THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

AI and Ethics: Navigating the Spectrum of the Good, Bad, and Beyond

2025 Capacity Building Institute: Cultivating Growth from Seed to Bloom

May 6, 2025

Who are we?

Rob Froehlich, Ed.D., LPC, CRC

Previous Chair of the CRCC Ethics Committee

Nichole Tichy, Ph.D., CRC

Current member of the CRCC Ethics Committee

Today's Learning Objectives

Understand Ethical Principles in AI for Vocational Rehabilitation and Special Education: Identify key ethical considerations surrounding the use of Artificial Intelligence in vocational rehabilitation and special education, including privacy, informed consent, bias mitigation, and data security.

Evaluate the Impact of AI on Counselor/Teacher-Client Relationships: Analyze how AI-driven tools can influence decision-making, client/student autonomy, and equitable access to services while maintaining professional integrity and ethical counseling practices.

Apply Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks to AI Integration: Develop strategies for responsibly incorporating AI technologies into vocational rehabilitation and special education practices, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and legal regulations, and promoting positive client outcomes.

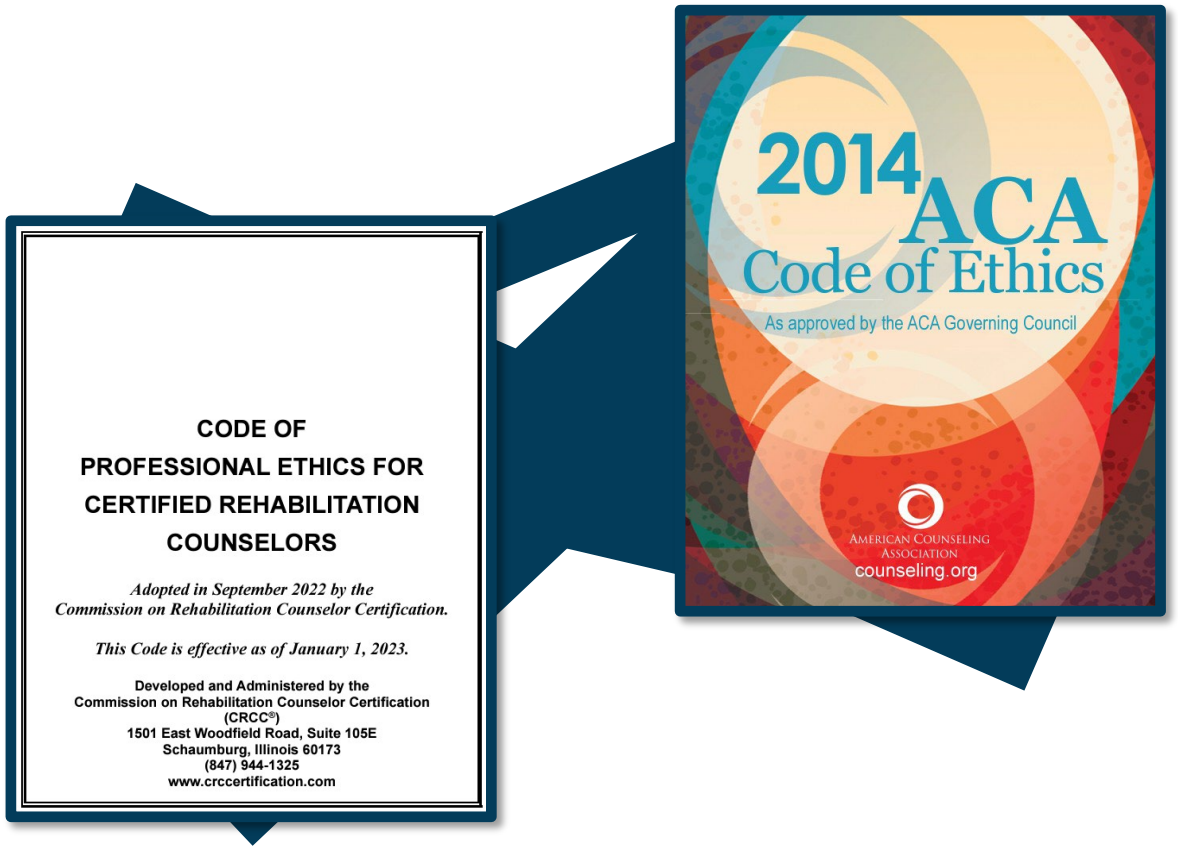
Codes of Ethics and Technology Guidance

CRCC – Revised 2023

- Code of Ethics for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors

ACA - 2014 Revision

- American Counseling Association Code of Ethics



Relevant Sections of the Code

Section B: Confidentiality, Privileged Communication, and Privacy

Section E: Professional Responsibility

- E.1.a. Boundaries of competence
- E.1.b. New Specialty Areas of Practice
- E.1.d. Avoiding Harm
- E.1.g. Continuing Education

