

Humanizing Assignments *In the Classroom*

An FLC Zine



create

NOT JUST SUBMIT



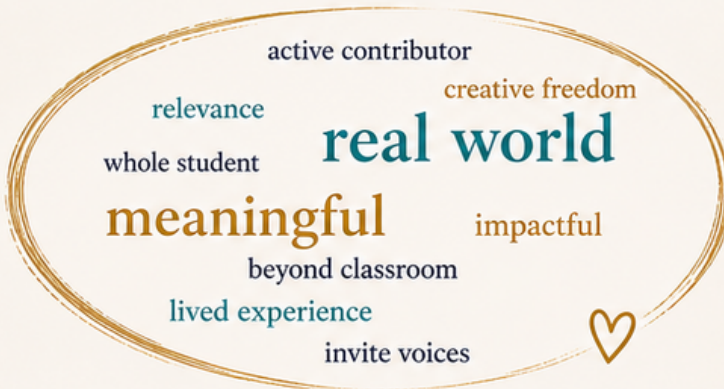
connect

TO REAL LIFE



think

NOT JUST ANSWER



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What is this FLC?

As AI shows up more in our classrooms, we have been asking:
what still feels human in learning?

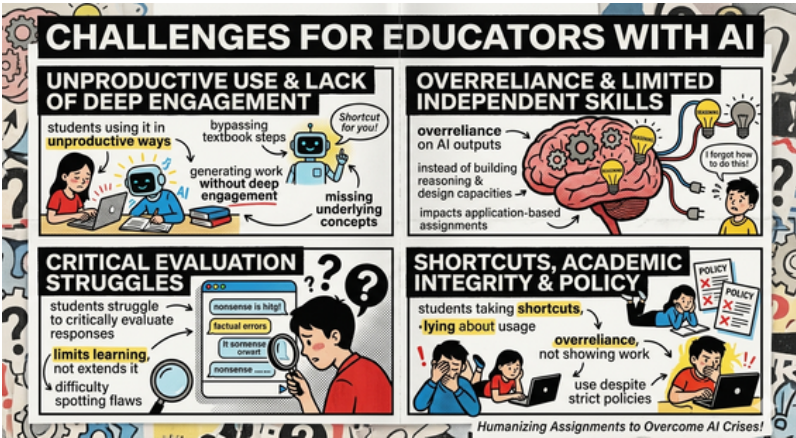
In this faculty learning community, we explored how to design assignments that center creativity, critical thinking, and lived experience—not just outputs. We talked honestly about the tensions AI brings, but also the possibilities.

Together, we experimented with assignments that invite student voice, storytelling, and multiple ways of expressing knowledge. We worked as co-learners—sharing ideas, testing redesigns, and being transparent about how (and when) AI fits.

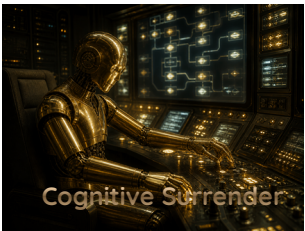
Along the way, we kept coming back to one question: what makes an assignment humanizing?

For us, it meant creating space for students to bring who they are—their perspectives, cultures, and experiences—into their learning.

Challenges in Humanizing Assignments



Challenge: Student Disengaged



Challenge: Faculty Burnout



Elements Created Using Gemini and ChatGPT

What Makes An Assignment Human?

Our Perspectives

Moving Beyond "Passive Vessels"

Allowing students to act as contributors whose "knowledge and perspectives have value."

Prioritize Learning Over "Checking Boxes"

In the age of AI, it's easy to "cheat ourselves out of learning."

Centering the Whole Person

"Center the student as a whole person." Require the kind of introspection and creativity that makes their voice "an integral part" of the work.



Graphic created using ChatGPT

Adapting without Steamrolling

AI should "accentuate and enhance our humanity"

Incorporate Tactile Elements

Student Perspectives

The Power of the "Un-Essay"

The freedom to create: a podcast, video, original game, there's meaning when they can "play to their strengths" and turn a task into something they are proud of.

The Authority of Lived Experience

Impactful assignments use personal history as the primary text. From "interviewing a grandmother" to mapping "queer lineages," students value work that "authenticates personal experiences through academic theories."

