DAVISAI
Institute for Artificial Intelligence

2024–2025
in review

Prompts

& Perspectives

Contents

Note from the Interim Director of DavisAI

Since 2021, the Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence has been dedicated to establishing Colby College as a nationally recognized center of excellence in transdisciplinary, human-centered AI teaching and research. Our successes over the past four years have emerged from embedding DavisAI's identity within Colby's academic program through tenure-track faculty positions, comprehensive curricular and pedagogical support for AI courses, diverse educational outreach programming, and serving as an applications incubator for multimodal AI research. This year we furthered our mission by leading with a *polymathic* approach to AI at Colby.

Throughout history, a rare few individuals with a burning curiosity about humans and their relationship to the natural world—often referred to as *polymaths*—have transcended disciplinary boundaries to make lasting contributions to the natural and physical sciences, philosophy, art, and society. From familiar figures like Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Benjamin Franklin to less recognized scholars such as Ibn al-Haytham, Hildegard von Bingen, and Zhang Heng, these transdisciplinary thinkers left an enduring mark on culture and our understanding of the natural world. The works of these remarkable individuals laid foundations for what we now recognize as AI applications in computer vision, holistic medicine, and astronomy. Their legacies remind us that the most profound insights often emerge when ideas collide across disciplines.

At Colby, we embrace this polymathic approach to learning. Our curriculum intentionally bridges disciplines, requiring students in the sciences to engage with ethics, the creative arts, history, and philosophy, while students in the arts and social sciences gain an understanding of the scientific method through natural science courses and laboratory and field research. This cross-pollination of knowledge—enhanced by a foreign language requirement that builds cultural appreciation and communication skills—fosters an enhanced capacity for critical thinking and innovation.

But what does a polymathic approach to AI look like? At Colby, it looks like:

- An art professor challenging students to recreate an AI generated image with a collage of photos cut from a variety of print media
- Psychology students unpacking the effects of gendered AI voices on perceptions of competence and humanness
- A writing professor studying the implications of linguistic justice using generative AI
- A computer science student presenting AI decision theory
- A philosophy professor using AI to map the brain-body connections in the context of hip hop dance

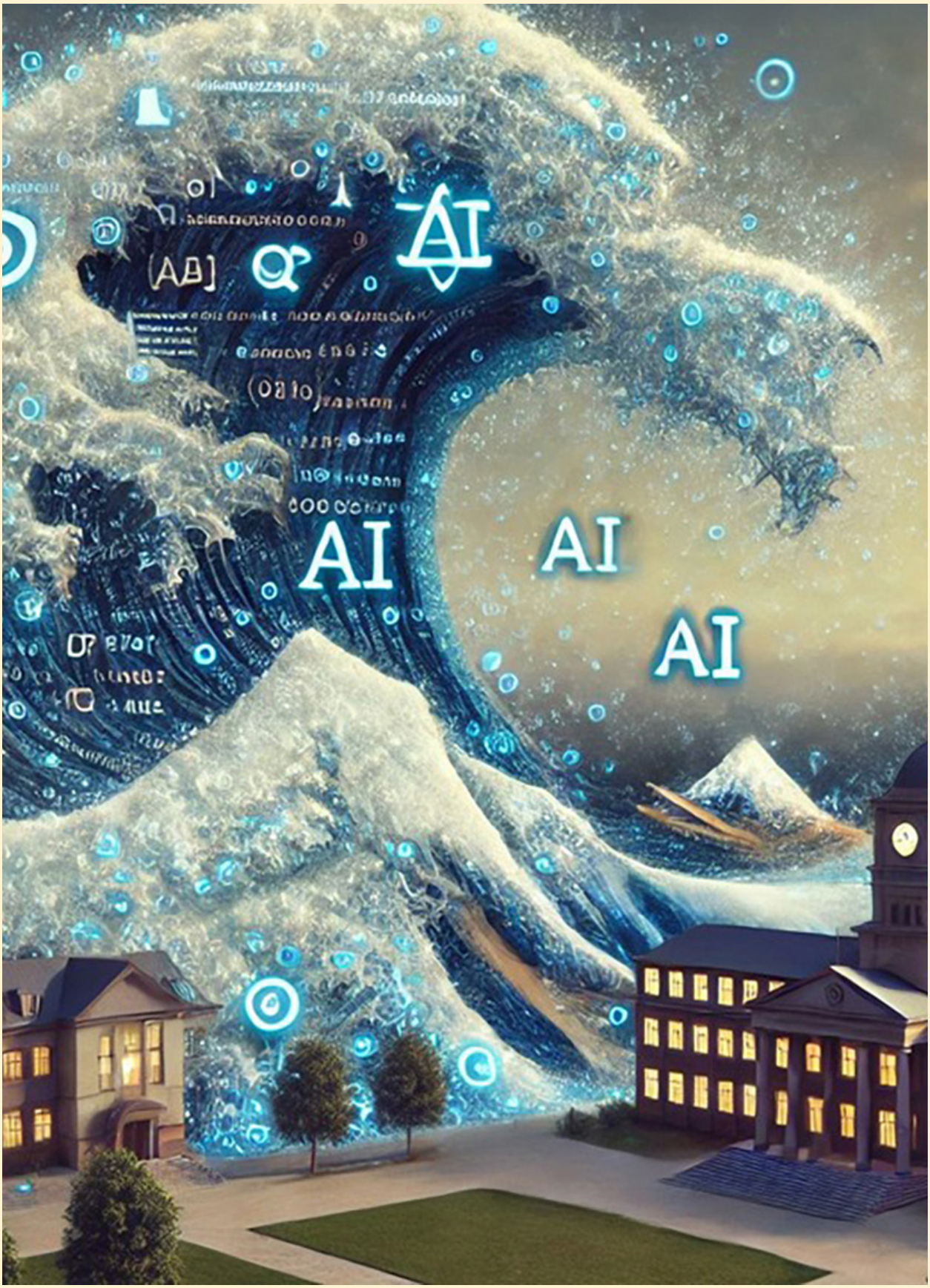
A polymathic approach to AI encompasses both the technical and the human, the ethics and the engines, the imagined and the investigated, the prompts and perspectives. At the end of the day, it comes down to asking good questions and thinking critically about the results. It's who we are, and it's what we do at Colby.

This shared polymathic approach to learning and AI sets the Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence and Colby College apart as leaders in defining a paradigm for a 21st-century liberal arts education in the Age of AI. By reclaiming the spirit of the ancient polymaths, we equip our students not just with answers, but with the critical thinking skills to transform those answers into knowledge, communicate across cultures, and make an enduring impact on their world after Colby. Similarly, by embracing a polymathic approach to AI we are not merely adapting to technological change—we are reclaiming an ancient tradition of integrated learning that will empower our students to shape the future with wisdom, creativity, and ethical purpose.

The pages that follow detail our strategic planning efforts, the exceptional work of our faculty and staff colleagues, the ways we engaged and empowered student learning across disciplines, and the deepening of our academic partnerships on campus and beyond. You will find that our achievements stem from a meaningful integration of DavisAI programming into Colby's broader academic mission—a testament to the enduring power of polymathic thinking in preparing students to have lasting impacts in our rapidly evolving world.

Looking back and reflecting on what we accomplished this year, I'm grateful for the support and partnership of Amy Poulin as the associate director of DavisAI. Her patience, creative problem solving abilities, and project management skills allowed us to achieve more than either of us thought possible a year ago. Also key to our successes were the behind-the-scenes efforts of Michael Yankoski who worked part time for DavisAI this year. Michael's technical expertise enabled us to deepen our identity as an applications incubator in implementing MuleChat, MuleBot and other innovative multimodal AI applications. His willingness to help push the boundaries of what DavisAI is capable of in the midst of a rapidly changing AI landscape was inspirational, and I'm happy that he'll be the first DavisAI Research Scientist and Assistant Professor of AI beginning in September. My thanks also to Ryan Bloom, who compiled and edited this report, and Mingwei Zhu, both of whom came on board in June to take the reins of our MuleChat experience, lead faculty and staff workshops, and help define our agenda for the coming year.

—Michael Donihue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Executive Summary

The 2024–25 academic year has been uniquely defined by the disruptions of generative AI (GenAI) on college and university campuses—impacts arguably second only to those of the Coronavirus Pandemic. What made GenAI particularly challenging for faculty was the unprecedented reality that the impacts it had on the curriculum were student-driven, rather than originating from within disciplines. At DavisAI this year, we helped support faculty in navigating these changes through workshops, peer-support networks, and conferences. A cornerstone of these ongoing efforts has been the development and deployment of MuleChat, a web portal accompanied by tutorial support, offering access to the most capable large language models (LLMs) for the entire Colby community. Beyond regular MuleChat updates to keep pace with rapid GenAI innovations, DavisAI's research and development agenda this year has included AI classroom assistants, custom GPT applications, and collaborative multimodal AI research projects.

Amanda Stent, DavisAI's inaugural director, left Colby last May. Having already been involved in DavisAI, Professor Michael Donihue took the reins as interim director.

With two dedicated full-time staff members, including Donihue as interim director and Amy Poulin as associate director, and one part-time research fellow, Michael Yankoski, the human resources at DavisAI were stretched thin. Despite this, we achieved a number of important milestones, including:

- Embedding MuleChat in specific courses and providing research access for faculty and students, enabling secure and responsible access to AI tools for curricular and pedagogical development and to advance the research agendas for several of our faculty colleagues.
- The deployment of two custom AI assistants accompanying MuleChat, one of which has opened doors for an intensive research project.
- Designing and teaching two semesters of a new AI Lab course that trained students to teach and talk about AI to their peers, professors, and staff, as well as to present their own research in poster sessions.
- Hosting faculty and students from other small colleges at a fall symposium, spring DataFest, and spring conference.
- Establishing strategic partnerships domestically and internationally.

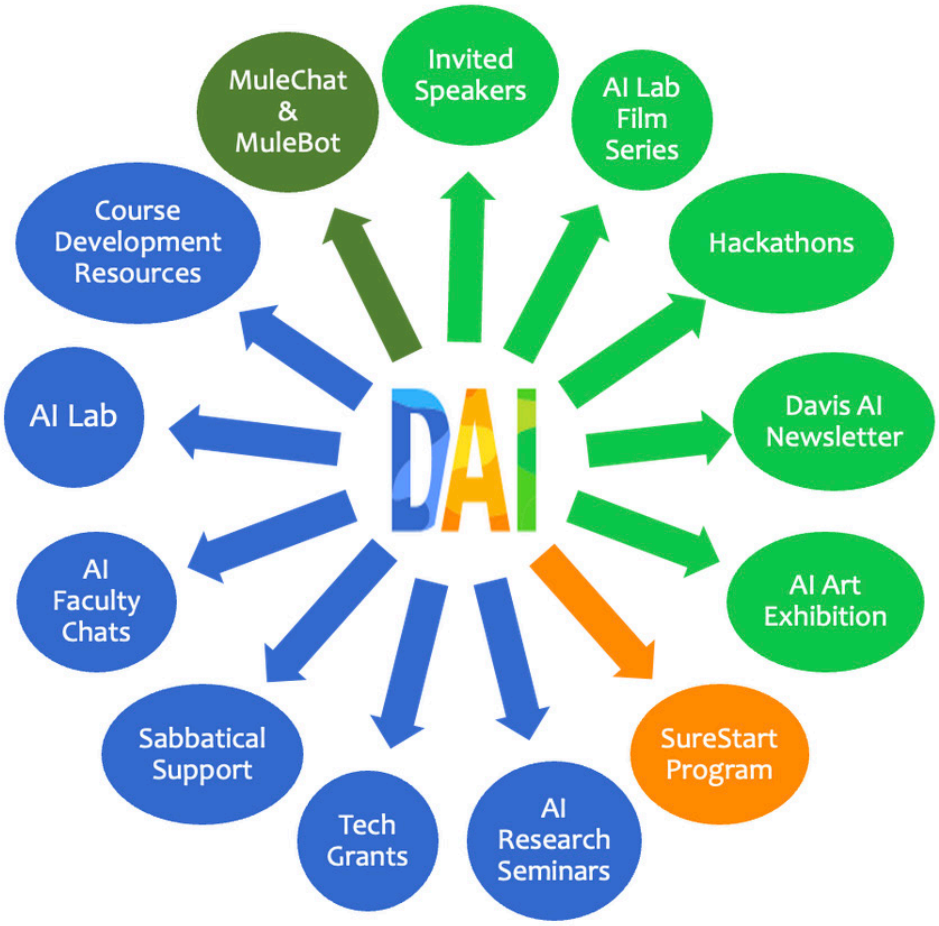
Two important attributions need to be included to contextualize the success this year. First, DavisAI received support from a number of on-campus and off-campus partners—we are deeply grateful for the opportunities to collaborate and share knowledge.

Second, Stent left in her wake a solid foundational legacy that centered DavisAI within the educational curriculum. This positioning enabled us to ride the tsunami of GenAI, leaning into the possibilities by developing MuleChat and an AI Lab, rather than being left to flounder in the debris of unmet needs and failed applications.

