHRONICLE

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AI AT DMACC

HOW AI POSES NEW CHALLENGES
IN THE CLASSROOM

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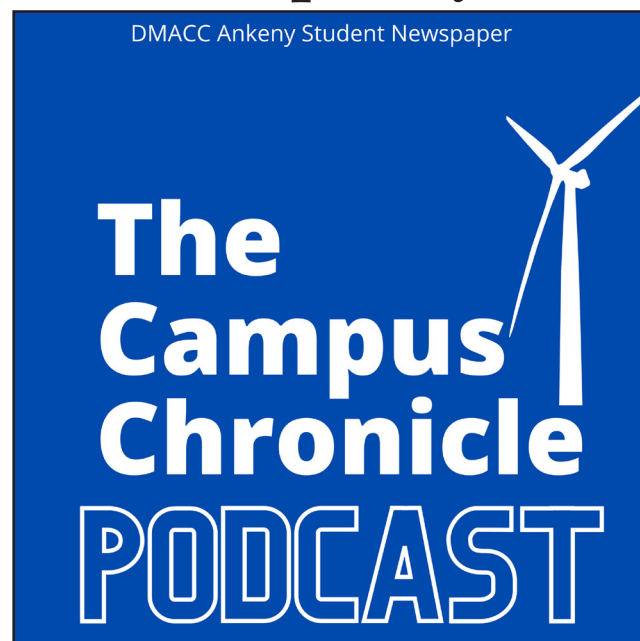


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Spanish instructor says the American dream is alive and well

Riley Dickerson

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Andrea Mendoza-Estling teaches Spanish I and Spanish II at DMACC. She has resided in the U.S. for 20 years, eight of those in Iowa, and has been teaching for 13 years, something she said she finds passion in.

"I'm from the capital of Colombia, Bogota. When I was living in Bogota, close to 8 million people lived there," said Mendoza.

In Bogota, there was always something to do — the weather was beautiful, said Mendoza. Coming to Warroad Minnesota from Colombia in 2002 was a big change. Mendoza said that even though it was summer there was nothing to do, it was just flat land everywhere.

Mendoza also made it clear there are major cultural differences. Coming from a big city with lots of diversity to a small town with few houses and less diversity in rural America, "It is a culture shock, to say the least," she said.

Mendoza also said that in Latin culture where she comes from there is little or no personal space. "In Colombia, we hug and kiss each other on the cheek and it is normal, but here in America that is not normal; coming to the United States you must adapt and have cultural intelligence," she said.

Mendoza has lived in other states in the U.S. including Minnesota, Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, and finally Iowa. She also visited California, where her daughter currently lives. For the first time in the U.S., she felt at home.

"I feel like I belonged in California because it's much more diverse with much larger Hispanic representation," she said.

The food was much different than anything she could get in Iowa. She said that she did not feel safe in California she loved the culture but felt unsafe. In Iowa however, she said, "The majority of people from Iowa are very friendly."

In her experience, snow or rain, it doesn't matter, people here will help

when you have a flat tire, but those in a big city in a rush will not stop to help oftentimes.

During her time in Colombia Mendoza completed her high school education. Mendoza received a bachelor's degree from the University of North Dakota in Spanish Education and received a master's degree from The University of Northern Iowa in Spanish and literature.

"I came here with no money, no English, and really zero knowledge," she said.

Mendoza's first job in the United States was as a housekeeper because she didn't know the language. She then worked at a company called Marvin Windows in Minnesota, which would offer her the opportunity

of a lifetime: free English lessons with an instructor from a community college. The company told her they wanted to improve her position in the company, telling her if she could

finish with a C or better her books would be paid for.

"You have to be willing to be vulnerable and willing to try and learn English," Mendoza said. "I got a C; that C to me meant an A because I put all my effort, my time, my everything into it," she added.

She would record the lectures, and she had a very helpful tutor. Even if she was very tired, she would work 8-12 hours with the tutors. This hard work and dedication shaped her into who she is today.

Mendoza had advice for someone in her shoes coming from a foreign country who may know little or no English: "I would say resilience. That would be one thing, You have to take one day at a time, for sure, and learn English," she said. "This will allow you more opportunities here in the U.S.," she added.

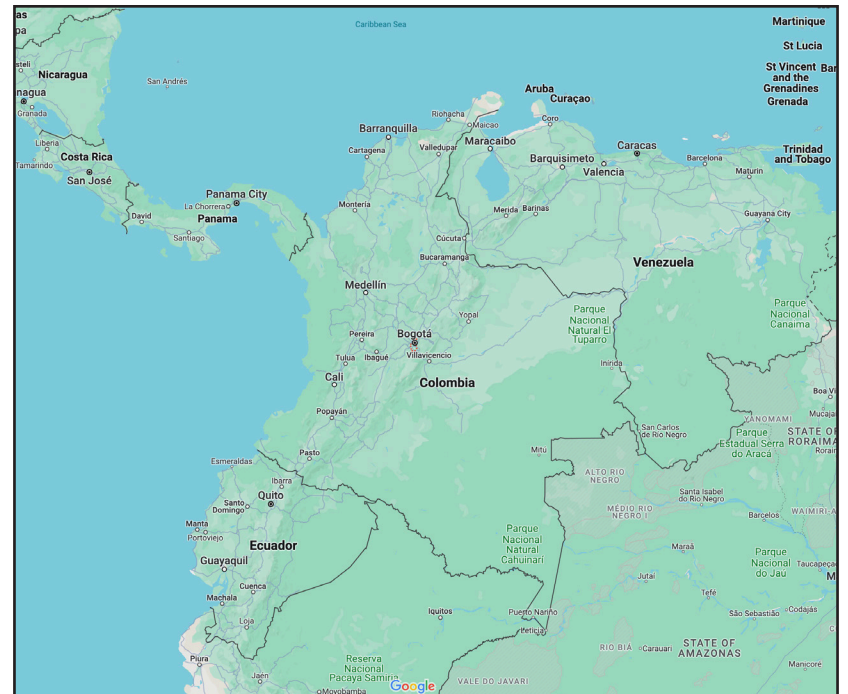
She also suggests that people remember who they are and even though you adapt to the culture around you don't change who you are.