Section K: Technology, Social Media, and Virtual Counseling

- K.1. Competence and Legal Considerations
- K.2. Accessibility
- K.3. Confidentiality and Disclosure

Section M: Resolving Ethical Issues

- M.1. Knowledge of Ethical Standards and the Law
- M.2. Addressing Suspected Violations
- M.3. Conduct in Addressing Ethical Issues

Importance of Ethical Decision-Making

Ethical decision-making is the process of evaluating and choosing among alternatives in a manner consistent with ethical principles.

- **Involves:**
  - recognizing and analyzing ethical dilemmas
  - applying professional and moral standards and
  - selecting actions that align with values
- **Ensures** that the well-being of clients is prioritized while adhering to legal and organizational guidelines.

Reminder: Ethical Principles

Autonomy: To respect the rights of clients to be self-governing within their social and cultural framework.

Beneficence: To do good to others; to promote the well-being of clients.

Fidelity: To be faithful; to keep promises and honor the trust placed in CRCs/CCRCs.

Justice: To be fair in the treatment of all clients; to provide appropriate services to all.

Nonmaleficence: To do no harm to others.

Veracity: To be honest and truthful.

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

Now that we have some decision-making tools…

What is **artificial intelligence?**

Complex Answer

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science focused on creating systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence.

These tasks include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, understanding natural language, perception, and decision-making.

- Basically, it's math. It's a series of linear regression utilizing predictive analytics to analyze patterns to predict relevant information.

More Buzz Words – Machine Learning

A more complicated aspect of **AI** is the use of machine learning – which enables systems to learn and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed.

- Three different types:
  - Supervised**
  - Unsupervised
  - Reinforcement

Supervised Learning

Most commonly used:

A technique that uses labeled data to train algorithms to recognize patterns and predict outcomes. The goal is to create a model that can predict future data

- Again, it's math - you enter an input x and receive an output of y

Example: Spam Filters

- your input is the e-mail, and the output is binary (spam or not spam)

Natural Language Processing (NLP)

Branch of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** that enables computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language.

Combines linguistics, machine learning, and deep learning to process text and speech data

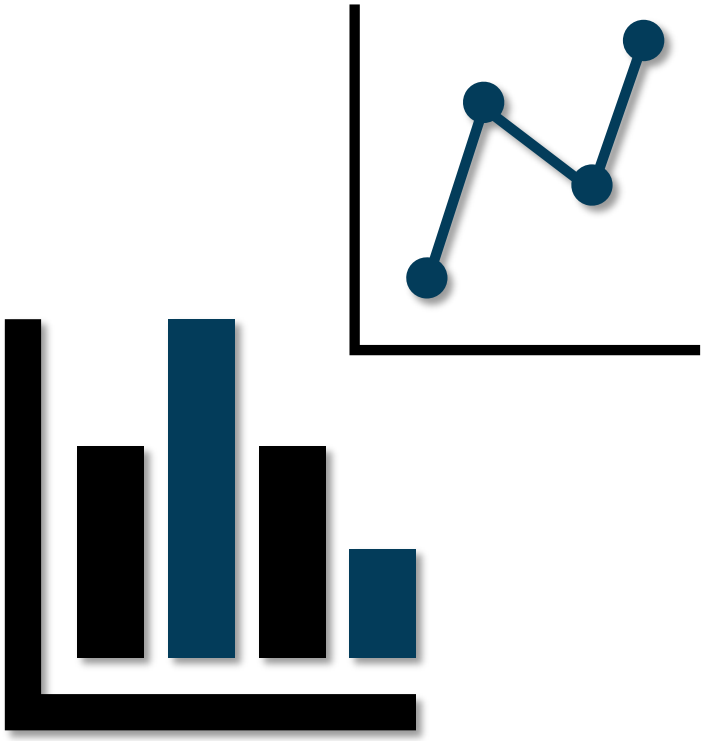
Key Steps:

- Understanding text
- Analyzing text
- Processing meaning
- Generating responses

Example: The app **Mindstrong** assesses smartphone usage patterns (typing speed, text structure) to predict mental health fluctuations.