Still, the tides of change at DavisAI continue to shift.

We hired four people full-time, including our new director, David Watts, Michael Yankoski (now as an AI research scientist and assistant professor of AI), Ryan Bloom (AI application specialist), and Mingwei Zhu (AI applications engineer).

With more institutional history, new energy, and the impressive legacies of not only Stent and Poulin, but now Donihue, DavisAI is on track to continue enhancing the educational and research missions of Colby College, as well as generating influence and prestige by modeling responsible, secure, and equitable access to AI and exploring cutting-edge possibilities for human-centered AI.



Our strategic plan for the 2024–2025 year prioritized deepening the integration of DavisAI into the academic environment at Colby including: organizing peer-support opportunities for AI research, engaging students in a new AI Lab, providing curricular and pedagogical support for AI-related courses, and developing a custom LLM portal with an accompanying custom chatbot.

Supporting our academic initiatives by fostering conversation and critical thinking about AI, we also planned a robust offering of educational outreach programs throughout the year.

Academic Roots

Since its founding, academic support has been the backbone of DavisAI from which a bounty of programming, resources, courses, research projects, and entrepreneurial ventures have blossomed. Whereas similar programs at other institutions attempt to work in parallel partnership with academic departments, DavisAI was founded with roots already stretching through some of the most popular majors at Colby, granting us faculty buy-in from the beginning that other programs struggle to earn.

One aspect of academic embedding comes from our "X+AI" faculty, professors who teach their discipline (X) in the context of AI (+AI). The gift from the family and charitable foundation of 1985 graduate Andrew Davis that established the Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence included four tenure-track X+AI professors, each in a unique discipline.

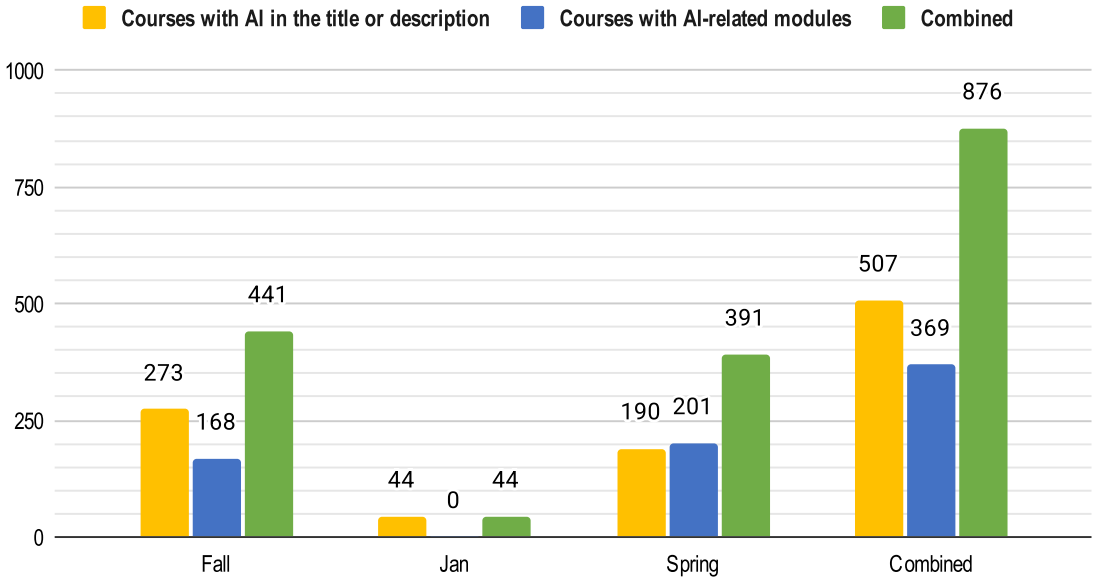
Our X+AI faculty are not the only instructors teaching with and about AI—this past year, over 25% of departments ran at least one AI-related course, for a total of 51 AI-related courses throughout the year. Also new this year, students can now formally demonstrate their focus on AI by majoring in computer science with a concentration in AI.

At the most essential level, DavisAI provides support for teaching, researching, and learning with and about AI. In addition to our more structured programming below, we were responsive to faculty and student concerns about AI, leading group discussions about field-specific concerns with multiple academic departments, the Farnham Writers' Center, and students in individual classes.

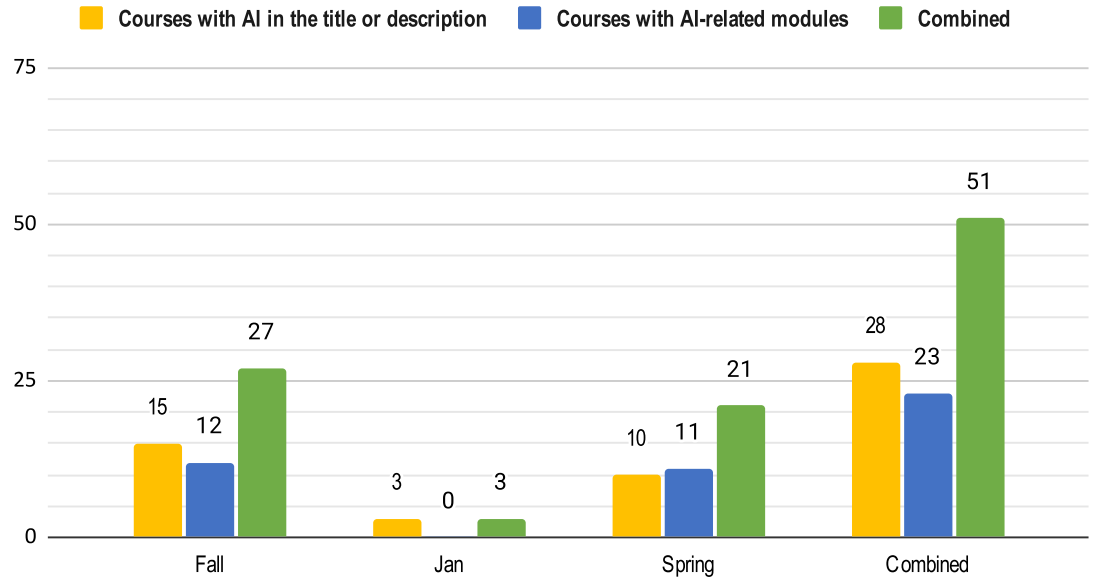
Our planned structured programming included:

- Course development resources for prompt engineering and discussions about ethical and responsible applications of AI
- Faculty workshops and research seminars
- An AI Lab course (one of many AI-focused courses)
- Sabbatical support and tech grants
- Our custom AI portal: MuleChat

Students Enrolled in AI-Related Courses



Combined Count of AI-Related Courses



- Yellow bars represent courses with AI or related concepts in the title or description, as advertised in the 2024–2025 course catalogue.
- Blue bars represent courses without any reference to AI in the title or description, but with AI components or modules in the course materials.
- Green bars combine these counts for a total snapshot of AI-related courses.

AI297/298: Artificial Intelligence Lab

Colby's First Official AI Course

Our two-credit AI Lab was created and taught by Interim Director Michael Donihue. The course enrolled 15 students in the fall and 20 in the spring and included majors from a dozen different disciplines across all divisions of the College. Students gained skills in prompt engineering, RAG database creation, and LLM architecture. Students were also introduced to multimodal applications of AI including computer vision, AI-generated pictures and videos, AI "wrapper" applications, and image processing. In-class discussions and tutor/client role-playing were key components of the course as students developed communication skills and confidence around appropriate uses of AI, implicit algorithmic biases, intellectual property concerns, and unethical AI practices.

Michael Donihue, center, reviews MuleChat with AI298 students.

In addition to the classroom sessions, students in the AI lab committed to employing their communication and AI applications skills in an hour of MuleChat tutoring each week. Students were also responsible for developing an AI-related research project as a capstone experience. Each student presented their research in a breakout Multimodal AI Studio session at our AI@SLAC Symposium (winter) and Conference (spring). Students in AI 298 also presented their research at poster sessions during the Colby Liberal Arts Symposium in May.

X+AI Faculty Courses

Vivian Ferrillo, Government

Focus: Political speech in podcasts

GO155f Ethics of Data Science. This course addresses topics at the intersection of political communication, data science, ethics, and policy. We will examine how changes in the structure and forms of political communication affect 1) the relationships among government actors, the media, and the public; 2) the production of data that can be used to study those relationships; and 3) the ethical implications of the creation, distribution, and analysis of that data. Four credit hours.

GO323f Digital Extremism. Many scholars predicted that the internet would enhance democratic citizenship and weaken autocratic regimes around the world. Yet 30 years into the digital revolution, few of those optimistic predictions have come to fruition. Why has the internet become such an effective tool for antidemocratic actors? Why do extreme ideas spread so easily in the digital, and how do extremist actors use the internet so successfully? Are digital social movements more or less meaningful than their traditional counterparts? Digital Extremism traces the course of political activity and media into the digital era, asking how the digitization of society has changed journalism, campaigning, and social movements. Four credit hours.

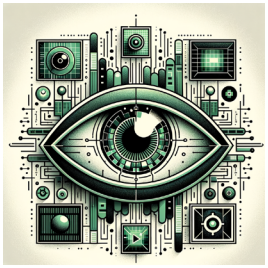
Aleja Ortiz, Environmental Studies

Focus: AI interpretation of large volumes of satellite data on temperature, water levels, and other measures of climate disruption

ES235s EnviroComputation: Computational Approaches to Environmental Problems. Solving challenging environmental problems means translating big environmental data into meaningful results. It means taking advantage of powerful analytical tools to understand data and communicate results with data visualization.

Take your environmental problem-solving skills to the next level by learning to code with Python. No prior programming experience required. You will learn to decode data, create your own algorithms, use AI, and create stunning visualizations with issues relevant to environmental science and policy. This hands-on course will unlock your data analysis abilities and help you solve our grand environmental challenges. Four credit hours.

ES494f Environmental Science Research Experience. Causes of and solutions to selected environmental problems are investigated through lectures, laboratory and field work, discussions, and guest presentations. Focuses on completion of a group research project to investigate freshwater, forest, or marine ecosystems. Research results are presented in a public forum at the end of the semester. The civic engagement component provides useful information to the community and the state and gives students experience interacting with interested stakeholders. Skill development includes research, communication (both oral and written), and collaborative work skills. Prerequisite: Biology/ Environmental Studies 271, and senior standing as an environmental science major. Four credit hours.



Tahiya Chowdhury, Computer Science

Focus: Computer vision, interpretation of social media video images, equity and fairness in AI applications

CS166f Computational Thinking: Computer Vision. A course for students who have some experience programming, but who are not ready for CS231. Using the Python language, students will learn how to write algorithms, manipulate information, and design programs. They will learn about abstraction, how to divide and organize a process into appropriate components, how to describe processes in a computer language, and how to analyze and understand the behavior of their programs. The projects will focus on manipulating images and videos using computer vision. This course enables CS- and AI-related student learning outcomes. Students may not receive credit for both this course and Computer Science 151, 152, 153, or 154. Prerequisite: Permission of instructor. Four credit hours.

Ben Baker, Philosophy

Focus: Intersection of neuroscience, cognitive science, and AI; use of AI applications to understand connection between cognition and movement.

PL120fs Central Philosophical Issues: Mind and Machine. This course is an introductory exploration of the philosophical issues surrounding artificial intelligence, covering a broad range of perspectives on the topic. The course will start with some historical roots and then turn to address views from contemporary philosophy of mind and relate them to discussions about current AI systems. We will delve into foundational concepts like inference, representation, computation, and learning, as they are used to describe both biological and artificial systems. We will examine the extent to which AI systems approximate human and animal intelligent capacities, and critically reflect on the implications for understanding our own minds, and on the ethical implications of building AI. Four credit hours.

PL380Df Philosophy of Emotion. Explores a range of philosophical questions about emotions, their relationship to other psychological phenomena, and the important role they play in our lives. We will examine historically influential views on emotion from Ancient Greek, Indian, and Chinese perspectives, transition into a substantial discussion of puzzles about exactly what constitutes an emotion, and discuss empirical views on the physiological, cognitive, and neural processes related to emotion. We consider possible evaluative and action-guiding roles of emotions and how they interact with other aspects of our mind, as well as social aspects of emotion, such as their connection to body language and art, and the significance of emotions in moral judgment, ethical decision-making and character development. Prerequisite: Two philosophy courses. Four credit hours.

PL422s Philosophical Encounters: AI and Human Values. Provides an opportunity for students to dig into questions about how modern AI systems are built and deployed, and into the ethical, political, technical and scientific, cultural and legal questions that current and emerging AI raise. In addition to reading and discussing scholarship and case studies in these areas, students will engage with several researchers currently doing work relating to these questions. The course aims at developing an improved understanding of the relationship between AI and human values, and means to equip students to contribute to steering the development of AI in a way that preserves and empowers what is most important to us. Prerequisite: Five philosophy courses, at least one of which must be at the 300-level. Four credit hours.