"A metaphor that I would like to use is we are a tree, we still have the same roots, but we start getting new branches and grow more, adapt to the

"We are a tree, we still have the same roots, but we start getting new branches and grow more, adapt to the culture, and be resilient."



Spanish instructor Andrea Mendoza-Estling poses in Building 8.
Photo by Riley Dickerson



culture be resilient, and do your best to learn English," she said.

"The last thing I will say is enjoy life and be happy. Be willing to learn new things meet new people and get new experiences because life is too short, surround yourself with positive people and people who can teach you something, and maybe you can teach them something, like an exchange of knowledge and exchange of cultures," she said.

Mendoza said she believes the American dream is still alive and well give it everything you have and you can achieve this.

"You have to be willing to work, be able to be vulnerable, be able to learn, and be able to work hard," she said.

"Be a role model for those who are coming behind you for those new immigrants who are coming behind you," Mendoza said.

Finding a new path: mortuary science

Bella Perez

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Like many people after high school, Claire Pollard found a job working in retail. For three years the 19-year-old Norwalk native worked at Old Navy but late last year she made the switch and began working for a very different type of business: a funeral home.

(For the sake of wanting to be as truthful as possible, Pollard asked to keep the name of the funeral home private.)

While a clothing store and a funeral home are two very different things it did not push Pollard away — if anything it was the change she needed to find a career path that would work for her.

“I chose mortuary science because it seemed like the first and only job that I could actually see myself doing,” Pollard said.

Pollard was apprehensive at first to jump right into mortuary science which led her to decide to start working at a funeral home as a way to get her feet wet.

“The best decision I ever made was working in a funeral home environment before committing to the program,” Pollard said.

Her motive behind mortuary science wasn't only rooted in joining the program at DMACC or finding a future career but also in exploring and gaining a deeper understanding of the emotions that correlate with death and grieving.

“I love talking about death and everything that comes with it because it's the one thing that we all share in common; it's inevitable and no one is safe from experiencing grief or death,” Pollard said.

Mortuary science and working in a funeral home are much more than an education path or job to Pollard. There is a passion for her in the emotional understanding that comes with death. Whether it is her or the grieving family, Pollard has come to see firsthand how emotions play a critical role in the death process.

She said she has come to understand mortality as

a whole but also strengthened her relationship with the idea of death.

“Prior to working there I always thought about my own mortality and those close to me because it's interesting to think that at any moment we can be gone. I've always had a healthy relationship with death; the concept itself has never scared me,” Pollard said.

She said the emotional side of things was one of her most impactful parts about working in a funeral home. Pollard said it has given her a reality shift and a new perspective on life and death.

“The average person only experiences death when it's someone they know so being around it so often has allowed me to have a detached perspective,” Pollard said.

While the job has been rewarding for Pollard she still has faced a few challenges along the way. The biggest struggle she said is realizing how demanding this job has been hours-wise, especially as a student.

“I'm only a student right now so I only experience a minuscule amount of exhaustion, but recognizing the toll it takes on the people I work with scares me,” Pollard said.

The demand of the job is something that not only Pollard has experienced but something her co-workers who have done it for years have also talked about.

“It's a never-ending business, that's fast-paced. I've had the privilege to work with people who are honest with me, and don't sugarcoat the realities; it's a taxing job,” Pollard said.

Another challenge Pollard faced was understanding just how taxing her job could really be. She talked about the turnaround rate in a funeral home is surprisingly big with the average funeral director staying in the business for five years. Due to the high demand this job has she shares that the fear of becoming overwhelmed within the job is something she does have.

“The burnout rate is fast and it's a fear that I have to consistently face but at the end of the day this job has changed my perspective in so many ways that



Mortuary science student Claire Pollard.

I will carry with me for the rest of my life whether I'm working in this business for two more months or 20 more years,” Pollard said.

She added that funeral directors spend so much of their time and life overall dedicated to making sure that families get the goodbye that they want and need. While it is very physically and emotionally taxing she understands how important of a job it is.

“I think if you are passionate about what you do, it helps balance out the ugliness but there's no denying that it's hard,” Pollard said.

For those who have also thought about getting into mortuary science, Pollard recommends getting exposure to the life of it first before deciding that's what you want to do.

“You have to do it for the right reasons because if you aren't passionate about what you're doing, you're going to get run down really fast. So I would say, expose yourself and reach out to a funeral home because they are always looking for extra help,” Pollard said.

Who did you root for and what was the best part of the Super Bowl?



The Chiefs and Purdy. McCaffery's early 21-yard touchdown reception from Jauan Jennings.

Gabe Ingram
Marketing
West Des Moines



Kansas City Chiefs. Mecole Hardman's touchdown.

Bronson Mott
Education Transfer
Beaverton, OR



The 49ers for Brock. The parlay didn't hit though. Taylor Swift and her entire platform, SHE RUINED IT.

Ahmad Hameed
Liberal Arts AA
Iraq



Advisors Annie Wood, Benjamin Krdzalic, and Vice President Lynne Moeller offer details about the Human Services Club. The club does volunteer work, helps at the homeless shelter, and tries to contribute to the well-being of everyone, said Krdzalic. Through the Genesis youth program, the club helps kids from Africa with no English and helps them to develop skills. “You don’t need to attend every event,” he said. “Our Goal is to make the world a better place for everyone,” said Krdzalic.



Robert McIntyre, advisor of the DMACC Philosophy Club, said he wants to get people interested in philosophy. The clubs will talk about the mind, body, and theory, he said. “We debate but respectfully,” he said. The club discusses the questions everyone is always thinking about. “We are different from any other beings; we recognize our mortality,” he said. He added that the club also has free food.

Spring into DMACC highlights

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Financial Aid and scholarships are offered to all students at DMACC. Sue Rardin said there are \$2.2 million in scholarships to give to all DMACC locations. “Any Questions you have come on in,” she said. The deadline to submit your Financial Aid requests is March 1.



