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Preparing to Teach with AI: Six Faculty Roles for Reimagining Creative Teaching

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As coauthor Joe Keller prepared to revise his syllabus for the upcoming semester, he kept thinking about a moment from a previous course. A student turned in a research paper so polished he assumed they had help—and he was right. It was not plagiarism, but it was clearly AI-assisted.

That moment did not lead to a disciplinary hearing. Instead, it sparked a class-wide conversation about authorship, technology, and what counts as thinking. I walked away realizing that preparing to teach in an AI-mediated world required more than updated policies: It required reimagining my role as an educator.

Generative AI has entered our classrooms, and we need to come to grips with the possibility that it's here to stay. Whether we feel intrigued or uneasy, it is reshaping how students engage with learning and how we design for it. As faculty, we do not need to become AI experts. But we do need to prepare

with purpose. That means modeling how to engage with AI ethically, creatively, and with a mindset of inquiry.

In our work across disciplines, we have identified six adaptable roles that can help frame this preparation. These are not job descriptions or checklists. They are starting points—flexible teaching lenses for integrating AI in ways that prioritize pedagogy, integrity, and student learning.

1. The AI mentor

Students typically use AI tools without understanding how they work. As mentors, we can demystify the technology. This might mean beginning the semester with a short activity exploring how generative AI creates text or what "AI hallucination" means (Nguyen et al., 2023). Or it might mean providing a quick demo: "Here is what ChatGPT says about this topic. What is missing? What sounds off?" Framing these tools as brainstorming partners rather than scholarly sources helps students approach them with discernment, fostering technical familiarity and critical thinking.

2. The data literacy facilitator

Once students understand what AI can do, they need to understand how it does it. AI spots patterns in massive data sets. Faculty can introduce simple concepts like structured versus unstructured data, algorithmic bias, and probabilistic reasoning—no computer science background required. Even a five-minute discussion on why a chatbot might get something wrong can go a long way. AI does not "know" anything; it predicts. That awareness builds student skepticism and digital literacy.

3. The AI ethics advocate

Understanding how AI functions leads naturally to the question of how it should function. Students often think of ethics only in terms of cheating. We can expand that view. Conversations about who designs AI tools, how data is collected, and what biases are their outputs may reproduce help students connect ethics to real-world contexts. Case studies, such as AI use in hiring or surveillance, can spark powerful reflection. We do not need to be ethicists, just facilitators of dialogue that encourages values-driven thinking.

4. The prompt engineer for learning

With a foundation in function and ethics, students are better prepared to engage AI critically. One powerful entry point: teaching them how to write effective prompts. AI output depends on the quality of input. In a marketing course, students generated product launch plans using AI, then analyzed them with a SWOT framework. The result was not just critique; it deepened their understanding of strategic thinking and tone. Research shows that prompt design can significantly affect engagement and depth (Lee & Palmer, 2025).

As a practical exercise, students can test different prompt styles in what we call a "Prompt Showdown." For example, they write two prompts on the same topic, compare the AI responses in small groups, and then reflect on what changed, what improved, and what went sideways. This experimentation helps to build critical awareness of how prompt design shapes AI output.

- Keeps the tone and flow.
- Respects word count.

- Responds directly to editor's suggestion.

5. The curator of AI-enhanced resources

Not all AI tools are created equal. Some support accessibility or thoughtful revision; others reinforce bias or limit expression. As curators, we evaluate tools before bringing them into the classroom. Co-authors Lynn Austin, Christielynn Konopka, and Josephine Shaw each examined different tools. One noted that a grammar platform encouraged nuanced revision, while another tool flagged nonstandard English without considering context. Another noticed that an AI assistant suggested phrasing that undermined cultural inclusivity. The tools we choose reflect and shape our classroom values. As curators, we must choose with intention.

6. The human-in-the-loop designer

AI may speed up grading or generate feedback, but it cannot interpret nuance or emotion. That is our role. As human-in-the-loop designers, we ensure our presence remains central. In one writing course, coauthor Lynn Austin noted that their AI grading assistant missed key reflective insights. The fix? Pairing AI-generated comments with brief, personalized notes. Students noticed the difference—and felt seen. AI can assist, but it can't replace our pedagogical judgment or relational insight.

Where to start

These roles are not prescriptive. You need not adopt all of them. Choose one that fits your style or discipline. Try a low-stakes activity: a prompt-writing exercise, a short discussion on AI bias, or adding an AI policy to your syllabus. Each step builds fluency—not only for students but also for us.

And here is the larger truth: these roles may be new, but they reflect what great teachers have always done. We mentor. We model curiosity. We help students ask better questions. Teaching remains a human endeavor rooted in inquiry, ethics, and relationships. These roles help carry that purpose forward. AI does not change our work; it sharpens it.

References

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AI disclosure: The authors used generative AI (ChatGPT) to support refinement of phrasing and tone. All original content, ideas, and examples are theirs.

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