Instructor Support

Workshops

We held workshops in collaboration with the Writing Department, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and Academic Technology Services throughout the year. We also initiated a new signature workshop, "Prompts & Provisions,"in summer 2025. These semi-structured and lightly catered workshops featured an AI "short course" that covered the foundational information about neural pathways approach to knowledge acquisition and how that LLMs leverage that approach. The workshops also addressed ethical and security considerations, demonstrations of three specific potential faculty applications, and an open discussion period.

Faculty seminars

"Bagels & Bots" and "Snacks & Chats" were twice-monthly DavisAI-sponsored seminars designed to facilitate networking and peer support for faculty engaged in multimodal AI research. These informal discussions, led most often by a faculty member sharing their research on multimodal or other AI-related areas of inquiry, became a successful community for sharing best practices and resources on campus.

These seminars also served as the opening event for both our AI@SLAC Symposium in December 2024 and our AI@SLAC 2025 Conference in April 2025. Importantly, these events helped DavisAI establish a dimension to our mission and identity as an applications incubator for AI research on campus.

Online Resources

We partnered with on- and off-campus domain experts to create and consolidate dozens of resources for users at various stages in their AI "journeys."

LibGuides

Created principally by Kara Kugelmeyer, this guide walks through an interdisciplinary approach to AI and AI literacy, providing glossaries of key terms, discussing ethics and copyright concerns, and highlighting AI-related research by Colby faculty.

AI@Colby

A resource and documentation hub created by Academic Technology Services to provide support for the open release of Gemini and NotebookLM.

AI@SLAC Resources

Collected from DavisAI and partner institutions attending the AI@SLAC Spring 2025 conference, these resources cover a range of topics including:

- Institutional policies and LibGuides
- Prompt engineering tips
- Teaching resources and tips for GenAI-resistant assignments

MuleChat Guide

A digital resource created by DavisAI to serve as an introduction and reminder of what the MuleChat experience covers, tips for working with AI, a glossary of terms, and a snapshot of the resource landscape.

MuleChat

This year, we designed, developed, and launched MuleChat, a custom portal that allows credentialed users to query and compare results from some of the world's leading large language models (LLMs). When it was launched in September 2024, MuleChat was the most widely equitable, safe, and secure accessway to premium AI models and local storage on campus.

Faculty and students had access to MuleChat through three routes: as researchers, in classrooms, or at tutoring sessions.

Research

Faculty and sponsored students could apply for tech grants that included credentials to MuleChat.

13 semester-long grants:

- 7 faculty recipients
- 6 student recipients

Classroom

Tech grants could also be used to provide credentials for an entire classroom, opening the door for AI-based assignments and metadiscussions about the role (and limitations) of AI in scholarship.

- 4 departments used MuleChat in at least one course (Computer Science; Economics; Science, Technology, and Society; Writing)
- 64 students reached

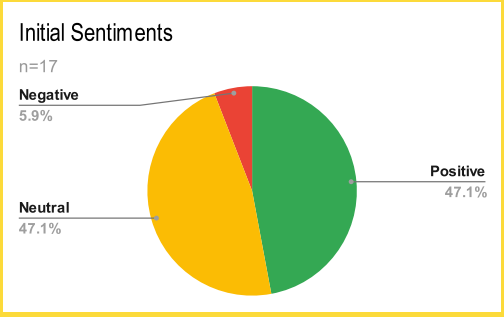
Tutoring Sessions

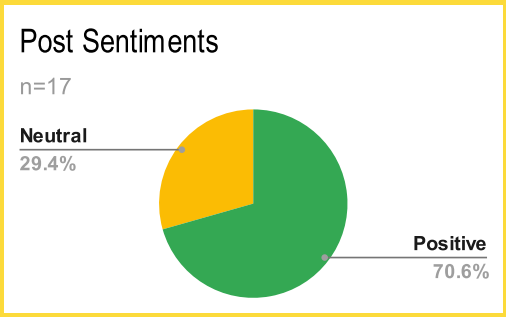
A trained tutor worked with the client one-on-one to demonstrate the interface and features, discuss prompt engineering, ethics, and responsible use, and brainstorm use cases.

- Fall: 58 sessions, including 1 classroom visit (total reach: 72)
- Spring: 14 sessions, including 3 classroom visits (total reach: 71)
- Summer: 20 sessions (total reach: 22)

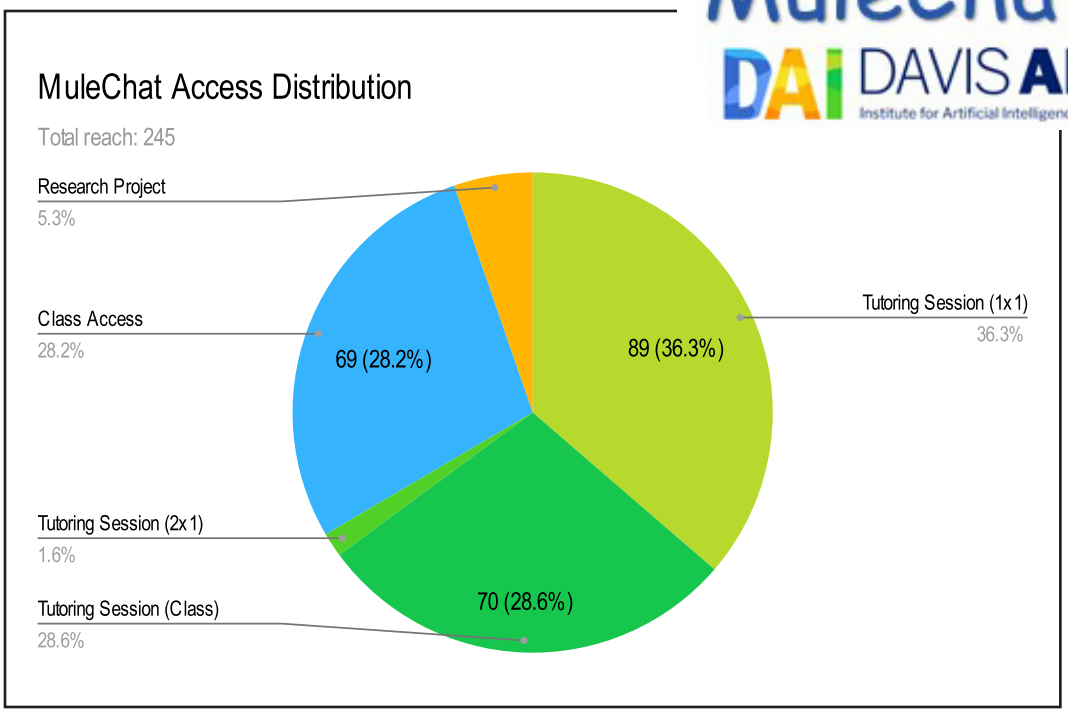
AI sentiments at tutoring sessions

(summer 2025)





Using adjectives like "curious, enthusiastic, balanced, open-minded, skeptical, and concerned," pre- and post-sentiments were assessed by MuleChat tutors prior to and immediately following a tutoring session.



A MuleChat tutor demonstrates an AI application at our Multimodal Studio event.

Sabbatical Funding

We offer grants to faculty working with AI on their sabbaticals. This year, we had two fellows:

Sonya Donaldson

Assistant Professor of African-American Studies

Sonya was in residence at DavisAI during the school year, and was a regular participant at our faculty chats and other events.

Sonya's research this year centered around the narratives of Black people and Black life, with a particular emphasis on Black girlhood, that are produced and reproduced by large language models (LLMs). "ChatGPT is us," she said in an interview with John Drabinski, and the tools "are simply matching what we've already produced." To that end, one aspect of her work is creating poetry in ChatGPT—a practical effort to re-shape the narratives coming in and coming out of LLMs. (Listen to the full interview: "Episode 47," The Black Studies Podcast (October 2024).)

José Martínez

Assistant Professor of Music

José, while abroad, implemented Somax2, an AI tool for musical improvisation from IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique). His goal was to integrate this generative AI model into his compositions, which blend audio technology with acoustic instruments. Initially, he struggled to make the tool feel like an organic part of his music. The breakthrough came after collaborating on an album with the Colombian duo TuKuPrá. Realizing he would miss playing with them, José decided to train Somax2 on audio from their sessions. This approach allowed him to "perform" with his colleagues' musical ideas even after they were physically absent, using the AI to create a prelude and postlude that bookend the album and preserve the trio's presence. Looking ahead, José is refining this system and has also started exploring a more complex IRCAM tool, R.A.V.E., with Colby student Samuel Apoya '26, to accelerate training and integrate it into future projects. (Preview "Prelude V1" here.)

Tech Grants

Tech grants are designed to support faculty course development, exploratory projects that could lead to future research grant applications, or faculty-sponsored student research.

We awarded a total of 13 grants this year. The scope of proposals included areas such as using LLMs for personality research, integrating AI into history classrooms, investigating AI positivity bias in rhetoric and writing, applying AI to student honors theses, exploring AI for image generation, and developing accessible artwork description. Most of the proposals sought access to MuleChat. Others were for API key access to specific LLM platforms like OpenAI or Anthropic.

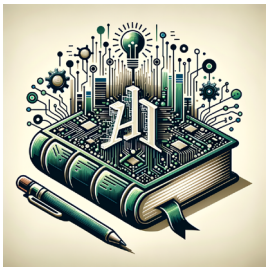
Type	Name	Project Title
Faculty course development	Danae Jacobson Assistant Professor of History	AI in the History Classroom
	Veronica Romero Assistant Professor of Psychology	Exploring MuleChat as a possible tool to use in PS215 (Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology II)
Faculty research project	Stacy Doore Assistant Professor of Computer Science	Automated Accessible Artwork Descriptions
	Stacey Sheriff Director of the Writing Department	AI Positivity Bias: The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Rhetoric & Writing*
	Debra Spark Professor of English	*Unknown Caller*
	Christopher Soto Professor of Psychology	Personality Research with LLMs
Faculty-sponsored research project	Jazie Abdi ‘27 Sponsored by Stacey Sheriff (Writing)	AI Positivity Bias: The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Rhetoric & Writing*

* Received two semester-long tech grants each

Type	Name	Project Title
Faculty-sponsored research project	Sarah Bassett ‘25 Sponsored by Michael Donihue (Economics)	Honors Thesis: How forever chemicals (PFAS) from fertilizer sludge used in Maine agriculture impact health outcomes
	Reva Namboodiri ‘25 Sponsored by Daniel LaFave (Economics)	Honors Thesis: Study of long-term outcomes of vaccination mistrials on local populations
	Ashly Nyman ‘25 Sponsored by Dave Findlay (Economics)	Honors Thesis: Exploring the impact of working hours on happiness: The role of income, social class, and personal values
	Maya Wong ‘25 Sponsored by Michael Donihue (Economics)	Honors Thesis: Determining lost working hours & wages induced by occupational heat-related illness in outdoor workers

FIT fellows

In collaboration with Academic Technology Services, we supported five Faculty Instructional Technology (FIT) fellows by granting early access to NotebookLM, offering dedicated support, and providing a modest stipend. These grants are designed to support innovation in technology-driven teaching approaches, with fellows this year focused on innovative teaching applications of NotebookLM.



Ghada Gherwash

Director, Farnham Writers' Center; Assistant Professor of Writing

Using AI Tools in Tutor Training Programs | WD214: Tutoring Writing in Theory and Practice

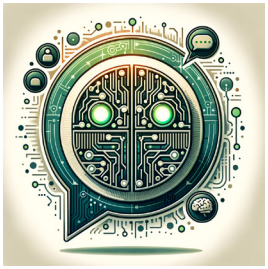
Ghada implemented NotebookLM in her teaching through three distinct instructional strategies. First, she uploaded academic articles to the platform and used it to generate a 5–10 minute podcast based on the source materials. Second, she introduced NotebookLM as a resource for students to use in designing their in-class activities. Third, Ghada experimented with the use of NotebookLM for AI-assisted peer review. After participating in traditional in-person peer review sessions, students uploaded their draft papers, assignment guidelines, and grading rubrics to NotebookLM. The platform then generated personalized feedback to support students in revising their work, which she critically discussed with them before having them write a reflection about it.

Tim Hubbard

Professor of Economics

Diversifying Discussions in a Senior Seminar | EC479: Auctions

Each week in Tim's class, students formed groups, identified a perspective, and worked with each other and NotebookLM to understand an assigned academic article through the lens of that perspective. Perspectives and the composition of the groups varied across weekly topics. Before class, students would populate NotebookLM with the assigned article and sources that informed the AI about the perspective they were considering. Interactions throughout the week (within their group and with NotebookLM) helped students consider the assigned reading from a different viewpoint. In class, after one group summarized the article, each group would share an interpretation and supporting evidence through a lens of their perspective.