Useful Applications

- Assessment and Evaluation Tools
- Personalized Vocational Planning
- Assistive Technology and Accessibility
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- Data-Driven Program Evaluation



Platforms

Different Types of Platforms

- Natural Language Processing (NLP) Tools
  - ChatGPT
  - Grammarly
- Speech Recognition and Voice AI
  - Amazon Alexa
  - Otter.ai **and** Ava
- Predictive Analytics
  - Tableau AI
- Smart Assistants
  - Apple Intelligence
  - Google Assistant
  - Microsoft Copilot
- Specialized AI tools
  - Goblin Tools
  - Seeing AI
  - Rezi
  - VRsim

Ethical Implications

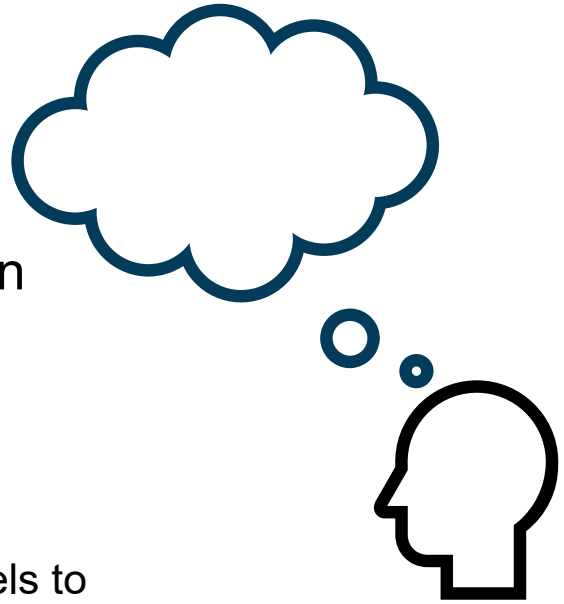
Remember AI **DOES NOT** replace the professional and clinical judgement of the counselor.

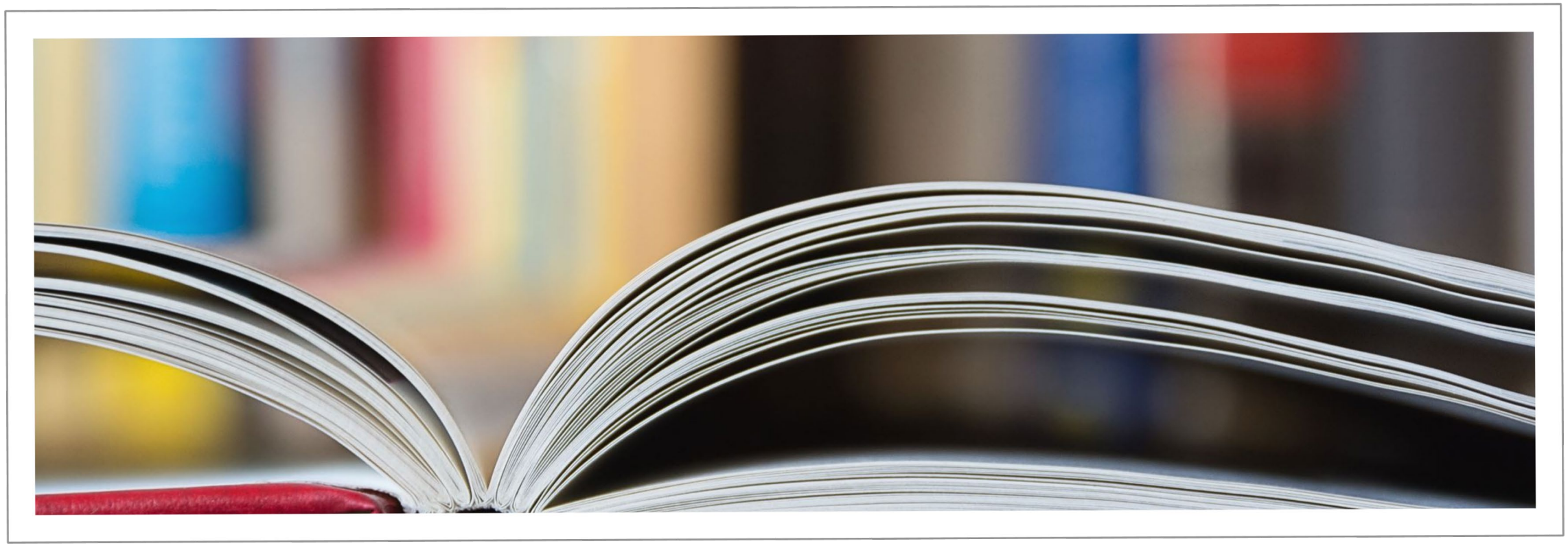
While AI can enhance service delivery, it's essential to address:

- Data Privacy and Confidentiality
- Algorithmic Bias
- Client Autonomy
- Competence and Professional Usage of Technology

Pondering Thoughts

- Just because something can be done…doesn't mean it should.
- "With great power comes great responsibility."
- Our role: Equip youth not just with tools—but with trust, choice, and voice.
- Don't be afraid but proceed with caution.
- It's not all bad or all good.
- A good analogy for where we are with AI is where we as a field have been and how we have developed secondary to social media.
    - Initially the field's response was not now not ever…
    - But as the world has evolved so has the code.
    - Focus has changed to include the use of critical thinking and decision-making models to make a choice to use or to avoid.





Is there existing literature or resources on this topic?

Artificial intelligence in positive mental health: a narrative review (Thakkar, Gupta, & De Sousa, 2024)

- Discusses AI's applications in psychiatric disorders, emotional regulation, diagnosis, and intervention while also addressing ethical concerns.
- Traces AI’s history from early theoretical developments to modern applications.
- Provides a robust overview of Artificial Intelligence and its application to mental health care

Outcomes in Mental Health Counseling From Conversational Content With Transformer-Based Machine Learning (Imel et al., 2024)

- Explores use of transformer-based machine learning models to evaluate conversational content in asynchronous text-based mental health counseling (TalkSpace) and its association with client outcomes
- **Data Source:** The study used de-identified data from **TalkSpace**, covering counseling sessions from **2014 to 2019**.
  - **Participants:166,644 clients**
  - **4973 licensed therapists**
  - **20,600,274 messages** exchanged
  - Clients primarily aged **26-35** (55.4%), predominantly female (75.23%), and mainly White (61.8%).

Artificial Intelligence for Psychotherapy: A Review of the Current State and Future Directions (Beg, et al., 2024)

- Literature review to review roles of AI in psychotherapy
  - PRISMA guidelines (January 2009 – December 2023) = 28 studies
- **Key Themes:**
  - **Effectiveness of AI** – chatbots and iCBT have shown promise in treating anxiety and depression
  - **Types of AI** –
    - **Deep learning** – identifying patterns for diagnosis
    - **Natural Language Processing** – analyze human speech and text
  - **Benefits of AI Integration** – Accessibility and Scalability
  - **Challenges and Ethical concerns** – Data privacy and security, lack of empathy

ACA: AI Work Group Recommendations for Counselors

- Learn more about the essentials of artificial intelligence, its subfields, and its applications to mental health.
- Stay open, informed, and educated.
- Avoid over-reliance on AI.
- Recognize that AI may contain bias and be capable of discrimination.
- Career counselors and those who address employment issues should stay informed about how automation is shaping the world of work.
- Advocate for transparency in AI algorithms.
- Maintain transparency and informed consent.
- Leverage AI for data-driven insights.
- Ensure data security and privacy.
- Counselors should empower clients to communicate about their AI use.
- Supervisors can use AI to enhance the development of supervisees.
- Counselors must understand the limitations of AI in diagnosis and assessment in all counseling settings.
- Consider conducting research on the intersection of AI and counseling.

Recommendations For Client Use and Caution of Artificial Intelligence

Now, how do we navigate that spectrum?

The good, the bad, and the beyond

The Good: AI as a Powerful Tool

How AI Supports Students and Youth:

- **Assistive Technologies** (e.g., speech-to-text, screen readers, captioning)
- **Career Exploration** (e.g., interest-based job matching)
- **Personalized Learning** (adaptive learning systems, tutoring bots)
- **Social Skills Coaching** (virtual role-play, AI chat for interview prep)

The Bad: Ethical Risks and Limitations

- Bias in algorithms affecting fair job placement.
  - AI may replicate societal biases in hiring or evaluation.
- Invasion of privacy and misuse of student data.
  - Sensitive educational or health data at risk.
- Lack of transparency in decision-making tools.
  - Students may not understand how decisions are made.
- Over-reliance on technology without human support.
  - Limits in critical thinking skills
  - Risk of replacing, not supporting, human judgment.