Connecting Concepts to Communities

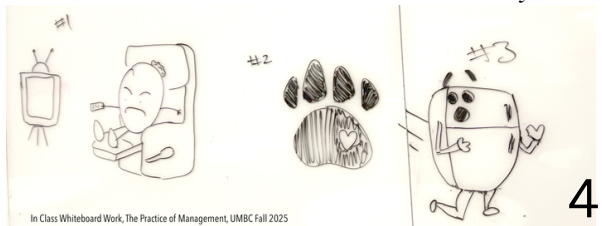
Learning sticks when it solves a "real problem that people have."

The Classroom as a Human Space

Simple acts of visibility matter, like "writing words on the board that we have been called" or sharing "true dream jobs." Transform the classroom into a community.

AI as a Mirror, Not a Mask

Use it to "understand what they struggle with most," not to skip work.



Examples for Humanizing Assignments

FLC Faculty have already tried making assignments more “humanizing”. Here are some examples we discussed from our classrooms.

WITH AI

Check Sources
(e.g., analyze accuracy of generated information)

Limitations of AI
(e.g., compare their knowledge with AI output)

AI as Learner
(e.g., LLMs roleplay as students)

Ethics of AI
(e.g., address the ethical ramifications of using AI)

Give Incentives for Mentioning AI Use
(e.g., include as part of grade)



Without AI

Team-building Exercises
(e.g., joint coloring activity)

Hands-On Activities
(e.g., solving problems in class)

Convert Abstract Problems into Humanized Scenarios
(for realistic problem solving)

Grounding Concepts in Students' Lives
(e.g., design experiments using household materials)

Use Simulators that LLMs struggle with
(e.g., ASPEN)

Switch to Visual Problem Solving

Faculty use of AI beyond assignments:



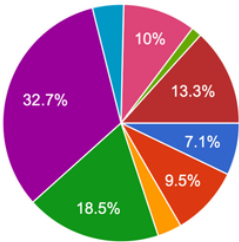
- AI is here to stay, so incorporate
 - For instance, think about AI as a teaching partner:
 - Use AI for Syllabus Creation, Creating Quizzes, Bb content creation, Giving feedback on rubrics, Brainstorming lecture hooks or analogies for tricky concepts, Translating or adapting materials for multilingual students, Role-playing as a student to stress-test assignment clarity
- Alongside this, we should create intentional AI-free zones for human connection
 - For instance: Hands on Experiential Learning Activities - LEGOS, Paper Planes, Deck of cards, Pair of DICE
 - Group-work-in class activities
 - Semester Long Project work in Groups
 - Peer Evaluations
 - Lab Work - Hands ON



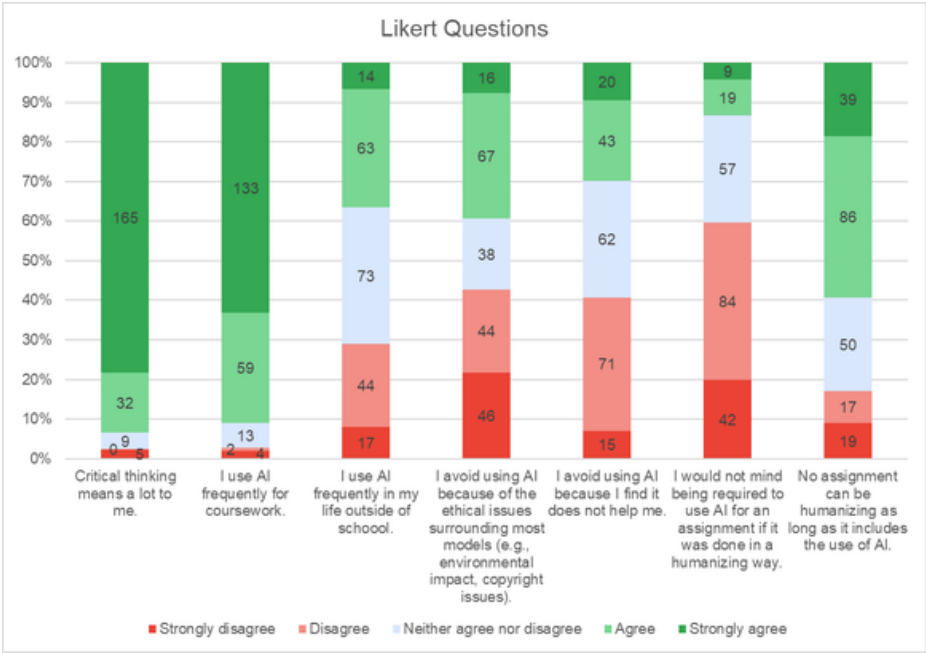
Asking Students about Critical Thinking

Which of these classes are you taking this semester?