Christopher Soto

Professor of Psychology

AI-Driven Tools to Support Student Learning and Writing | PS251: Personality Psychology

Chris incorporated two AI-driven tools in his course. The first tool was the Prof. Sotomatic Chatbot, a NotebookLM chatbot trained on the lecture slides, lecture notes, readings, and handouts from the course. Students could ask the chatbot questions about the course material while studying. The second tool was the Advice Column Feedback Bot, a "custom GPT" based on ChatGPT. Students could copy and paste drafts of a short writing assignment into the feedback bot, which then gave structured feedback and suggestions that followed the assignment's guidelines and grading criteria. The bot's instructions included guardrails to prevent it from drafting text, giving overly positive feedback, or estimating grades.

Chaoran Wang

Assistant Professor of Writing

Understanding Students' AI-mediated Literacy Practices & Developing Their Critical AI Literacy | WD203: Generative AI & Writing

Chaoran incorporated NotebookLM and MuleChat 2.0 into her W2 writing class, which focused on the impacts of LLMs and GenAI on literacy and language practices. Given the course's focus on writing with and about AI, and learning with and about AI, students engaged in weekly AI interaction/reflection assignments in which AI functioned in multiple roles: as students' research subject, learning assistant, and reading partner. Throughout the semester, students used theories from the course to critically analyze and reflect on their AI interactions through their weekly AI chat histories with annotated reflections. At the end of the semester, students did comparative case studies by revisiting their semester-long reflection in comparison with a peer's, reconceptualizing what it means to be "literate" in an increasingly AI-mediated world.

Hong Zhang

Professor of East Asian Studies

NotebookLM as a Faculty Planning Tool | EA355: Aging and Public Policy in East Asia

Hong used NotebookLM solely for her course preparation and did not assign it to students. She compared course discussion questions and study guides that NotebookLM generated with her materials, which helped finalize the reading questions for weekly assignments. Occasionally, Hong used NotebookLM to provide comments, make comparisons, or quickly summarize articles, which helped determine whether and how to incorporate them into the course. While Hong found that NotebookLM can be a valuable tool for faculty in planning and preparing course content, she has reservations about its use by students.

Educational Outreach

AI will continue to develop at an exceptionally fast pace for the foreseeable future, presenting challenges to higher education institutions not only in navigating the realities of teaching and learning in the context of AI assistance, but also in ensuring that researchers are empowered to use whatever tools they think would be helpful to their work, staying as close to the cutting edge as they would like.

In order to effectively serve the campus community and propagate the spirit of innovation within the lens of human-centered AI, we conducted two wide-net surveys this year. In the fall, we asked students about AI and its role in their learning environments. In the spring, we turned to faculty members, assessing where they were on their "AI journeys" and the overall impact AI has had on their teaching.

Additionally, part of our responsibility in cultivating a human-centered culture of AI is creating opportunities for organic, low-stakes discussions that bring people from all parts of campus together to raise questions and concerns, ponder future implications, and share opportunities or new developments.

Our outreach plan this year included:

- Invited speakers
- A film series
- AI art exhibitions
- A 48-hour DataFest
- A monthly newsletter
- Issue 2 of the *Journal of Writing With and About AI* (JWAI)
- Academic partnerships and outreach

Attendees at our final "Prompts & Provisions" session

Generative AI Surveys

Student Results (Fall 2024)

Administered for the first time since 2016, the Colby Student Lifestyle survey was expanded this year to include questions about the use of generative AI.

The survey was open to responses from October 8th through November 11th, 2024. Sent to all Colby students (approximately 2,400), there were 659 total responses. The final respondent pool aligns closely with the Colby population in terms of class year (Class of 2026 had the largest overrepresentation, +3.4 points) and academic division (social sciences were the most overrepresented, +4.5 points). However, it shows significant non-response bias concerning gender and race, with female students being overrepresented (+5.8 points) and male students and students of color being underrepresented (-8.9 points and -6.3 points, respectievly).

Some notable results:

90% reported receiving **guidance on ethical academic use of AI** from at least one professor.

68% more likely to use **AI as a tool** than as a shortcut.

58% reported their **top concern with AI is academic dishonesty**, lack of original thinking, or decreased writing or critical thinking skills.

Faculty Results (Spring 2025)

Administered at the start of the spring 2025 Faculty Retreat, May 22, 2025, we captured 57 responses from faculty members about where they were on their GenAI journeys.

The survey was three questions long, and was followed by a discussion about AI on campus. Post-discussion sentiments were not captured.

Some notable results:

26.3% have **experimented with incorporating AI** into their teaching practices.

78.9% reported **talking about AI meaningfully** with their students.

43.91% reported **positive impact on teaching** as a result of GenAI.

Invited Speakers

In collaboration with other departments, we hosted or co-hosted eight lecturers to discuss how AI intersects with their line of work. Topics ranged from art, culture, and social media to evolution and healthcare.

September

Dexter Thomas

Journalist & Documentary Filmmaker

"Facebook Fried Your Parents' Brains. Are You Next? How to navigate social media and the '24 election"

(Co-sponsored with the Goldfarb Center and the Center for the Arts and Humanities)

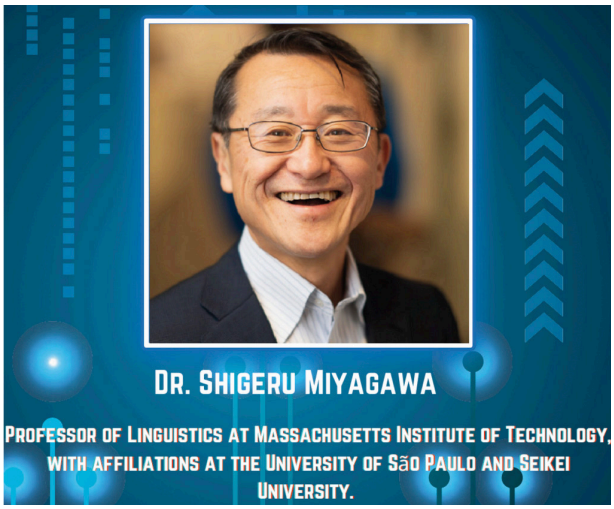
October

Ernest Bryant

Artist & Critic

"The Affective Properties of Images Within the Power of Play, new pedagogical strategies /// perversion pedagogy"

(Co-sponsored with the Center for the Arts and Humanities and the Lunder Institute for American Art)



November

Shigeru Miyagawa

Professor of Linguistics

"Looking ahead at AI while looking back on human evolution"

(Presented by the IBM Lecture Series)

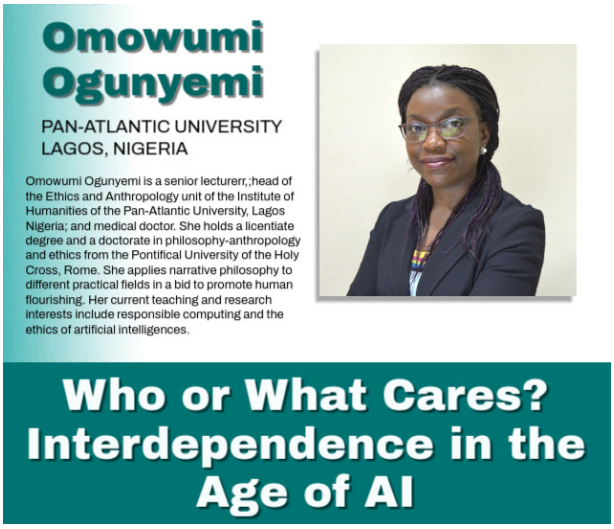
February

Omowumi Ogunyemi

Senior Lecturer; Medical Practitioner

"Who or What Cares? Interdependence in the Age of AI"

(Co-sponsored with the Department of Computer Science)



March

Jeffrey Pennington

Author; former VP & Chief Research Informatics Officer

"AI in Medicine: Implications for Careers, Ethics, and Healthcare"

(Co-sponsored with DavisConnects, the Linde Packman Lab, and the Departments of Biology and Computer Science)

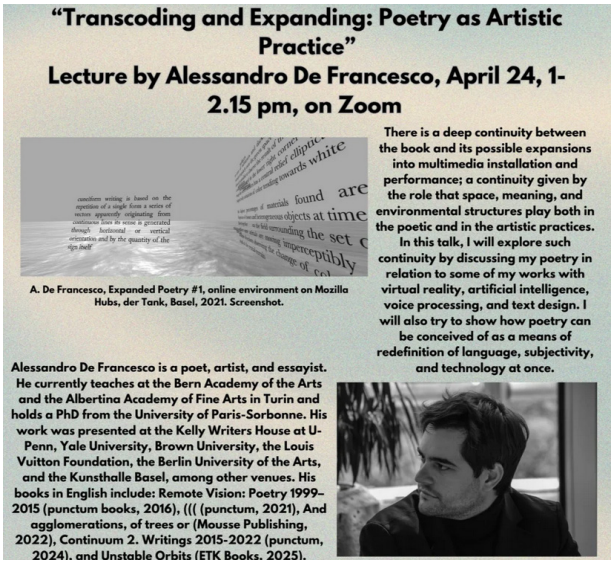
April

Chris Mustazza

Co-Director of the PennSound Archive & Professor English

"Synthetic Breath: AI Voices from Clones to Necromancy"

(Co-sponsored with The Center for the Arts and Humanities, the Department of Francophone and Italian Studies)



April

Alessandro De Francesco

Poet, Artist, & Essayist

"Transcoding and Expanding: Poetry as Artistic Practice"

(Co-sponsored with The Center for the Arts and Humanities, and the Department of Francopohone and Italian Studies)

May

Henry Shevlin

Cognitive Science Philosopher & AI Ethicist

"Ethics of Social AI"

(Co-sponsored with the Department of Philosophy)

March 2025 DataFest

In early March (4-6), Colby hosted a 48-hour DataFest during which student teams used AI to take on real-world challenges relating to apartment prices in major metropolitan areas with data collected and supplied by the American Statistical Association. Five teams represented Colby, four represented Bates, and two represented Bowdoin.

Judges, including Michael Hei Wan of the Roux Institute and Michele Baldini P'28 of Goldman Sachs, came from far and wide to support the students and crown winners across several categories.

Award-winning groups:

- Best Insights: 3C1K (Bates team)
- Best Visual: Women in Stem (Bates team)
- Best in Modeling: ETA minus 60 (Bates team)
- Best presentation skills: P value Posse (Colby team)

This DataFest was organized by Annie Tang (Assistant Professor of Statistics), Jim Scott (Associate Professor of Statistics), Sasha Alcott (Associate Director of STEM Programming), and Amy Poulin (Associate Director of DavisAI).

Newsletters

Distributed by email approximately once per month, the newsletter primarily served as a means of sharing key updates and news with our influential and participatory stakeholders. We had approximately 250 on-campus contacts enrolled, and approximately 150 off-campus contacts enrolled.

JWAI, Issue 2

The *Journal of Writing With and About AI* (JWAI) opens yearly for submissions of scholarly and creative writing that engages with artificial intelligence in either a practical or theoretical way. For its second issue, Professor Tahiya Chowdhury and Associate Director Amy Poulin continued to lead the solicitation, selection, and review of works.

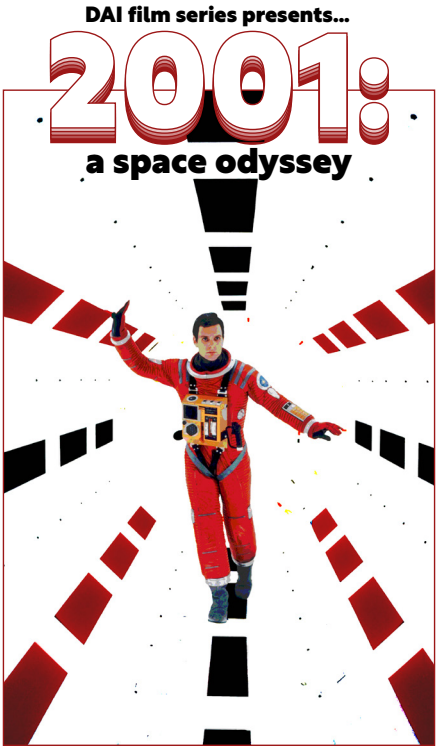
This year, we received 11 text submissions, ranging from inter-model love letters and experiments about voice and narrative to scholarly essays and reviews of popular media through the lens of AI and scholarship. The texts will be joined by 10 art submissions, some of which were created by GenAI, and some of which were created using found images and textures based on AI-generated art in Photoshop.