The Beyond: Future Directions and Critical Thinking

- Universal Design Principles
  - Choose tools built with accessibility in mind.
  - Emerging tools (e.g., emotion recognition, social skills coaching).
- Human-in-the-Loop Systems
  - Combine AI support with professional insight.
  - Consider the role of human judgment (e.g., empathy, ethics, and personalization)
- Co-Design with Students
  - Let youth voice shape tool development.
  - Involve students in choosing tools that fit their needs.
- AI in mental health support
  - Promise and pitfalls.
- Transparency & Explainability
  - Help students understand how AI works.
  - Promote digital literacy

What are some examples we can use?

Questions to Consider When Using AI

- Is this tool equitable and culturally responsive?
- Does it respect student privacy and autonomy?
- Who created it, and how are decisions made?
- How does it support—not replace—student voice?

AI Use in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling

Scenario: A vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor is assisting a client diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) who struggles with decision-making, time management, and workplace social interactions. The client is seeking a remote job to help manage anxiety while maintaining productivity.

To provide personalized and ethical support, the counselor integrates AI tools such as:

- **Goblin Tools** (AI-powered executive functioning support)
- **ChatGPT** (Career coaching & interview preparation)
- **SARAworks** (Client communication and compliance automation

Ethical Use in this Scenario

Personalized AI Support While Maintaining Human Oversight

- Collaborate with the client to use Goblin Tools,
- SARAworks reduces administrative burdens

Ensuring Data Privacy & Informed Consent

- The **client consents** before inputting any personal details into AI tools.
- **ChatGPT is used in an anonymized way**
- The counselor **educates the client** on **AI limitations and data security risks**, helping them make informed choices about which tools to use.

Addressing AI Bias & Promoting Equitable Opportunities

- The counselor **reviews AI-generated job suggestions** for any biases

Supporting, Not Replacing, Human Judgment

- **ChatGPT is used for mock interviews**, helping the client **prepare answers** for anxiety-provoking workplace scenarios. However, the counselor **provides direct coaching** on emotional regulation and confidence-building.
- AI tools are **complementary resources**, not replacements for **the counselor's clinical expertise in anxiety management**.

Promoting Transparency & Client Autonomy

- The counselor explains **how AI tools generate recommendations**, ensuring the client **understands the reasoning behind suggestions**.
- The **client has full control** over which AI recommendations to implement, reinforcing **self-determination** and **confidence in decision-making.**

Unethical Use in this Scenario

Violating Data Privacy & Confidentiality

- **inputting personal and medical details** into **an unsecured AI system** without **anonymization or consent**

Why It's Unethical?

➞ **Breach of confidentiality** and potential **HIPAA violations** by sharing protected health information (PHI) without consent.

Replacing Human Judgment with AI Decisions

- Relying **solely on AI-generated job suggestions**, not considering the client's **preferences, workplace culture needs, or coping strategies**.

Why It's Unethical?

➞ AI is used **as a substitute** for **counselor expertise**, **removing human insight** and **reducing client autonomy** in vocational decision-making.

AI Bias & Discriminatory Job Recommendations

- The job-matching AI **filters out high-responsibility positions** because of the client's anxiety diagnosis, reinforcing **stigma and bias**.

Why It's Unethical?

➞ AI perpetuates **bias and discrimination** against individuals with mental health conditions, limiting **equal opportunities**.