DMACC Blades is a student-run fencing club at DMACC and is overseen by President Jasmine Bengtson. The club travels to and competes in events in places like Kansas and Minnesota. “We stab people safely,” Bengtson said. For further information contact Joe Danielson, 515-965-7085 or Melanie LaHart.

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Artificial intelligence poses new challenges

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Over the past year AI, or artificial intelligence, has taken the world and classroom by storm. In higher education, AI could be seen as a beneficial resource or a means of cheating. Different professors have different policies regarding AI, which complicates the matter.

One popular AI tool is ChatGPT, which can produce almost any kind of text — an essay, research paper, or even a poem by giving the chat box a prompt.

Another example is Grammarly, which is an AI-generated tool that fixes grammar within writing software such as Microsoft Word and Google Docs.

ChatGPT and Grammarly can be seen as a resource for students to use when writing, but some professors may view it as a form of cheating, especially when used as a form of plagiarism.

Professor Perspectives

Many professors at DMACC are embracing the use of AI and integrating websites like ChatGPT for certain assignments.

Some professors are accepting the usage of AI while using caution, including DMACC English Professor Bethany Sweeney, who has a Ph.D. in literature.

Sweeney said she worries that if students rely too much on AI, they won't have the skills to identify how to approach and complete class work: "I find that AI has a lot of potential for being a useful tool for students and for me, and [there are] some pitfalls that we need to look out for."

Sweeney explained that programs such as Grammarly and ChatGPT can be useful for small things like fixing grammar and coming up with prompts for discussion posts but she worries that students might use AI because they do not have the skill set to do the work on their own.

Sweeney said that she has noticed different reactions from her colleagues: "I have some colleagues who are a part of that 30 percent of people who never in any way helped a friend on a paper or they have really rigid ideas about cheating and honesty." Sweeney said that most of her colleagues do not mind the idea of AI or are at least trying to embrace it.

One of Sweeney's colleagues, Colin Hogan, is an example of a DMACC professor who is trying to embrace AI, but still expresses concerns about the rapidly changing technology. Hogan, who has a Ph.D. in American literature, teaches composition and literature classes at DMACC and has seen assignments that have used ChatGPT, Snapchat AI, and Grammarly.

"I've seen it used in some good ways. But mostly students seem to be either not using it or using it in simple and not engaged ways, or they are relying on them, and I worry about the reliance part," said Hogan.



Hogan also described his policy on AI: "Students can use them. They have to cite them, and then I also want to see their chat record so that I can see the process and understand how we got to the final product."

Hogan expressed his concerns about using AI too, explaining that he worries about students not retaining information and how future generations could be negatively affected.

Hogan said he would like to see a college-wide AI policy to relieve some of his and his other colleagues' concerns. This policy has only been in a discussion phase due to the large scope.

Hogan said, "We should have had a policy last summer. We should have already had a policy in place. I have seen comparable policies from other institutions. This technology has changed a lot, even in the past year. We have to figure out how to respond to [rapid advancements in AI]."

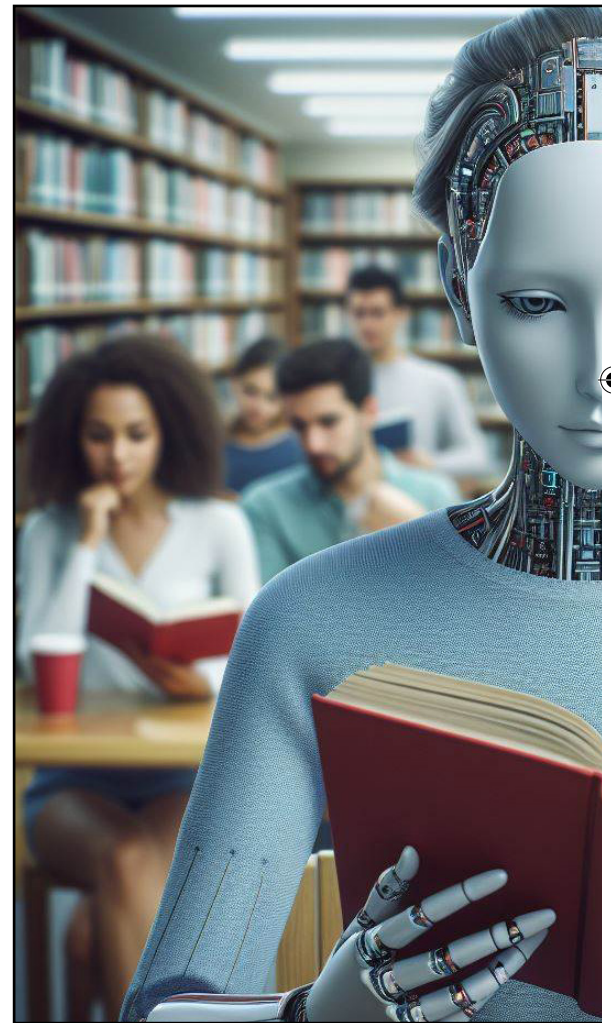
Andy Langager, a journalism professor at the Ankeny campus, said he has encountered a number of students handing in work by AI as their own:

"Out of 180 or so students in the past year, I have had about 10 who have submitted AI work. If a student hands in work written by someone else — whether a friend wrote it, they copied it from Wikipedia or ChatGPT, my policy is an automatic zero and a deduction of two letter grades for the final grade in the class."

Langager said he does allow for some AI in the classroom. "In the syllabus I have a list of things they can use AI for, including brainstorming topic ideas, helping to create an outline or finding sources.

Langager added, "I think students will need to be fluent in the use of AI in the future, but I don't think there is any learning going on if they let it do all the thinking and work for them. Learn the core skills, then you'll be able to recognize when and how to use AI."

Langager said that AI has also added work when it comes to grading. "If a student turns in suspicious writing, now I have to spend extra time cross-checking it with what ChatGPT would write. It's definitely added to my time spent grading and giving feedback," Langager said.



Student Perspectives

DMACC students have stepped forward to share their thoughts on AI usage at DMACC as well, including communication major and Campus Chronicle writer Dashae Engler.