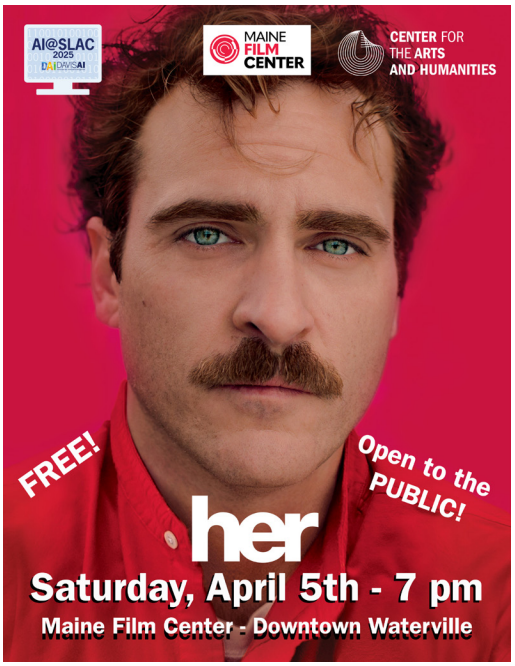
Film Screenings

Throughout the year, we hosted film screenings of well-known science fiction films relating to AI and the human-machine connection. These low-stakes events offered a low barrier of entry into discussions about the cultural and humanist implications of scientific and technological advancements.

Our films this year included:

- *The Matrix*
- *2001: A Space Odyssey*
- *Her*

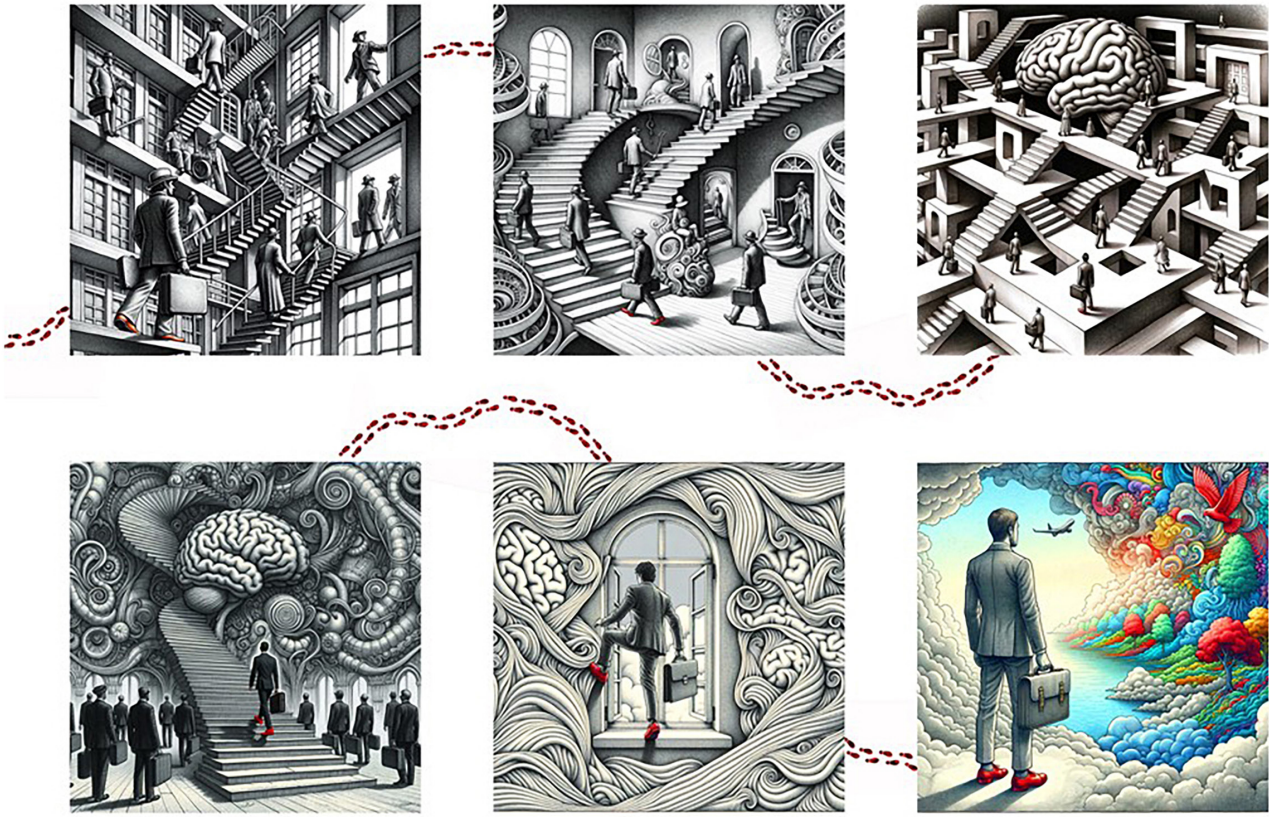




GenAI Art Exhibition

Displayed at our AI@SLAC 2025 spring conference, members of the campus community were invited to submit AI-generated art, with prizes for the best prompt, best post-editing, and top five best overall pieces.

Also featured at this exhibition were several projects from Professor Taka Suzuki's Digital Media course, where students recreated GenAI images using found materials in Photoshop.



Academic Partnerships

A valuable new partnership this year was with the Max Planck Institute in Germany. In November 2024, we welcomed Michael Grunze and Joachim Spatz to campus to discuss an academic partnership, and Interim Director Michael Donihue visited Germany throughout the year to deliver presentations.

Continued partnership with the Max Planck Institute could open the door for faculty exchanges, aligning well with Colby's goals to foster cross-cultural learning and increasing Colby's overall global influence.

Additionally, we made connections and discussed strategies with other liberal arts institutions throughout the year, including Amherst College and Bowdoin College.

We also maintained and grew our transdisciplinary on-campus AI working group. Four new members joined the AI working group this year: Jordan Troisi (Center for Teaching and Learning), Carol Hurney (Provost's Office), Chris Sessums (Academic Technology Services), and Stacey Sheriff (Writing Department).

Presentations

Michael Donihue presented at several instiuttions, locally and internationally, including:

- February 2025: Presented "AI Short Course for Scientists" as the featured speaker at the "Matter to Life" Spring Days Conference (Heilbronn, Germany)
- April 2025: "A Human-Centered Approach to AI: Reclaiming the Ancients" at the Accepted Students Program
- June 2025: Presented "A Polymathic Approach for AI@Colby" to Colby senior staff
- June 2025: Delivered "A Polymathic Approach for Information Literacy in the Age of AI" at the New England Science Boot Camp for Librarians
- June 2025: Presented "A Human-Centered Approach to AI: Reclaiming the Ancients" for the Breakwater Group First Friday call-in at Morgan Stanley
- July 2025: Presented "An AI Short Course for Scientists" at the Max Planck Ringberg Symposium in Munich, Germany

Symposiums & Conferences

DavisAI hosted two intercollegiate events this year focused on AI at small liberal arts colleges (AI@SLAC): a winter symposium, and a spring conference.

Additionally, students in the AI Lab participated in Colby's annual Liberal Arts Symposium (CLAS) in May.

AI@SLAC: Winter Symposium

Held December 6–7, 2024, the AI@SLAC Winter Symposium brought together faculty, students, and staff from Colby, Bowdoin, Bates, and Amherst Colleges to discuss active research, the future of AI on college campuses, and more.

Much of the first day was spent in group discussions and share-outs. Other highlights that day included Professor Stacy Doore's discussion of her ongoing research in AI-powered seeing eye "dog" robots.

Students present their research at the AI@SLAC Winter Symposium.

On the second day, we tackled some larger questions, working together as intercollegiate partners to think broadly about the future of AI on our campuses. Then, we transitioned into a poster session where all students of the AI 297 course presented their research.

AI 297 Poster Session Presentations

Name	Poster Title
James Fei-Baffoe ‘27	MuleChat: Let’s Talk About Artificial Intelligence!
Aleksandra Avramenko ‘28	AI in Retail Market: Analysis and Visualization with LLM
Anya Morris ‘27	Lessons on LLMs: Critical Thinking Tools for Analyzing LLM Use in Schoolwork
Benjamin Wintersteen'27 and Cathy Fan '26	How does Personality Influence LLM Agents’ Strategic Decision Making?
Joseph-Richard Kwarteng '27	Evaluating Investment Opportunities: Leveraging AI to Analyze Confidential Information Memoranda (CIMs)
Maddie Puzon '26	Performance, Applications, and Practicality of Locally Run Language Models
Dave Boku ‘26	Should I Trust a Chatbot? Building Trustworthy Information Retrieval Chatbots
Tyshawn Rene '26	AI and Kinematics: How do they mix?
Samuel Apoya '26	Understanding RAG Systems
Tenny Ye '25	Exploring the Impact of AI on Human Experience and Values: Perspectives from Liberal Arts Students

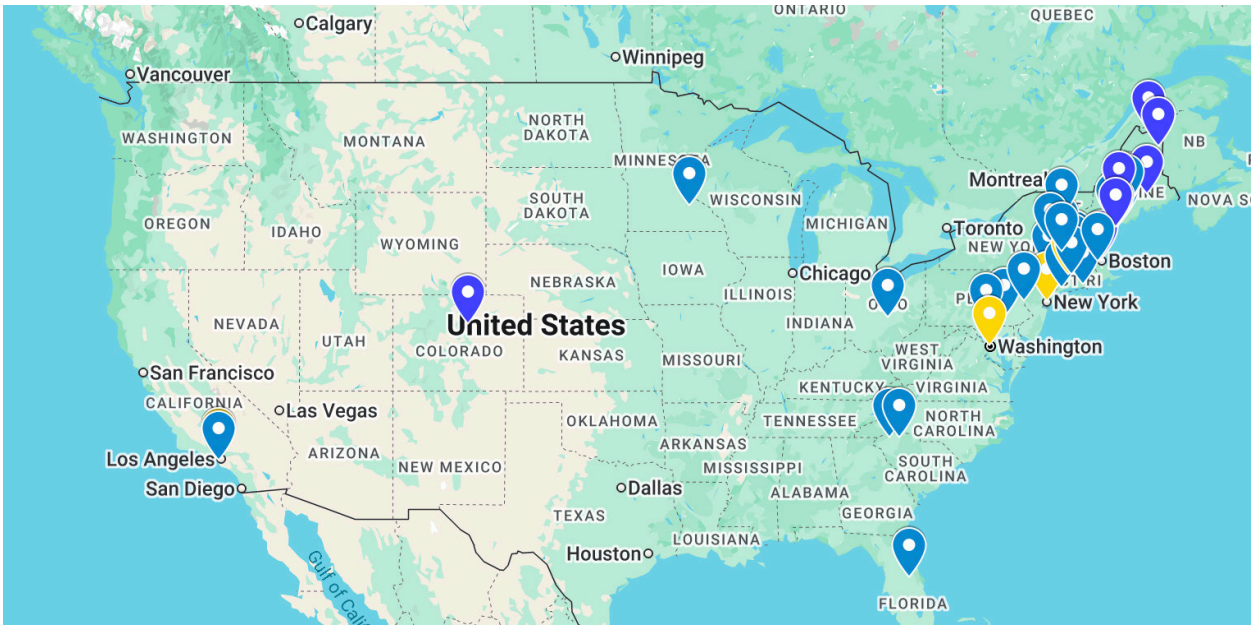
AI@SLAC: Spring Conference

The AI@SLAC Spring Conference, held from April 4–5, 2025, gathered participants from an array of academic institutions nationwide. The event also welcomed attendees from several larger universities, a select number of non-profit organizations, and representatives from the State of Maine. See Appendix C for a full list of participating institutions.

Day one featured a student workshop, “Code & Beats: Soft Power in the DARQ Ages” led by Daouda Leonard, founder and CEO of CreateSafe. A key emphasis of the workshop was the idea that AI offers artists the opportunity of a “New Renaissance.” Students presented their learnings, challenges, and successes from working later that evening. (Check out our video highlights of this “New Renaissance” event here.)

And, day one’s keynote speakers, Per Urlaub and Eva Dessein from MIT Global Languages, unpacked the “Why's” and “How’s” of thinking about generative AI in a liberal arts context. Looking at chess as an example, Urlaub and Dessein explored how the best results of AI come from a human-AI partnership, rather than sole reliance on AI. This aligns well with the goals and missions of liberal arts educational institutions, and higher education more broadly, reinforcing the importance of a human-centered approach to AI.

On day two, Professor Tahiya Chowdhury led a "Bagels & Bots" seminar, discussing her research on computer vision and multimodal applications of AI.



Attendees at the spring AI @ SLAC Spring 2025 Conference..

We then shifted into a series of panel discussions moderated by Colby College staff and faculty, and including panelists from our participating institutions:

- **Panel #1: Ethical, Moral and Cultural Issues of AI.** Moderated by Stacy Doore (Colby College), panelists included: Fernando Nascimento (Bowdoin College), Diane Uwacu (Mount Holyoke College), and Sarah Sweeney (Skidmore College).
- **Panel #2: AI and Language.** Moderated by Arne Koch (Colby College), panelists included: Per Urlaub (MIT), Junjie Luo (Gettysburg College), and Ghada Gherwash (Colby College).
- **Panel #3: The AI Teaching Conundrum: Adapt: Resist, or Redefine.** Moderated by Jordan Troisi (Colby College), panelists included: Lew Ludwig (Denison University) and Lindsey Hamilton (Bates College).
- **Panel #4: Information Literacy in the Age of AI.** Moderated by Michael Yankoski (Colby College), panelists included: Kara Kugelmeyer (Colby College), Susan Archambault (University of Washington/Loyola Marymount University), and Jessica McCullough (Connecticut College).

