Past President's Letter

Thanks so much to our membership and our board for another great year. I appreciate all of the support this past year, and I believe we have continued to build an engaged and relevant state chapter. The national educational environment continues to change rapidly and often unexpectedly. This situation continues to challenge instructors, and the constant change may exacerbate the challenges and obstacles already confronted by our students. IOSS endeavors to build a strong support network while providing useful, applicable information on current topics. Our conference this year addressed relevant trends in artificial intelligence, and we hope attendees found it valuable as we see this topic gain momentum in higher education. However, the increasing challenges in higher education also highlight the need to maintain and continue building an active, vibrant chapter. Our colleagues throughout our institutions may not realize the opportunities available through IOSS to provide support and build connections. I would like to encourage our membership to consider not only greater activity within the chapter, but to help encourage others at your institution to participate. If we have more people involved and committed to the effort, we will become more effective as an organization meeting the needs of our profession and our students.

Thanks again for your engagement and support this year, and I am looking forward our opportunities in the coming months. Please consider contributing ideas or suggestions to the board and consider participating on the board. Your engagement makes IOSS a stronger organization and an effective advocate for our students.

In This Issue

- **IOSS Fall 2024 Conference summaries and reflections**
- **IOSS 2025 Student Scholarship application information**
- **IOSS 2025 Outstanding Service to Students Award nomination information**
- **America Reads 2024-2025 book donation details**
- **Opportunities to stay connected with colleagues**

Save the Date

Watch for conference updates on our IOSS 2025 Fall Conference page at
https://www.dmacc.edu/ioss

Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: IOSS 2024 Fall Conference Keynotes Review

Within only a few years, artificial intelligence has become one of the prominent topics in higher education. It promises tremendous opportunities and offers disconcerting challenges, all at a frustrating rate of change. Instructors may not only feel uninformed about the actual resources involving artificial intelligence, but they may feel overwhelmed by the choices and the potential consequences. As keynote presenters at this year's IOSS conference, instructors Chris Snider and Emily Dux Speltz—-provided members with an experienced and knowledgeable review of AI tools and their potential application in the educational field.

Chris Snider, a professor of social and digital media at Drake University, offered a thorough introduction to a sample of AI resources, ranging from text-based constructions to visual image creation. In his courses, Professor Snider introduces students to the tools they may utilize in media production, and his presentation highlighted the options instructors may apply to augment student experiences or streamline instructor work. Although many are familiar with prominent resources such as Claude or Anthropic, which may enhance research efforts or help structure writing, a tool like Fathom provides note-taking during online meetings and Gamma aids with building presentations. Midjourney, Ideogram, and Imagen offer a variety of image creation and editing opportunities, while Sora helps create video from text inputs. Further, as tools to help create a more engaging course experience, D-ID and Synthesis allow a user to build customized avatars, a potential benefit for online courses. While these tools offer engaging elements, several tools apply to common practical concerns instructors face. Products like Eleven Labs and Descript allow the creation of voice and text translations or transcriptions, valuable tools for second-language students and students with disabilities. As presented by Professor Snider, the opportunities for educators are rich, varied, and expansive, although they require active research and engagement to determine which may be useful for each individual's needs.

Making a direct connection with Professor Snider's information, Dr. Emily Dux Speltz provided an example of how these tools may be integrated into a course. Currently teaching with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide, Dr. Dux Speltz created an English course at Iowa State University that purposefully placed the "machine in the loop" of writing, in which the students' final products were created with an artificial intelligence tool. Students were introduced to the benefits and hazards of AI, along with a review of ethical usage, as part of the course's analytical, critical process. Building their project, students practiced prompting skills with AI tools to find useful, reliable, and relevant material, and after creating a plan with a persuasive argument element to support their project, students used AI to evaluate their plan. Students created a variety of multimedia products, including a student who built a functional phone app without previous knowledge or experience. Ultimately, the course exhibited how AI may serve as a tool for creative and critical engagement, giving students an unusual and creative experience with a new technology.

The technological landscape changes rapidly, and educational institutions will struggle to stay ahead of all the new resources. Obviously, educators will be concerned about academic integrity, credibility, and plagiarism, but our presenters exhibited how these tools may enhance student experiences and provide instructors with new options in course construction and support. As with so many initiatives and challenges, the shared knowledge and experiences of colleagues may provide direction and support as institutions may use these tools to benefit students.

Dan Nelson, DMACC

Department of Education Update

As with previous conferences, the Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Community Colleges offered an update on strategic statewide initiatives such as pathways and measuring outcomes. This year, Kelly Friesleben and April Pforts addressed the concerns related to student preparedness in math. Specifically, the bridge between high school and the first year of college remains a focus as many students struggle with their first, college-level math courses. Since the state only requires three years of math in high school and many high schools do not offer a fourth-year math course outside a STEM path, many students enter college without having a math course for over a year or more. Subsequently, the bureau intends to encourage the creation of new courses to attract this particular segment of students. The bureau hopes these students will complete this course and enter college more prepared, making their transition smoother and reducing demands on college institutions. As colleges work through assessment, placement, and support, this option will help institutions and students to meet the expectations of college-level work and support successful progress.

Dan Nelson, DMACC

Equatio at the Nexus of Student Accommodations and the Modern Digital Shift in Higher Education

I featured the software Equatio because it addresses a critical gap in accommodations technology in mathematics. Mathematics accommodations for students with learning differences have generally had significant limitations for some students, such as for students with dyscalculia and dysgraphia. Equatio is the best I have seen for addressing the needs of students we have underserved.

We began with a discussion of how accommodations in mathematics have done well overall with lesson needs (e.g., text-to-speech, audio and video recordings of lectures, copies of lecture notes), setting needs (e.g., rooms devoted to testing and assessment, testing centers), and timing needs (e.g., allowing extra time on assessments). However, accommodations have not as effectively met the response needs of students.