Engler said she does not mind software such as Grammarly, but she does not think sites such as ChatGPT should be used by students because it is cheating and does all the work. Engler also mentioned that she thinks AI can be used as a tool

Challenges and opportunities for DMACC

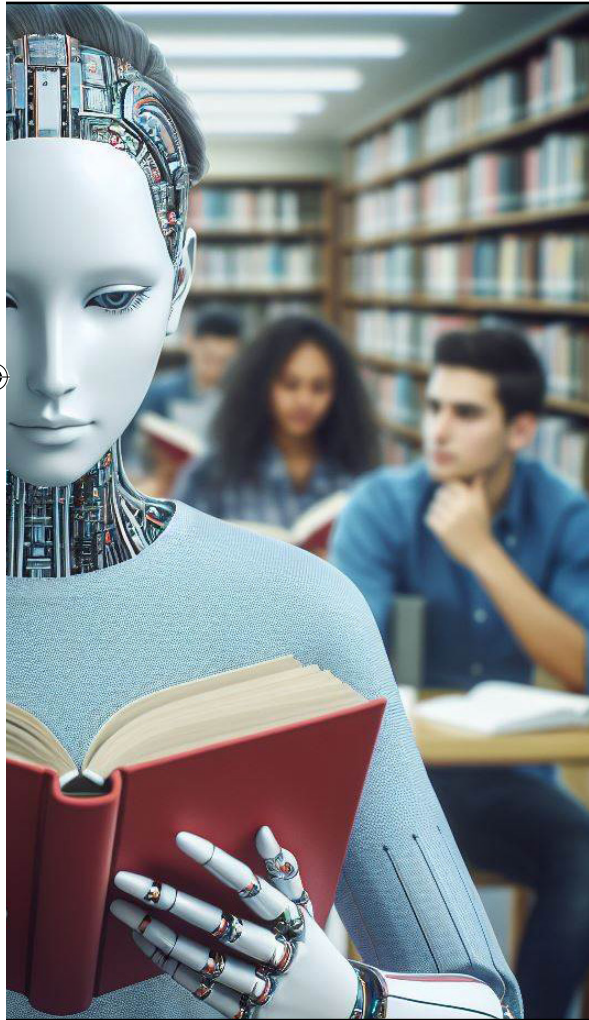
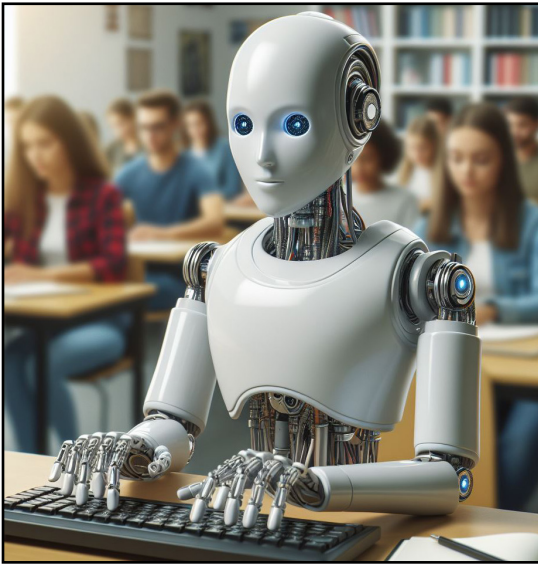


Photo illustrations created with Bing AI

for learning if it isn't coming up with every idea for the student.

Lynn Bousman, a sophomore and theater major, said that she believes AI could be useful for generating discussion and project topics, but anything more would count as cheating and plagiarism.

"As long as you are able to prove what you are doing you should be allowed to use it for certain things," Bousman said. She added that most of her professors have a zero-tolerance policy for AI for essays, but some allow it for prompting ideas.

Judicial Perspectives

DMACC Judicial Officer Deborah McKittrick oversees plagiarism and academic dishonesty cases.

Academic dishonesty policies vary from professor; some might make a student rewrite a paper, and for some, it will result in a 0 and impact the student's final grade. Regardless, students can be sanctioned for academic dishonesty, which McKittrick said she sees frequently.

In an email interview, McKittrick said, "Sanctions are determined by the Instructor. What I have typically seen is an award of an 'F' for the assignment for a first violation. Failure for the course for any form of a second academic misconduct violation."

McKittrick added: "One of the reasons students are held accountable for cheating is to preserve the integrity of the course and the degree they are seeking. While AI can be helpful, it is not a replacement for doing the work and gaining the knowledge that comes from doing the work."

McKittrick explained that she encourages both faculty and students to communicate the usage of AI in the classroom to create transparency about the expectations and consequences of using AI.

McKittrick noted that even unintentional plagiarism is subject to a sanction. "A student who does not disclose their use of AI could be accused of an unauthorized collaboration, and thus a conduct violation. Using another's words, works, or thoughts, whether it be from Google, AI, another student's work, or even the student's own previous work, without citing the source and giving it credit, is plagiarism," McKittrick said.

"Students should also be aware that AI is not without its flaws and often is wrong therefore I would caution them depending on it," McKittrick said.

In general, students and staff members at DMACC are having similar thoughts about the usage of artificial intelligence in a school setting. AI is something that can be a resourceful tool, but it presses concerns for academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and the idea that it is blocking students from learning the material of their courses and skills to complete assignments and other tasks.

Do's and Don'ts of AI

Do:

Understand AI

AI is going to be a big part of our future and the chances of it being something we use in our everyday lives continue to rise. Instead of fearing AI or trying to just ignore it we should try and learn about it as a whole and embrace the good parts of it. This would allow people to become more comfortable with it.

Use AI as a tool

Using AI can be a great tool to use for schoolwork. Using it to brainstorm ideas, check grammar, or even build off prompts, it offers positive ways to use it educationally. When used correctly AI can offer a student many ways to help improve their work. But always double-check your professor's course policy.

Use AI for fun

Using AI doesn't have to be just for education. Finding websites that embrace the fun side of AI can allow a person to find comfort in AI. Using it for fun can also allow people to express themselves. Many artists have found AI websites that can generate images based on their ideas.