We wrapped up the day with a "Snacks & Chats" session, a Multimodal Studio breakout, hosted by students from the AI 298 lab, and a screening of the Oscar Award–winning movie *Her* (set in 2025) at the Maine Film Center, with an introduction and discussion led by Veronica Romero (Colby College).

Students participate in the "Code & Beats" workshop, led by Daouda Leonard (center).

Multimodal Studio Application Presentations

Category	Name	Title
MuleChat Applications	Alex Moretti '25 and Brendan McCarthy '25	FitGPT
	Maddie Puzon '26 and Sumira Naroola '26	AI in the Classroom: Friend, Foe, or Study Buddy?
Computer Vision	Professor Stacy Doore and Rose Agyapong '27	SPOT
	Professor Tahiya Chowdhury and Said Castro-Solano '27	Movement Capture
AI & Art	Sumira Naroola '26 and Jillian Kane '25	AI on the [Right] Brain—Is it Art?
AI Digital Library	Michael Yankoski and Matt LeVan	Colby's Special Collections Project
	Peggy Jones '26	EchoBot (Custom GPT)
AI Assistants	Tenny Ye '25, Eric Adjei '26, and Anya Morris '27	NotebookLM
	Maddie Puzon '26	GPTs on a Laptop

Colby Liberal Arts Symposium (CLAS)

Held on May 1, 2025, the annual symposium celebrates student scholarship. This year's event showcased the works of 678 individual Colby students across 498 projects—making it the largest undergraduate research symposium at a liberal arts college.

AI-Related Poster Presentations

Department	Name	Poster Title
SureStart 2024	Minh Pham-Dinh '26	Planning Agent with Knowledge Graph–Powered Inner Monologue.
	Arhum Ibrahim Nadeem Chaudhry '27 and Sanjay Krshna (SK) Rameshkumar '27	MenYOU

Sumira Naroola '26 presents "Is It Really Art?"

Arhum & SK competed in Greenlight Maine's Season 10 College Edition. Watch the episode here.

Department	Name	Poster Title
AI 298: Artificial Intelligence Lab	Rose Agyapong '27, Jillian Kane '25, and Sumira Naroola '26	Is It Really Art?
	Said Castro-Solano '27 and Aleksandra Avramenko '26	Vibe Coding: Are We Gonna Lose Our Jobs?
	Benjamin Wintersteen '27	When Should AI Make Decisions?
	Samuel Apoya '26 and Emmanuel Assumang '25	LLM Dissect
	Eric Adjei '26 & Peggy Jones '26	AI Code Debugger & Explainer
	Ben Kaczmarek '25, Brendan McCarthy '25, and Alex Moretti '25	FitAI
	Papa Yaw Owusu Nti '27	Multi-LLM Applications
	Maddie Puzon '26	Retrieval Augmented Generation Process and Applications
	James Fei-Baffoe '27	AI Wrapper: Recipe Generator
	Tenny Ye '25	Empowering Educators: Building Custom AI Without Code
	Anya Morris '27	Lessons on LLMs: Critical Thinking Tools for LLMs in the Classroom
	JK Baik '27	LLM and 0DTE Trading
Computer Science: Honors Projects	Owen Raymond '25	Assessing Factors that Impact AI Response Trustworthiness
CS 448: Research in Human Centered Machine Learning	Brooke Kulaga '25, Lindsay Michels '25, and Bibatshu Thapa Chhetri '25	Spot the Difference: Can Humans Identify Human Explanations From AI Ones?
	Liam Cassidy '25, Yelaman Moldagali '25, and Junnan Shimizu '25	Example-based Explanations and Expertise in AI Resume Classification Systems

Department	Name	Poster Title
CS 448: Research in Human Centered Machine Learning	Jessie Owles '25, Kabir Reddy '25, and Narit Trikasemsak '25	Testing the Incorporation of Explainable AI in College Admissions
CS 448: Research in Human Centered Machine Learning	Hale Aktas '25 and Mason Cheney '25	Measuring Optimization vs. Manipulation Using Explanations
	Colin Huh '25, Parth Parth '25, Danny Stokes '25, and Brian Vera '27	Perceptions of Collaborative AI Policy in Higher Education
	Dean Hickman '25 and Duilio Lucio '26	Scheming in AI Systems
EC 473: Data Analytics and Forecasting	Matthew Erwin '25 and Ryan Levine '25	Human Intuition vs. Artificial Intelligence: Who Calls the Best Sports Bets?
Psychology: Research Posters	Lexi Asch '27, Meagan Englert '27, and Tracy Xiao '27	Gendered AI Voices and Gendered Information on Humanness and Competence
	Olivia Doherty '26, Annika Lambert '26, and Sarah Watchman '25	Academic Integrity in the AI Era: Who Uses It, Who Abuses It, and Why?
WD 492: Everything is Awesome: The Linguistic Dangers of Toxic Positivity Bias in Generative AI	Jazie Abdi '27	Everything is Awesome: The Linguistic Dangers of Toxic Positivity Bias in Generative AI
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies: Senior Capstones and Honors Project	Victoria Ruan '25	Ready Enough: The Right to AI Girlfriends

Research & Development

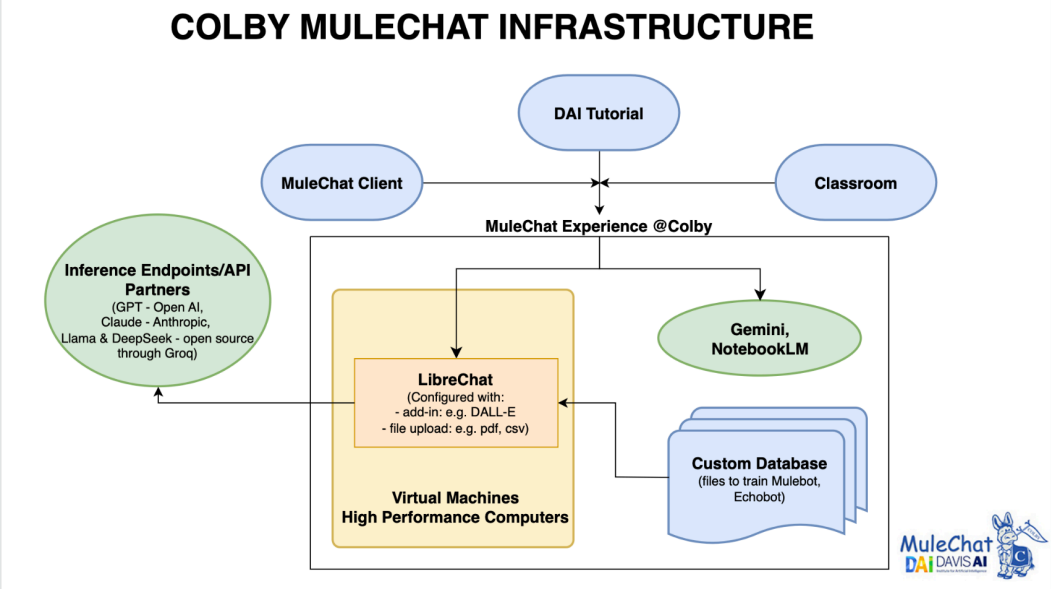
This year, DavisAI further cemented our role as a leading center for multimodal AI research and development. Focusing on providing the Colby community with the tools, resources, and support to push the boundaries of what is possible with AI, we cultivated our ethos as an applications incubator. Through these collaborative efforts, we yielded some great achievements, including:

- **MuleChat, MuleBot, and EchoBot:** These custom platforms provide secure and equitable access to advanced AI for the entire Colby community, serving as a cornerstone for both curricular development and faculty research.
- **NSF ARIA Grant:** As co-recipients of the National Science Foundation (NSF) ARIA grant, Colby College was designated as a peer institution alongside major research universities. This grant will accelerate the development of next-generation AI assistants that are safer, more effective, and more accessible.
- **E-RISE RII:** Enhancing Maine Forest Economy, Sustainability, and Technology (Maine-FOREST) Ecosystem To Accelerate Innovation. A collaborative research project awarded by the NSF, faculty and research scientists affiliated with DavisAI at Colby and the University of Maine will collaborate in delivering a diverse, sustainable, and statewide research, education, and innovation incubator that builds strategic R&D capacity to fuel the dramatic growth of the state's forest-based economy and the rural communities it supports.
- **Faculty Research Support:** We supported multiple faculty research projects, from developing automated art descriptions for blind and low-vision museum visitors to creating tools for scaled text retrieval from scanned pictorial magazines.
- **SureStart:** Supported by the Halloran Lab, our SureStart program helped students develop AI-powered business prototypes and business plans. These projects spanned a range of applications, including financial management, travel personalization, and campus-wide skill-sharing platforms.

MuleChat Development Timeline

2024	July	MuleChat design begins.
	August	MuleChat development begins.
		Met with Julie Wood, VP for HR, to discuss possibilities for a Colby-specific chatbot (MuleBot).
	September	Launched MuleChat with a demonstration for Colby President David Greene.
	December	MuleBot demonstration for the Office of Institutional Research
2025	February	MuleChat 2.0 launch (now with MuleBot and EchoBot)

MuleChat Development



This year, we designed, developed, and launched MuleChat, a custom portal that allows credentialed users to query and compare results from some of the world's leading large language models (LLMs) from OpenAI, Anthropic, and Groq. When we launched MuleChat in September, it was the most widely equitable, safe, and secure accessway to premium AI models and local storage on campus.

Several of the available models are "reasoning models," so-called for their enhanced capabilities and performance with logical and complex tasks (e.g. coding, math proofs, data manipulation). Additionally, some of the available models are open-source, which creates opportunities for the development of locally run, on-premises applications capable of handling sensitive data.

Early in 2025, we launched a more robust version of MuleChat that included two custom AI assistants: MuleBot and EchoBot. Both bots have their own knowledge bases (vector databases) with Colby-specific source material that allow them to use retrieval augmented generation (RAG) to provide grounded, relevant, and specific responses.

MuleBot has access to publicly available materials about Colby including faculty, staff, and student handbooks, the 2024–2025 course catalog, directories, and more. As a result, MuleBot can answer Colby-specific questions ranging from "How do I double major in Geology and Art" to "Provide me a .csv file with all of the economics instructors' names, emails, and office locations."

EchoBot has access to digitized versions of every issue of *The Colby Echo*, a student newspaper dating back to 1877. EchoBot mainly serves as an educational tool, demonstrating a new approach to primary source research, but can also serve a wide variety of administrative offices who interact with alumni regularly.

The MuleChat Experience began as more of a "sandbox" or "playground" where clients would work with a trained tutor (AI Lab students) to learn about the capabilities

of generative AI in a secure environment. By the end of the school year, the faculty and students who worked with MuleChat found it to be a valuable classroom and research resource.

Now, after rolling out access to Gemini and NotebookLM to the full campus community in June 2025, the MuleChat Experience has taken on more of a consultative role. We continue to provide one-on-one support for AI tools and serve as an outpost for discussing our human-centered approach to AI, as well as broader topics such as prompt engineering, teaching applications, responsible use, ethics, and security. Additionally, with new tools added to our AI toolboxes, and more ready-made use-cases to demonstrate capabilities for these tools, tutors are better able to help clients imagine and prototype applications for their specific needs.

NSF ARIA

On July 29th, 2025, the National Science Foundation (NSF) announced the recipients for five AI research institute grants. Led by Brown University, and in collaboration with UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, Dartmouth College, University of New Mexico, Santa Fe Institute, NYU, and Carnegie Mellon, Colby College is a designated awardee for the NSF AI Research Institute on Interaction for AI Assistants (ARIA). According to the NSF announcement, the institute aims to "accelerate the development of next-generation AI assistants that are safer, more effective, and better able to adapt to individual user needs."

"Davis AI has become a national leader and a tremendous resource for our faculty and students to push the boundaries of what's possible—not just at a liberal arts college, but in society as a whole."

–President Greene

President Greene identified the principal investigators for Colby as:

- The Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence
- Professor Vero Romero (Department of Psychology, Davis-UWC scholar, former DavisAI Fellow)
- Professor Isaac Lage (Department of Computer Science).

Colby is the smallest academic institution included in the list of awardees, becoming recognized as a peer institution with such research powerhouses as MIT, UC Berkeley, and Cornell. This accomplishment demonstrates, as President Greene shared with the Board of Trustees, that "Davis AI has become a national leader and a tremendous resource for our faculty and students to push the boundaries of what's possible—not just at a liberal arts college, but in society as a whole."