This introduction led to discussions of how these challenges play out for students on assessments. For example, a student with dyscalculia may need the problem read to them to be able to correctly answer it. This may work fine on homework where a tutor or fellow student can read the math to the student, but this can be more difficult on tests and quizzes.

I then demonstrated Equatio while discussing how the features facilitate learning mathematics, such as its speech-to-text feature, which can address the needs of students with dysgraphia. Such features are even helpful to students who have no learning differences but have not internalized the language of mathematics. There are many other useful features in the software, including handwriting-to-text, the ability to read any webpage through the software (not just in a learning management system), and built-in learning resources.

Attendees at my presentation might have thought I was marketing for Equatio, but I have no connection to Texthelp, the company responsible for the product. Attendees engaged in discussion actively, and they drew upon their professional experiences to offer up a number of concrete examples of students who could have benefited from the software. While my presentation was intended to open up space for discussing technology in education overall, I think

the attendees found the discussion of the software and its features most interesting.

Folks can get access to the PowerPoint in the Member Resources section of the IOSS webpageto get a sense of the software's ability to facilitate learning.

Mike Cagley, WITCC

Technology in Higher Education

During my session at the FALL 20224 IOSS conference, I demonstrated the software Equatio and framed the software within the broader tensions between technology and education. Instead of more about Equatio, I would like to open space for further discussion about the intersection between technology and higher education.

I have been thinking quite deeply about how technology is affecting education. Over 15 years ago, I remember the clunky eCollege learning management system (LMS) that I first used for online education as an instructor. Across my time teaching for colleges, I have also used Blackboard and now Canvas. Interestingly, across this same time, I have seen the division between online education and brick-and-mortar education blur into almost the same thing in the LMS even if there is a classroom component in the brick-and-mortar class.

I often hear students state that they regret taking an online course. However, the students most often regret the online course experience because they had no substantive engagement with the instructor. For courses that I teach online exclusively, my course evaluations will almost always include one or more statements about how my course was the first time that the students had an instructor engaged with the

students throughout the course. I am a strong supporter of technology in education, and I try to make use of it constructively to do my job better rather than to do my job for me. The same criticisms directed against students for their inappropriate uses of technology can be directed at the instructors as well.

It is important to note that I did not begin as a good online instructor. There was a lot of trial and error. I remained and still remain committed to delivering the best education I can through whatever medium I am using. We all know that this is not the case across all of online education. Many (maybe most?) online educators are more like data managers than educators. My point is that technology is not the culprit. The structural guidelines or rules for using technology as well as the people who are using technology create the opportunities, or lack thereof, for widespread abuse.

Therefore, I believe the topic of generative artificial intelligence and the broader topic of technology in education are both worthy of further exploration and discussion. Whether we like it or not, technology is finding its way into education. I strongly support the responsible use of technology, especially because our students will be operating in a world becoming more reliant on technology every day -- again, whether we like it or not.

Mike Cagley, WITCC

Applications Open for 2025 IOSS Student Scholarship

The Iowa Organization for Student Success (IOSS) Executive Board is again accepting applications for a student who has excelled in developmental coursework. Please take time to share this scholarship opportunity with students at your school. Below is the link where students will find the information needed to apply for this $500 scholarship. Applications are due by June 30, 2025.

[IOSS Student Scholarship Application](#)

2025 Outstanding Service to Students Award Nominations

We are excited to have the opportunity to celebrate and recognize an educator who demonstrates outstanding service and impacts student success!

We encourage each of our members to review the criteria on the form available on the Member Resources page of the IOSS website at https://www.dmacc.edu/ioss and nominate a deserving faculty member, staff member, and/or administrator for this honor. You will find the full process and award details, as well as the online application, on the nomination form at:

[Outstanding Service to Students Nomination Form](#)

Submit nominations by June 30, 2025.

Please note that nominees do not have to be current members of IOSS to be eligible for the award.

America Reads 2024-2025

IOSS is pleased to share the joy of reading with elementary school students as we continue our participation in the America Reads program. Recipients of our book donations for 2024-2025 are enrolled at McKinley Elementary School in southeast Des Moines. McKinley serves a multiethnic group of children from pre-K to 5th grade. In 2023-2024, more than 90% of McKinley's 266 students qualified for free and reduced-price lunches, and nearly 30% of the students were English Language Learners.

Check the Fall Conference section of the IOSS website for a link to the McKinley Elementary School Amazon Gift List:

https://www.dmacc.edu/ioss

IMPORTANT: When checking out, on the *Choose a Shipping Address* page, make sure to have the books sent to the school address:

McKinley Elementary School
Attn: Ann Mortimer
1610 SE 6th Street
Des Moines, IA 50315

Join the IOSS Conversation

- Have you recently attended a conference of another professional organization? Summarize a session relevant to our membership for the *Reader's Corner*.
- Has your institution revamped its placement policies, developmental studies offerings, or academic support program? Provide a quick update.
- Have you located a great academic resource for student or faculty to use? Share the wealth.
- Have you transitioned to a new position or received special recognition for your professional accomplishments? Let us celebrate with you!

To submit articles or information for future editions of the *Reader's Corner*, please send to:

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Stay in Touch with IOSS and NOSS

IOSS Website:

Check the IOSS website for 2024 conference updates; student scholarship information; Executive Board contact information; and member resources, including IOSS meeting minutes and materials from conference presentations.

https://www.dmacc.edu/ioss

IOSS Facebook:

Like us on Facebook to receive updates on IOSS and our annual conference!

https://www.facebook.com/iowaoss/?ref=py_c

The NOSS website:

https://thenoss.org/