Don't:

Don't use AI to replace creativity

Using AI to complete an assignment may seem easy, but in reality, it takes away the creativity of a person. AI is pretty emotionless and that comes across in the work done by artificial intelligence. A paper that could have once felt natural and unique could come across as cold and lifeless if written by AI.

Don't believe everything that AI generates

AI can generate answers to questions you ask but don't immediately believe everything it says is true. While some of it could be accurate AI has been known to pull some of its information from outdated sources. If you get any information from AI it's important to always fact-check and make sure it's true.

Don't use it to cheat

While this could seem like an easy solution to schoolwork, using AI to cheat can only hurt you in the end. Your grades and success will be based on what AI knows and not what you know and are capable of. Using AI could be a way to help you study and build off of prior knowledge but relying on it to get you good grades is a poor decision.

Rob Denson celebrates 20 years as DMACC president

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This past November, President Rob Denson made DMACC history by becoming the longest-serving person in his position in the college's 57-year history.

During the 20 years that President Denson has been at DMACC, the college has grown by more than 50 percent by focusing on faculty and staff instruction, keeping tuition low, and developing partnerships, according to a DMACC press release.

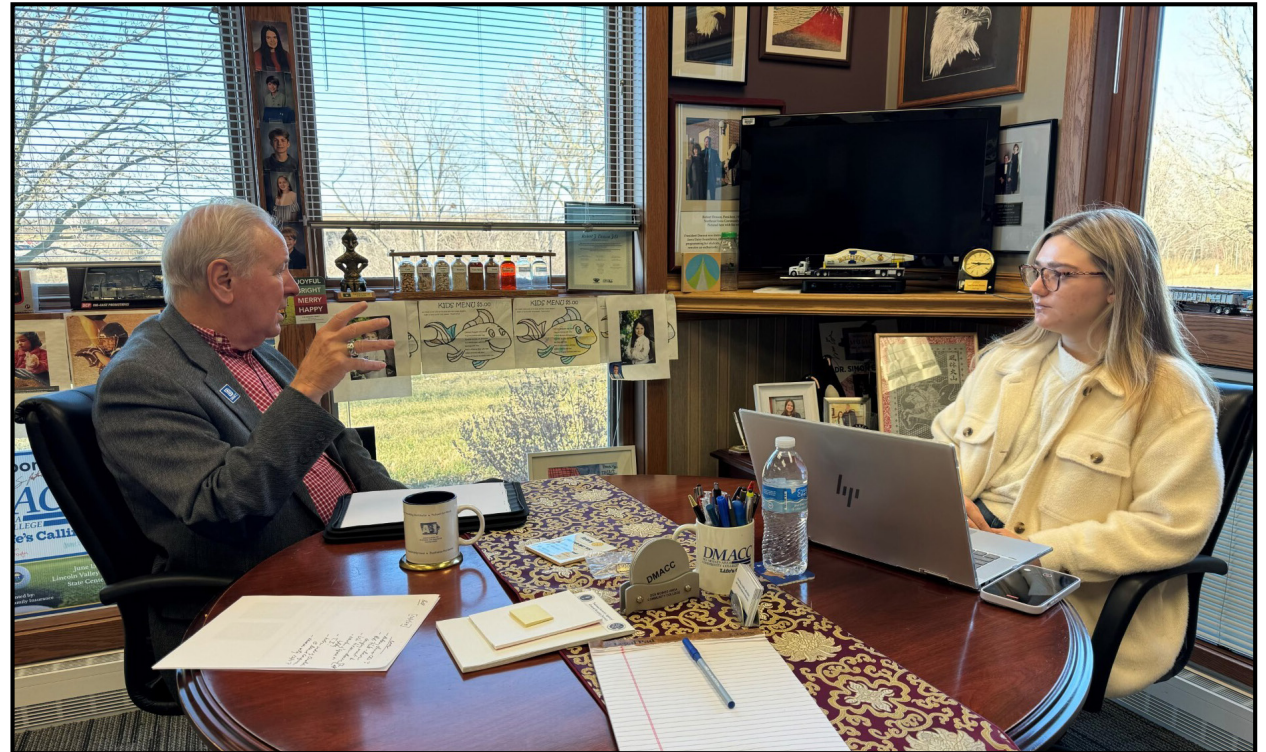
Before he became the president of DMACC, Denson studied political science and economics at Iowa State University. Denson also attended the University of Florida, graduating from law school and working as a board-certified civil trial attorney for 16 years.

When transitioning to the field of education administration, Denson first took a dean position at Santa Fe Community College and then five years as President of Northeast Iowa Community College.

Denson explained why he decided to transition from law to education: "Practicing law was different than it used to be, and I did not want to change the nature of my practice. I had done well, so I retired."

Denson was hired as president of Des Moines Area Community College in November of 2003. Denson explained that he made the career change to DMACC because "The area was vibrant and there was really a potential for significant growth." He also said that he had a good relationship with the former president of DMACC, which made things feel "meant to be."

After taking the role in 2003 Denson took advantage of the growth potential he saw, and within a decade the college had invested more than \$100 million in new and remodeled classrooms, recreation, and study areas across



Chronicle reporter Kennedy Ballinger speaks to DMACC President Rob Denson in his office. Photo courtesy DMACC.

the college. Denson also played a crucial role in creating and building DMACC's Career Academy campuses.

According to a DMACC press release, Denson actively focuses on larger-scale issues concerning public education and serves on councils, including the DMACC President's Panel, that help find solutions to issues relating to the college.

Denson explained the thing he is most proud of is his faculty and staff at DMACC. "I call them fire breathers... We are in a disruptive environment with challenges, and it is fun just watching and supporting them."

Denson also stated that he has put together a council of 20 people who take on a collaborative leadership role to create agendas and initiatives for the college. One recent initiative involved restructuring 230 different degrees and certifications and sorting them into 10 main career pathways such as Health Science and Fitness, Building Trades and Transportation, and Business.

Not only does Denson take on higher responsibilities at DMACC, but he also maintains an active relationship with students and staff members. Denson said he tries to stay on campus as much as possible and meets with a group of students once every month. He said he also consistently attends to peer feedback and produces a weekly email to bring the college together. Denson mentioned that the relationship between himself, campuses, and faculty is important to him and that he does what he can to maintain and improve it throughout DMACC.