Faculty Research Highlights

Hong Zhang

Professor of *East Asian Studies*

Professor Hong Zhang leverages generative AI to conduct text mining, textual analysis, and data visualization on China-related primary sources for her research. Her project has two types of primary sources. One type involves archival files of American missionaries to China (diaries, correspondence, mission reports) from 1880 to 1950. The other type consists of three to four Chinese state pictorial magazines dating from 1950 to 1966. DavisAI has supported her research by providing custom GPTs to query information on missionaries with Colby connections. DavisAI also developed image processing pipelines with Special Collections & Archives, enabling her team to scale text retrieval from scanned copies of pictorial magazines.

Stacy Doore

Assistant Professor of Computer Science

INSITE Lab Research with support from Davis Institute for AI

The INSITE lab has been working with its Boston Dynamics Spot Explorer robot since 2021, exploring its potential as part of a human-robot team and a non-visual navigation assistant.

Students in the INSITE lab students have developed a LLM voice-based interface and a harness to allow for two-way communication (similar to a guide dog and its handler). Traditional guide dogs provide invaluable assistance to blind and low-vision (BLV) individuals, yet they have limitations in interpreting complex commands and ensuring consistent performance.

To address these challenges, the Lab is developing a voice-based iOS interface that enables BLV handlers to partner with an agile quadruped robot (Spot Explorer developed by Boston Dynamics) through voice-based interactions focused on navigation tasks. The proof-of-concept project aims to enhance the autonomy and mobility of BLV individuals by leveraging new technology to execute precise and complex spatial navigation commands as the robot provides information about specific routes and distances, detection of obstacles, and fetching personal objects.

INSITE Lab students study SPOT's controls and responses

Automated Art Descriptions for Blind and Low Vision Museum Visitors

Blind and Low Vision (BLV) individuals often find themselves left out when visiting museums and other cultural centers due to a lack of accessible descriptions of the collections. The creation of accessible descriptions requires specialized training and is time intensive. For many museum exhibit curators, this goes beyond the resources available. The goal of this project is to develop a human expert and AI-team workflow to help automate accessible artwork descriptions to support BLV engagement and independent museum exploration of the physical and online museum collections.

Kara Kugelmeyer

Data Services Librarian

Kara created Colby's LibGuide on Artificial Intelligence, a resource that covers AI concepts and terms, AI at Colby and faculty research, ethical and copyright considerations, and available tools. She has also created frameworks to provide clear structure on what different "levels" of AI use policies in the classroom and in administrative departments can look like, making it easier for professors and supervisors to set guidelines for their own classrooms and departments. The resource introduces not only four degrees of use, but also questions to consider within each framework to ensure clear communication and expectations.

Kara is also working on an Ethical Data Toolkit, a resource guide for ethical considerations with AI use.

Matt LeVan

Digital Archives Librarian

Matt partnered with Michael Yankoski to build two multimodal AI tools over the past year.

Image Annotation Tool

Historically, the Libraries' digital image collections have lacked robust descriptive metadata because of the time requirements for its creation. Matt and Michael built the Image Annotation Tool to produce descriptive metadata for image/photo collections at scale. This tool runs as a Jupyter Notebook and is capable of analyzing image files (JPG, TIFF), then outputting the following:

File name: File name and extension.
Title: A single sentence describing the image.
Description: One paragraph describing the image, its depiction(s), and its context.
Keywords: A list of relevant keywords, objects, locations, and events depicted.
EXIF Data: Technical specifications of image, including camera model/settings, capture date/time, GPS coordinates, etc.

All of this data is output into a spreadsheet that is reviewed by a human for quality control purposes, then uploaded to the Libraries' digital collections in JSTOR. Once uploaded and published, all of this metadata becomes searchable for researchers.

Manuscript Transcription Tool

Standard optical character recognition (OCR) software isn't capable of processing handwritten materials due to the complexities and nuances of handwritten text. Because of this, manuscript materials must be human-transcribed in order for them to be searchable within digital collec-

tions. Unfortunately, human-transcription is incredibly time consuming, making it an unrealistic task for Library staff.

The Manuscript Transcription Tool is capable of analyzing handwritten materials and transcribing them to typed text, making the text searchable for researchers.

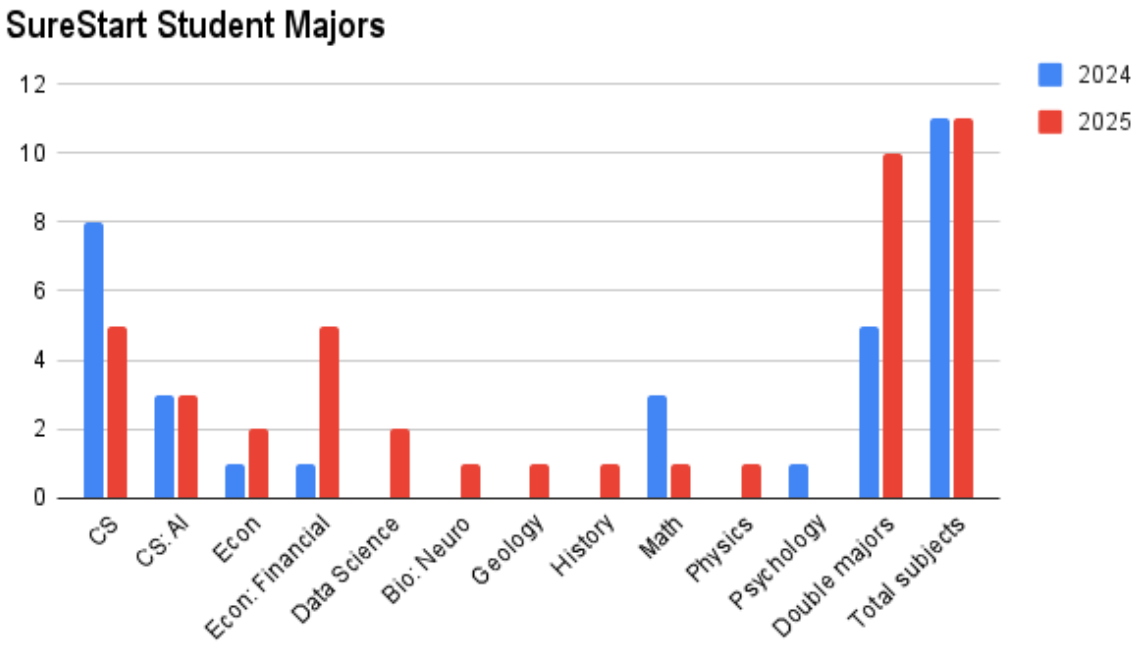
The Manuscript Transcription Tool runs as a Jupyter Notebook and is capable of batch-transcribing large sets of handwritten data. It then outputs those transcriptions into both .txt and .xls files. These files are then human-reviewed for accuracy before being uploaded to an online repository. Uploaded data is then text-searchable for researchers.

When he shared his project outlines with us, Matt also included: "I just want to express my appreciation for the Davis AI Institute and its staff. Michael Yankoski and Michael Donahue have both been super great to work with. The work they're doing is innovative and meaningful; they're great teachers who are very approachable; and they seem to be doing this complicated work with a genuinely thoughtful, kind, and humanistic approach. I'm excited to continue this partnership between the Libraries and Davis AI into the future!"

SureStart

SureStart is a DavisAI program run in collaboration with the Halloran Lab for Entrepreneurship. Participating students are challenged to develop business plans, deliver pitches, and deploy working prototypes for their own small business ventures that incorporate AI.

Students come from a range of subject areas, creating rich opportunities for cross-pollination as they share their unique interests and insights with each other. Students presented their projects at the Colby Undergraduate Student Research Retreat (CUSRR) alongside other student researchers.



Summer 2024

Name	Major(s)	Project
Zaynab Tariq ‘26	Computer Science: AI	**Comp-HuSim** Modeling AI agents with distinct personalities for human-like interactions.
Chengyu (Cathy) Fan ‘26	Computer Science: AI; Mathematical Sciences	
Linh Dang ‘27	Psychology	**Passport Pal** Transforming travel document management for international students.
Aikins Acheampong ‘27	Computer Science	
Rose Frimpomaa Agyapong ‘27	Computer Science	
Papa Yaw ‘27	Computer Science; Mathematical Sciences	**Prescripta** Your pocket-sized personal pharmacist.
Arhum Nadeem ‘27	Computer Science; Mathematical Sciences	
James Fei-Baffoe ‘27	Computer Science	
Katie Bernard ‘25	Computer Science	**ExamWell** AI-powered tools and a collaborative network for teachers.
Kingsford Sarpong ‘27	Economics: Financial Markets; Computer Science	
Minh Pham-Dinh’26	Computer Science	**ReasonPlanner** A novel agent that leverages a world model to perform planning and reasoning tasks in the simulated environment of ScienceWorld.

Katie Bernard won second place in Greenlight Maine’s Season 10 College Edition Finale! Watch the episode here.

Summer 2025

Name	Major(s)	Project
Stephen Owusu Badu ‘27	Computer Science; History	**AvayLable** A campus-wide skill sharing platform with integrated safety solutions.
Aayan Shah ‘28	Computer Science: AI; Physics	
Paung Khuat ‘28	Computer Science; Economics: Financial Markets	
Pascal Buernor ‘26	Statistics	
Muneeb Nafees ‘28	Computer Science: AI; Mathematical Sciences	**FinTrack** An AI-first financial management platform for the next generation.
Muhammad Ibraheem ‘28	Computer Science; Biology: Neuroscience	
Glory Mahenge ‘28	Economics: Financial Markets; Computer Science	
Eric Yook ‘28	Economics	**Hidden Gems** Personalizing travel through AI.
Jasper Shin ‘28	Economics; Geology	
Emmanuel Mbroh Buabeng ‘28	Computer Science: AI; Economics: Financial Markets	**REMEMRI** Where memory meets safety.
Saanvi Madduri ‘28	Data Science; Economics: Financial Markets	
Arvaneh Jamil ‘28	Economics: Financial Markets; Data Science	

Staffing Updates

This year we hired four full-time staff:

David Watts

Director

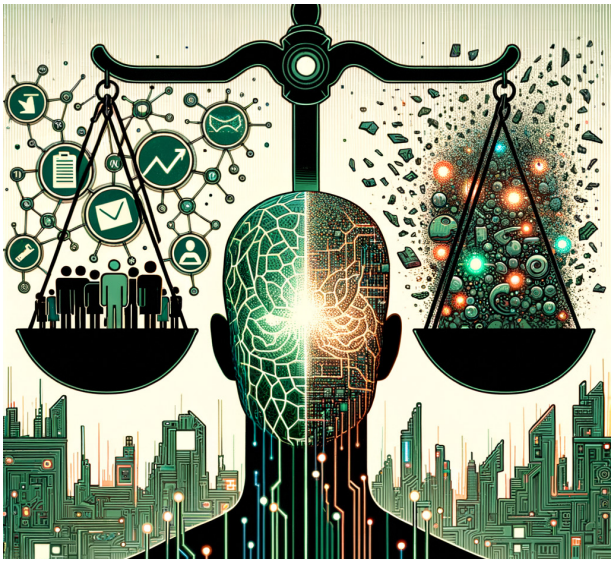
As of August 15, 2025, David Watts will be the Director of Davis AI. Before Colby, David was the vice president for the IBM Z Platform, where he led the development and delivery of hybrid cloud AI, security, and resilience solutions on IBM's industry-leading mainframe systems. Prior, he worked at Motorola, Obsidian Inc., and Ebara Technologies. He holds a B.A. from Carleton College, an M.S. from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado, Boulder.

In an interview with Renee Cordes from Mainebiz, Watts said: "The Davis Institute is already doing something unique in higher education. I saw a chance to help shape a powerful, cross-disciplinary vision, one that prepares students to lead in an AI-transformed world with creativity, purpose and integrity."

Michael Yankoski

AI Research Scientist & Assistant Professor of AI

Dr. Michael Yankoski received his Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies before working with Notre Dame's Department of Computer Science and Engineering as a postdoctoral research associate. Michael's current research focuses on the social and political implications of AI and dis/misinformation. Prior to this role, he was a Research Fellow with DavisAI.



Mingwei Zhu

AI Applications Engineer

Mingwei Zhu holds a B.A. in mathematical sciences and government from Colby College and an M.S. in data science from Georgia Institute of Technology. As the AI Application Engineer, he develops data analytics applications of AI and technical infrastructures to assist the Colby community in learning, research, and work. Prior, he built transportation management and business analytics platforms with a green transit startup in Georgia.

Ryan Bloom

AI Application Specialist

Ryan Bloom holds a B.A. in philosophy from Hamilton College and an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. As the AI Application Specialist, she works with Colby community members to explore, develop, and maintain applications of AI that enhance work and learning. Prior to joining DavisAI, she developed content used to train large language models on behalf of a top ten Fortune 500 company.