Lack of Transparency & Informed Consent

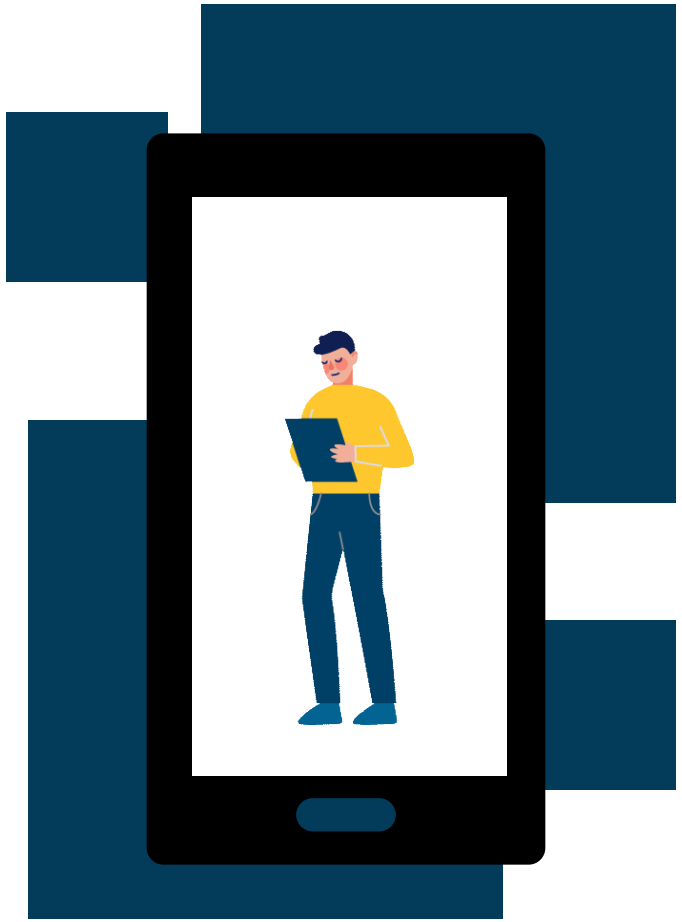
- **Failing to explain how AI systems generate recommendations**, leaving the client **unaware of why certain jobs are suggested or excluded**.

Why It's Unethical?

➞ Clients must have **full transparency** in AI-driven decisions affecting their career and privacy.

Beyond VR Tools and AI

- AI to get ahead in school
- Grief Bots/Ghost Bots
- Relationship or sexual role-playing AI platforms



AI and Accessibility Considerations

This too is a mixed bag that requires some decision making:

Positives:

- Can be used as a tool for individuals who have a difficult time picking up on social cues or context
  - Ex: “Take this response and make it empathic.”
  - AI in education could assist students with disabilities with note-taking.

Challenges:

- AI screening can screen out individuals who should actually be screened in regarding employment. (ATS or Applicant Tracking Systems);
- If AI is recording lectures to create notes, that raises potential concerns for faculty members regarding consent

Best Practice Guidance

- Promote Digital Literacy
  - Teach students how to use AI tools safely, effectively, and ethically.
  - Help them understand their rights (e.g., when data is collected, how it's used).
- Advocate for Inclusive Design
  - Choose tools that are designed with universal design for learning (UDL) principles.
  - Involve students in choosing tools that fit their needs.
- Support Equity & Accessibility
  - Ensure students with disabilities have equal access to AI-powered resources.
  - Collaborate with IT, special educators, and families to customize supports.
  - Ensure the AI system works across languages, cultures, and disability types to avoid reinforcing **bias or exclusion**.

Best Practice Guidance Cont.

- Use AI to Enhance, Not Replace
  - AI can free up time by handling repetitive tasks (e.g., data tracking), allowing educators and VR counselors to focus on relationships and personalized support.
  - Always **review AI-generated content or decisions** before implementation
- Protect Student Privacy & Data
  - Confirm that AI tools comply with FERPA, IDEA, HIPAA, and other relevant privacy laws.
  - Use platforms that clearly explain how data is collected, used, stored, and shared.
  - Provide opt-out options and obtain informed consent, especially when collecting sensitive information.

Questions?

Thank you!

Dr. Froehlich

rfro@gwu.edu

(202)994-7126

Dr. Tichy

nbean2@email.gwu.edu

Resources

1. CAST UDL Guidelines

- **Overview:** Provide a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn.
- Access the Guidelines

2. Center for Democracy & Technology: Student Privacy & AI

- **Overview:** Offers insights and research on student privacy concerns, especially in the context of emerging AI-driven technologies in education. Their work focuses on responsibly using data while maintaining the privacy and civil rights of students.
- **Explore the** Center's Work for Democracy & Technology

3. Partnership on AI: Responsible AI Practices

- **Overview:** Develops frameworks and best practices for the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies. Their initiatives include guidance on synthetic media and safe AI model deployment.
- **Learn** More about Partnership on AI

More Resources

4. Responsible AI & Tech Justice: A Guide for K-12 Education

- **Overview:** This guide provides comprehensive insights into responsible AI practices in K-12 education, emphasizing equity and justice in technological implementations.
- **Access the Responsible AI & Tech Justice Guide**

5. UDL Tips for Assessments

- **Overview:** CAST offers practical tips for aligning assessments with UDL principles, ensuring they are inclusive and effectively measure student learning.
- **Read More UDL Tips for Assessments**