"We have an unbelievably positive relationship," Denson explained when talking about his relationships throughout the college. "I love what I, what we do."

In the future Denson plans to continue to expand the college's capacity and its education quality. He also intends to raise the enrollment rate at DMACC, which has increased by 12.9 percent since last fall.



DMACC President Rob Denson photo courtesy Todd Jones

The one thing that Denson said he would like to focus more on is his relationship with faculty members and plans to continue to create a collectively positive and supportive environment throughout the campuses.

News briefs around DMACC:

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Court rules in favor of DMACC

Earlier this month, the Iowa Supreme Court overturned a million-dollar settlement between an IT worker and DMACC.

In 2021, Sandra Selden, a DMACC IT employee since 2013, was granted nearly \$1.38 million in a lawsuit against DMACC for sex discrimination in her pay. Selden sued DMACC on the basis that a

male colleague was receiving tens of thousands of dollars more for the same job, according to The Des Moines Register.

DMACC appealed the ruling, and on Feb. 2, 2024, the Iowa Supreme Court decided to side with DMACC for multiple reasons.

The court ruled that the DMACC administration proved that the male colleague had been with DMACC since 1998 and had more qualifications for the job than Selden. Also, since he had been there for 15 more years, he had received yearly raises that affected his salary. Additionally, when he was hired,

there was a huge need for programmers because people were worried about the Y2K bug, which also helped account for his higher salary.

Selden still works for DMACC, although, according to her Attorney David Albrecht, she is devastated by the loss.

London Study Abroad

DMACC's Study Abroad students have recently left for London. These students will be in London for eight weeks with two DMACC professors taking classes at the University of London, right in the heart of the city.

Norwalk native takes photography from passion to business

Bella Perez

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Since graduating high school in 2023, Lexi Mattiussi, from Norwalk, has focused on starting her photography business. She first found a love for photography at 13 but didn't realize it was something so important to her until 16. Now 18, she has started her own business and already served more than 50 clients in just under six months.

Choosing photography as something more than a hobby tied back to her family.

"My grandma and dad both did photography and were never able to do it for a living so I wanted to do something that incorporated their past passion into mine," Lexi said.

She said her dad was a big help getting her started. He helped her buy her first camera, choose service prices, and even set up spreadsheets to keep her photoshoots organized.

Lexi said photography is more than just a business to her. She said it is about the story she can tell through her photos and her passion for her art. Her drive for taking photos comes from being able to wake up and do something she is proud of. She said her photos have really pulled her out of dark places.

"As a teen with extreme mental health issues, being able to wake up and look forward to my business makes me want to live and continue to grow."

Starting a business from the ground up had proven to be a bit difficult for Lexi early on. She talked about the struggle and disappointment starting with no followers, feeling like her work would go unnoticed, and trying to balance it all with everyday life.

"I wish I didn't have to start out working two other jobs on top of photography just to afford living but also my equipment," she said.

She also found it hard to hear that her style of photography wasn't for everyone but she has come to understand that everyone has different tastes and sometimes criticism can help a person grow. Lexi likes to come to her photoshoots with a very laid back and personal aspect which she learned some people may consider unprofessional but she wouldn't change it because she wants people to always feel comfortable at her shoots.

While there were a few bumps along the way Lexi said the good times began to outweigh the bad ones.



Lexi Mattiussi poses with her camera.

"There have been very good days and very bad days but it's been a very magical experience."

She then went on to talk about how the support from her friends, family, and even old classmates has not only helped but warmed her heart.

"I couldn't do what I do without the people in my life."

Her favorite thing about taking pictures so far has been being able to capture sentimental moments for her clients. From couples photoshoots to graduation pictures, and even recently a pregnancy announcement, she enjoys taking photos that speak for themselves. Even in the photos that aren't taken for sentimental reasons or anything outwardly exciting, she talked about how she loves to incorporate details about her clients in them knowing that it is special to them but also to her because she is giving her clients a way to express themselves.

Lexi's biggest advice for starting a photography business is building a community.

"People in the photography community have been genuinely so nice and have been there if I have concerns or questions that Google just couldn't answer."



Above and below photos by Lexi Mattiussi

Another big thing she found successful was being consistent. Even when it felt like no one was seeing her work she stayed on top of posting even if it was the same person multiple times or just pictures of her dog getting her name out there was a way to make a mark. While there have been many ups and downs Lexi says it has been worth it because seeing the business she started on her own grow makes all the struggle worth it.

The program offers classes like composition, history, and humanities. But there are also opportunities for classes like "British Life and Culture" and field trips that teach the American students about the royal family, the history of London, and World War II in England.

Students will be staying with host families with the opportunity to try home-cooked British suppers.

DMACC Hosted Master Chefs from France
DMACC's Iowa Culinary Institute hosted master chefs from France the week of Jan. 15. The chefs

stayed for two weeks at ICI to give lectures and other demonstrations for students.

The first-year students get to observe while the second-year students help alongside the chefs. At the end of the two weeks, the second-year students present a French gourmet meal to the public.

The French chefs of the Chef's Association from the St. Etienne region have been to DMACC every January since 1986. This exchange program is with Des Moines' sister city St. Etienne, France. Second-year students also have the chance to apply to travel to several cities

in France as well as intern with French chefs in their restaurants.

Athletics
Men's basketball record: 21-3
Women's basketball record: 16-7
Baseball record: 2-1
The DMACC softball team's first game is on Feb. 16 at West Burlington.

On Feb. 6 DMACC raised \$1,500 for the American Heart Association at the basketball game's Red-Out!

Life in the Navy during COVID: a repetitive routine



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Many things happened during my time in the Navy but nothing larger than the COVID-19 outbreak in the weeks before my deployment to the Middle East. In the weeks following the news of COVID, the Navy was very slow in their response, thinking as many others did that it would come and go like the flu.