Looking Ahead to AY 2025–2026

As we conclude a year of significant growth and adaptation, the Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence looks forward to building on its successes and advancing its mission in the coming academic year. The unique challenges and opportunities presented by generative AI have positioned us to deepen our integration with the Colby community and strengthen our role as a hub for transdisciplinary, human-centered AI. Under the leadership of our new director, David Watts, our returning associate director, Amy Poulin, and an expanded full-time team, including Michael Yankoski, Mingwei Zhu, and Ryan Bloom, we are well-prepared to enhance our support for teaching, research, and collaborative innovation across the college. The following pages detail the few ways in which we can see the shape of what's to come:

- **Faculty Fellows:** We will support three faculty members on sabbatical as they leverage AI for projects ranging from computational analysis of qualitative data to creative works and computational models for age-related cognitive changes.
- **Bots & Books:** Our new Faculty Instructional Technology (FIT) fellowship will focus on exploring innovative applications of Google's Gemini and NotebookLM.
- **Ongoing Challenges:** We will continue to address the ongoing challenges of faculty frustration with AI, work to better communicate human-centered AI principles, and refine event ownership and collaboration strategies across campus to ensure our programs are effective and inclusive.

Faculty Fellows (AY 2025–2026)

In the coming year, we'll be supporting three faculty fellows during their sabbaticals. Fellows will be expected to present or lead a seminar that speaks to the role of AI in their work and how DavisAI's support furthered their goals.

Jen Coane

Professor of Psychology

Jen's first goal is to leverage AI computational models to analyze qualitative data, complementing traditional human-coding methods. A second goal is to begin developing a computational model for knowledge fluctuations and age-related changes in retrieval. The project is intended to directly impact students in the classroom and research lab by introducing new AI approaches to cognitive processes.

Farah Qureshi

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Farah's work will explore the use of AI in automated financial decision-making. The research will involve learning Python and utilizing machine learning libraries like scikit-learn and PyCaret to analyze the FSD Kenya Financial Diaries dataset from Harvard Dataverse. Through this work, Farah aims to understand how automated credit-scoring programs are trained and how these AI models interpret complex financial data to make decisions. The work will provide insight into the ethical and practical implications of using AI in the fintech sphere.

Taka Suzuki

Assistant Professor of Art

Taka has two creative projects in mind that leverage AI as a collaborator. First, "2X84," in reference to George Orwell's 1984 and Haruki Murakami's 1Q84, will consider the climate crisis and Earth's future habitability using daily prompts with ChatGPT. These AI-generated narratives will serve as a framework for creating images and videos. Taka will also ask ChatGPT to suggest a carbon offset for each prompt in the form of time away from the internet, which will be tallied and distributed over the next year.

The second creative project involves collaboration with a custom-built GPT, which will be used to generate written content for a Substack called "accepting failure" and use ElevenLabs for vocal performances.

A final goal during his sabbatical period is to learn how to load and build custom GPTs, whether as a front-end interface on a Raspberry Pi, or possibly as its own self-contained unit within a more powerful computer like a Mac mini.

Bots & Books: Fall 2025 FIT Fellowship

In collaboration with Academic Technology Services, we will again support five instructors as they seek innovative applications of AI tools to enhance their teaching and/or research.

This iteration of the FIT fellowship will focus on Gemini (Bots) and NotebookLM (Books), two Google AI tools newly available to the entire Colby community. Applicants are encouraged to explore topics including:

- Creating custom AI assistants in Gemini (known as "Gems").
- Developing innovative applications of NotebookLM's built-in tools (such as the audio/video overview or mind map).
- Juxtaposing the applications of these platforms.
- Designing a workflow that bridges the two platforms.

- Exploring applications of GeminiPro for data analytics and visualizations, survey design and thematic analysis of results.
- Crafting creative works using Gemini.
- Designing pedagogical applications to empower student learning.

Fellows will gain practical and comprehensive guidance on integrating AI into their teaching and research. Our support includes:

- Peer group meetings and workshops for collaborative learning and problem-solving.
- One-on-one consultations and tutorials with specialists.
- Optional class visits to observe and provide direct support for AI integration in action.
- Use case workflow and design assistance tailored to each instructor's unique needs.

Ongoing Challenges

Faculty Frustration. Though we are proud of our faculty support and interdisciplinary roots, the majority of surveyed faculty members at the May 2025 faculty meeting reported overall negative sentiments about AI from the 2024–2025 academic year, with over 50% selecting that AI had impeded their work as educators. This survey was taken before a large discussion about teaching and working with AI, and post-session sentiments were not captured. To address this, summer 2025 programming emphasized faculty outreach and educational workshops to help faculty feel more prepared to discuss AI with their students and establish course policies in the fall.

Communicating human-centered AI principles. We share concerns of dystopic futures where students and educators use AI as a substitute for their own creativity and critical thinking. An aspect of our educational outreach focuses on preventing that mindset from taking root at Colby. By cultivating an environment that emphasizes principles of responsible, sustainable, and secure use, we envision Colby College as a model of human-centered AI application in higher education.

Conclusion

As we conclude the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence has not only solidified its foundation but has also become a dynamic hub for transdisciplinary, human-centered AI at Colby College. This year was defined by a polymathic approach to AI, successfully integrating cutting-edge technology with the core values of a liberal arts education. We embraced our role as both an AI applications incubator and a lab, a place for proof-of-concept development and innovation where the Colby community could experiment with new AI applications in both research and teaching. This unique approach has been the driving force behind our key achievements, transforming our early vision into a tangible and impactful reality.

Academic Roots and Community Engagement

Our work has demonstrated the importance of a deep embedding within the academic program, evidenced by the diversity of disciplines in which AI-related courses are taught and the high volume of students taking these classes. The launch of our first official AI course with a laboratory component was a major milestone, providing students with a hands-on foundation in the field.

Our community outreach efforts extended conversations about responsible AI far beyond the classroom, with a diverse array of engagement fora including lectures, film screenings, DataFest, an art exhibition, and the *Journal for Writing With and About AI*. This variety of engagement created a rich, campus-wide dialogue about AI's potential and its place in our academic and creative lives.

Research and Collaboration

This year was marked by significant research accomplishments and partnerships. Our AI@SLAC 2025 Spring Conference attracted attendees from as far as California, highlighting the Institute's growing reputation as a leader in the field.

A key achievement was the successful design, development, and deployment of MuleChat, a custom portal that provides secure and equitable access to advanced AI tools for the entire Colby community. This project, along with our role as a co-recipients on the NSF ARIA grant, a major accomplishment that puts Colby on par with large research institutions, demonstrates our commitment to both practical application and groundbreaking research. And, our successful partnership with the Max Planck Institute further solidifies our position as a globally connected center for AI innovation.

Looking Ahead

We are excited to see where the coming academic year takes us, our faculty fellows, and our new Faculty Instructional Technology (FIT) fellows. This new phase of growth is supported by the addition of four new full-time staff members, including our new director, who will help us continue to advance our mission and support the Colby community in new and innovative ways.

The past year has been a testament to DavisAI's ability to foster a culture of responsible and creative AI engagement within a liberal arts context. The achievements of FY 24–25 have laid a strong foundation for the future, and we are grateful for your partnership in this endeavor. As we move forward, we are more confident than ever in our ability to guide Colby College in navigating the evolving landscape of AI and preparing our community to thoughtfully engage with its transformative potential. We are grateful for the continued support of President Greene, the Davis Foundation, and most importantly, our faculty colleagues at Colby. Thank you for your continued support in this exciting and dynamic time.

Appendix

A: Involved Faculty

Michael Donihue, Daniel LaFave, Scott Taylor, Stacy Doore, Dale Kocevski, Ben Scharadin, Dan Shea, Nicholas Jacobs, Tanya Sheehan, Ying Li, Hong Zhang, Aaron Hanlon, Alison Bates, Amber Hickey, Gianluca Rizzo, Amanda Lilleston, Liam O'Brien, Tariq Ahmad, Hannen Wolfe, Ashton Wesner, D. Whitney King, Kara Kugelmeyer, Eric Aaron, Lindsey Madison, Thomas Klepach, Naser Al Madi, José Martínez, Oliver Layton, Ekaterina Seregina, Chris Walker, Nicholas Record, Farah Qureshi, David Freidenreich, Jim Behuniak, Andrea Tilden, Derek Huffman, Keith Peterson, Lydia Moland, Dan Cohen, Stacey Sheriff, Carol Hurney, Justin Becknell, Karena McKinney, Philip Nyhus, Denise Bruesewitz, Gail Carlson, Jerzy Wieczorek, Ben Lisle, Sonya Donaldson, Yang Fan, Yee Mon Thu, Sam Hayes, Ben Baker, Aleja Ortiz, Veronica Romero, Dean Allbritton, Matt LeVan, Vivian Ferillo, Ghada Gherwash, Tim Hubbard, Christopher Soto, Chaoran Wang, Jen Coane, Taka Suzuki, Tahiya Chowdhury

Total count: 66

Departments Represented: 27

B: Colby Partnerships

We are thankful for the collaborations this year with several on-campus partners:

- Academic Information Technology Services
- The Center for Arts and Humanities
- The Center for Teaching and Learning
- DavisConnects
- The Department of Biology
- The Department of Computer Science
- The Department of Francophone and Italian Studies
- The Department of Philosophy
- The Department of Statistics
- The Department of Writing
- The Farnham Writers' Center
- The Goldfarb Center for Public Affairs
- The Halloran Center for Entrepreneurship
- Information Technology Services
- The Linde Packman Lab
- The Lunder Institute for American Art
- The Provost's Office
- The Public Humanistic Inquiry Lab

C: Participatory Institutions at the AI@SLAC Conference

Name	# Registered Participants
Amherst College	2
Bard College	1
Bates College	11
Bennington College	1
Bowdoin College	13
Carleton College	1
Colby College	31
Connecticut College	1
CreateSafe	1
Denison University	1
Franklin & Marshall College	2
Furman University	1
Gettysburg College	3
Goldman Sachs	1
Lafayette College	1
Loyola Marymount University / University of Washington	1
Maine Senate / Thomas College	1
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	2
Middlebury College	1
Mount Holyoke College	1
Rollins College	1
Sacred Heart University	1
Skidmore College	1
St. Joseph's College of Maine	1
Stanley-Whitman House	1
State of Maine	1
Surgical Data Science Collective	1
The University of Maine	1
Thomas College	2
Trinity College	1
University of Maine School of Law	1
University of Colorado Denver, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	1
University of Maine at Farmington	5
University of Maine at Fort Kent	1
University of Maine at Presque Isle	3
University of Southern Maine	1
Wellesley College	1
Williams College	2
Wofford College	2
Total insitutions (including dual appointments): 41	**Total registrants: 105**

D: DavisAI-Affiliated Publications

Chowdhury, Tahiya. "Computational Thinking with Computer Vision: Developing AI Competency in an Introductory Computer Science Course." *Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence* vol. 39, 2025. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2503.19006

Chowdhury, Tahiya and **Veronica Romero**. "Can We Trust Machine Learning? The Reliability of Features from Open-Source Speech Analysis Tools for Speech Modeling." 2025. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2506.11072

Donaldson, Sonya. Interview by John Drabinski. "Episode 47." *The Black Studies Podcast*. 14 October 2024. https://blackstudiespodcast.substack.com/p/sonya-donaldson-department-of-african?utm_source=publication-search

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Imai, Saki, **Tahiya Chowdhury**, and **Amanda Stent**. "Evaluating Open-Source ASR Systems: Performance Across Diverse Audio Conditions and Error Correction Methods." *Proceedings of the 31st International Conference on Computational Linguistics*, pp. 5027-5039, 2025. https://aclanthology.org/2025.coling-main.336/

Margolis, Micah, **Anna Mackey**, **Isabella Kuhr**, and **Michael Donihue.** "Generative AI in Liberal Arts Education: A Comparative Analysis of Student Experiences." *Journal of Writing With and About AI* issue 2, 2025.

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Key

Colby Faculty

Colby Students

E: Publications About DavisAI

Colby College Press

Keyes, Bob. "Longtime IBM Executive to Lead Davis Institute for Artificial Intelligence." *ColbyNews*, 20 June, 2025. https://news.colby.edu/story/longtime-ibm-executive-to-lead-davis-institute-for-artificial-intelligence/

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Voigt, Kayla. "How Will Artificial Intelligence Change Higher Education?" *ColbyNews*, 26 March, 2025. https://news.colby.edu/story/how-will-artificial-intelligence-change-higher-education/

Voigt, Kayla. "The No. 1 Skill Employers Want Right Now? AI Literacy." *ColbyNews*, 22 July, 2025. https://news.colby.edu/story/the-no-1-skill-employers-want-right-nowai-literacy/

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Benninghoff, Grace. "Netflix Founder Donates $50 Million to Bowdoin to Study AI." *Portland Press Herald*, National Trust for Local News, 25 March, 2025. https://www.pressherald.com/2025/03/24/netflix-founder-donates-50-million-to-bowdoin-to-study-ai/

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Sourwine, Abby. "Colby College Builds AI Literacy With Portal for Comparing Chatbots." *GovTech*, 27 January 2025. https://www.govtech.com/education/higher-ed/colby-college-builds-ai-literacy-with-portal-for-comparing-chatbots

F: Image Attributions

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