There were ships in our strike group who had left a few weeks earlier. These ships were fortunate enough to see some ports in the Middle East like Dubai. However, this led to multiple outbreaks among these ships. In response to this, the Navy called all naval vessels from ports and requested that all vessels stay

out of foreign ports to reduce the number of infected sailors. However, 17 U.S. Navy sailors still ended up dying from COVID-19, according to an article from U.S. Navy News in 2021.

In my case, our captain got the news and told all Vella Gulf sailors to prepare for a long, treacherous deployment and relayed the news that we were to stay out of foreign ports until further notice.

This changed everyday life on the Vella Gulf. After the captain announced the news, morale among all sailors dropped substantially, tensions rose, and it seemed as if there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

For six months as an engineer, my life every day was as follows:

Wake up at 6 a.m. and stand for six hours of ship roving watch. Then lunch and back to work for four to six hours depending on the day.

Following this was dinner then six more hours of watch. This would leave you four to six hours of free time. With this time you could shower, sleep, work out, or do whatever you wanted for this period. Of course, there were times when equipment broke and free time would be taken.

This routine continued for almost six and a half months.

During the midnight hours, there were video games, chess, and checkers, and the gym was active all hours of the day. I would go to the gym, shower, and go to sleep most of the time.

During these hours I met many great people. Most of these friendships did not last when I left the Navy, but I met three of my closest friends that I'm still in contact with today.

In the Navy, sailors are given one day a week off — this is referred to as Holiday Routine. On this day the crew eats a brunch, sleeps in, and gets their mind ready for the long week ahead.

On Saturday nights prior to Holiday Routine, we may have karaoke or ice cream socials, and some Saturdays we would have beer calls or steel beaches and sometimes even swim calls. This is one of my highlights of the deployment as I got to swim in the

Indian Ocean and cross the equator.

The captain and officers understood the morale was low for these six and a half months and made multiple efforts to improve morale, but nothing raised morale more than when the

captain announced that the Vella Gulf crew would be heading home.

The ride home was rough as we hit the outskirts of a hurricane on the return home. This day was one of the roughest deployments on the ship. At certain points we were hitting 20-degree lists which nearly capsizing the ship. After eight hours we were through the worst and headed home.

This deployment taught me to appreciate everything I have and that even things like sleep and food can not be taken for granted. Enjoy the little things in life like a pretty sunset or an ice-cold beer and remember things can always be worse.

“Enjoy the little things in life like a pretty sunset or an ice-cold beer and remember things can always be worse. .”



Upcoming events at DMACC:

February 21, 2024
NDSU College of Natural Sciences
Campus: Ankeny
Location: AN05 Corridor
11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Grocery Bingo!

Campus: Ankeny
Location: AN05 Stage
12:15 PM - 12:45 PM
February 27, 2024
Virtual Bingo
Campus: Ankeny
Location: AN05 Virtual
8:00 PM - 9:00 PM
February 28, 2024

UNI Day at DMACC
Campus: Ankeny
Location: AN05 Corridor
10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
March 6, 2024
Transfer Fair
Campus: Ankeny
Location: AN05 Corridor
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Kids these days...



Lara Jones

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As another year has come and gone the only question that lingers as the new year begins is, “What has happened to kids?”

No matter how old I feel asking that question, it needs to be asked. Why is it that at the tender age of 18, I look at today’s youth and think, “Huh that’s

strange.” Something has happened between the years that marked the end of my childhood and those few passing years in between. We’ve gone from Barbies to Stanleys and cheap Claires make up to \$300 skincare routines.

You might think, “Why do you care? Why does this matter?” To be honest it doesn’t. Except it does matter to me. Right now the influx of social media and hyperconsumerism has created a large mass of preteens losing out on childhood because it’s not “Trendy.”

Here’s the thing: kids aren’t supposed to be trendy, they’re kids. They are supposed to be awkward and unsure. It’s a weird point in their lives between maturity and immaturity. Why are we allowing kids to grow up so early? Why are we giving them a sense of adulthood that their brain hasn’t fully matured to?

It’s strange to see this new generation fawn over luxury leggings and Reusable cups that cost an arm and a leg, when I’m pretty sure for my

Christmas at 12 we got Super Mario 3D Land. So what’s different about this generation compared to others?

To put it bluntly, the Gen Alpha generation has not only grown up with the internet but is being raised by people who grew up without it; these parents haven’t experienced the full toxic environment that lurks under cute dog photos. They aren’t knowledgeable because, by the time the internet came around, they were smart enough to know what was right and wrong. Their kids however do not. The overshoot into adulthood is grounded in a generational difference.

You ask any Gen Z if they will allow their child a phone and social media at a young age and do you know what they’ll say? “No.” Because they’ve lived through it at a young age they know the struggle. I’m not saying that it’s the Millennial’s fault for giving kids iPads and not seeing this. It’s not their fault. The internet is a new technology that changes every day. I

just hope we can be different for the next generation of kids.

This may sound like a broken record every generation has seen something wrong with the previous one, and trust me I get it. As a teen or tween, anything different makes you an outsider, and when you are that age not blending into the crowd is a death sentence. This makes you want all the items that all the cool adults have.

Let’s stop making kids grow up early, and stop them from having to feel like they need to appease an audience of the world to belong. Let’s just get back to being a kid.

Don’t focus on all the name-brand things you have. Instead, just focus on that moment when you don’t need any responsibilities. As Chucky Cheese said, let’s make this into a world where a kid can be a kid.

Don’t let your failures define you



Kennedy Ballinger

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When I was in high school I struggled with anxiety and depression. This took most of the energy out of me and it was hard to focus on my education. This lasted from my sophomore year of high school to my freshman year of college, and it made learning incredibly difficult. I barely graduated from high school because I would fail or constantly drop classes because of my mental health, but I pushed through with the help of my parents and high school guidance counselor.

I started college almost two years ago here at DMACC, and I had the

mindset that because of my high school experience, I couldn’t do well in college. I was actively letting my “failures” and my past define me. My first semester at DMACC was extremely difficult. I hadn’t learned much in high school because I was just trying to push through, which meant I would accept a C or D as a grade in a class. This made jumping into college very overwhelming because I felt like I had to catch up to a high school level of education while actively learning and retaining a college education. At the same time, I was still trying to get better mentally, which combined with the schoolwork made life in general very hard.

I got through my first semester of college which was encouraging in the sense that I made it through something on my own, so then I decided I was going to turn my life around. This decision truly happened in a split second, and it was because I was no longer going to look at my life as a failure. I turned those “failures” into a motivation for me to do better.

I began to crack down on my mental health by going to regular therapy sessions, which allowed me to focus more on my education. During my second and third semesters at DMACC, I focused on grades and getting my

GPA up, and I figured out what I would major in. I went into my college experience having no idea what I wanted to be in life or what I was going to major in, and I let it discourage me. There were so many people around me who seemed to have life figured out, but I can say with confidence now that that was not the case. There are a lot of people who do not have college or a career path figured out, and that is completely normal and okay. Things tend to work themselves out sometimes, and if it did for me it will for you.

In my fourth semester, I had gotten my GPA up and into a routine that helped my personal and college life. I had also gotten significantly better mentally, so I was able to focus on things that I enjoyed. I signed up for an American government and a criminal justice class because I enjoy learning about those topics, and within that semester I figured out my major and what career I want to pursue. I decided to major in political science, and then

get a law degree to become a defense attorney. This would have seemed impossible to my past self, and I wish I could go back in time to tell her that after everything I have been through, I have made it to the other side.

With that said, I want to say that you can too. I share my story in hopes of inspiring others and just letting people

“Our paths in life are bumpy sometimes, but like a steamroller, the path you’re on will get smoothed out by something in the end.”

know that things will be okay. No matter what you may be going through, big or small, things will work out. Don’t let your failures define who you are and who you could be, and start taking chances in life.

Start with the little things and work up to the big things. We all walk a path in life that may seem so different from others; this path can be lonely but after some time you begin to realize our paths are intertwined and that they might not be all that different from others after all. Our paths in life are bumpy sometimes, but like a steamroller, the path you’re on will get smoothed out by something in the end.

The key to communicating with professors



Dashae Engler

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Being assertive is a balancing class act. There is a thin line between being aggressive and assertive. When you constantly allow things to push you past your boundaries, most people can get aggressive and say or do something they may regret. For this reason, learning how to effectively communicate our needs is vital.

Let me give you an example. Last semester, I was taking a class and had a paper due fairly soon. I tried to convince the professor to let me go past my word count so I could explain my point of view more. They

said the paper would be fine without me doing so. For this reason, I cut some of the information in my paper. I ended up getting a B. I didn't want a B; I wanted an A. Even though I cut a lot of information, I thought it was an A paper. This was a dilemma for me.

I didn't get mad or upset but thought of a plan of action. I knew I was going to have to talk to them. I didn't take it personally and thought of what I wanted from our meeting. I have to be honest; I wanted them to change my grade. So, I made talking points about how it meets the grading criteria.

One of the most important things I realized is that even though I thought I deserved an A, they get the last say. So, if I could not get them to change my grade, I had to decide what else I wanted from this meeting. That was to become a better writer. I wanted to know where I went wrong and where I went right.

I came into our meeting in a friendly but neutral manner. I was not trying to be overly nice and flatter them into changing my grade. I sat down, let them pull up the paper, and we discussed it.

They started by saying they loved my paper and that it was one of their favorites. I thanked them and explained it was a very passionate paper for me.



Image courtesy Canva

Then I asked what made it a B paper. They told me they wanted to see me give more detail.

I then pushed back that there was more information I wanted to include, but there was a rubric to follow, and the topic had a lot of nuances. I also noted that I asked to make my paper longer, but they said that would result in a lower grade. I also asked what parts they would've taken out to make it fit the restrictive word count.

We came to a resolution that we both were happy with it. Yes, I got my grade bump! It doesn't always happen like that. Different professors can have different responses. I could have just

kept that B and probably still got an A in that class. I could have gotten mad and taken it personally and not said a word. Instead, I use it as a way to voice my confusion and grow from it.

It's okay to challenge your professors. A good professor will welcome it because they want you to think critically about everything. You are paying for your education and deserve to utilize the professors. That is what they are here for. The key is to do it respectfully and never to take things personally. Even if it is, because you only grow when you see the situation as the problem, not the person.

A young journalist covers the war on social media

Emily Riley

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The bravest faces in conflict can sometimes come from the most unexpected places.

In the ongoing conflict involving Gaza, the hardest hit populations have been women and children, thousands of whom are currently displaced, with no family or friends left to care for them.

Close to the heart of the conflict, 9-year-old Lama Abu Jamous, along with her family, after being displaced from Gaza decided to make her voice heard. Armed with a phone and social media, she records her experiences, in her own words:

"I am able to amplify the voices of the Palestinian children to the world," Jamous says.

She posts updates on Instagram and Twitter, everyday life intertwined with fighting. Her family is currently displaced meaning she must move around often.

In her first Instagram video a few months after the conflict started, she donned a helmet and vest, saying, "I am ready to cover the war."

Whether it's walking through the rubble of what used to be homes or through more familiar areas she used to frequent with her family, such as the beach

or playground, she confidently goes from place to place, to keep people up to date with what's going on.

Her videos and interviews show the thousands of people, trying to find a safe place to stay after fighting and bombardment, living in tents far from their homes. Without food or water, many are situated close together outside of cities.

Her most popular Instagram videos feature her interviews with family members. She aspires to become a full-fledged journalist once she grows up. Inspired by her father who works for the Al Jazeera news outlet, she says in a video, "I love Journalism and holding the camera and Photographing people. I like to post videos related to the war on Instagram."

According to her uncle in a video on the Al Jazeera news site, Ahmad Abu Jamos, "Since Lama was very little, she has this lovely talent of engaging in discussions. She is a very social person. When the war started, we noticed she had something to say."

With her social media taking off, she is making her voice heard by more and more people in the hopes that she will soon be able to go home.

She sends out a plea that, "I would like to convey my message to the whole world to end the war, which is affecting the children of Palestine who are suffering and starving. We don't have food or water. We want to return to our homes and schools and be



A screenshot from Jamous's Instagram: lama_jamous9