211 responses

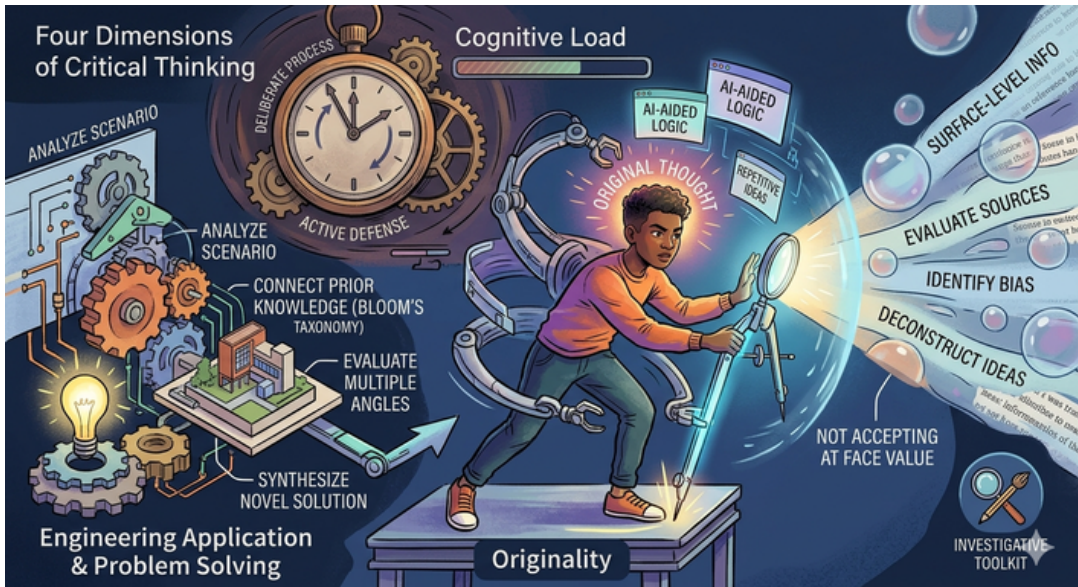


- CMSC 473/673 - Introduction to Natural Language Processing
- ENCH 427 - Heat and Mass Transfer
- ENCH 640 - Advanced Kinetics
- ENCH 446 - Design II
- IS 303 - Fundamentals of Human-Co...
- IS 325 - Mangagement Science
- IS 474 - Technology Law
- IS 496 - Business Analytics
- MGMT 210 - Practice of Management



Student Perspectives on Critical Thinking

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eE7D4pN7Op2HRuLhNMGuvfQnI9Uz8m2-gUpBXuM50o/edit?tab=t.0>

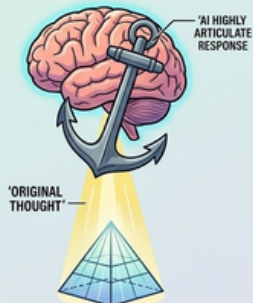


What missed in the survey (AI response)?

AI identifies key gaps in student perception of AI's role in engineering and professional practice.

1. THE ANCHORING EFFECT (ILLUSION OF INDEPENDENCE)

Thinking you are independent when your logic is constrained by AI.



FOUR BLIND SPOTS: HUMAN-AI INTERACTION (AI RESPONSE)

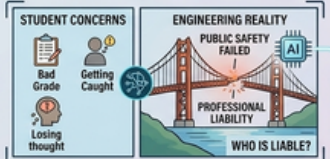
2. TREATING AI AS GOOGLE 2.0 (MISUNDERSTANDING TECHNOLOGY)

treating LLMs as databases, ignoring hallucination risks.



3. ENGINEERING ETHICS & LIABILITY BLIND SPOT

Ignoring public safety and professional liability.



4. ERASURE OF GRIT (EMOTIONAL DIMENSION)

Missing building emotional resilience through struggle.



Next Steps

TRY THIS TOMORROW

No redesign. No overhaul. Just one small shift.

Add a 5-minute reflection:

- Where does your voice show up here?
- What part feels most “you”?
- Did AI help? Where did you go beyond it?

Or try this:

Submit ONE “messy” artifact:

- a draft
- a sketch
- a voice memo
- a failed attempt + what you learned

Process > polish

You’re not changing everything.

You’re making space for something human.

HUMANIZING *assignments*

...is not a template.

...is not a rule.

It’s a stance.

Design work that:

- students don’t want to outsource
 - reveals how they think
- makes room for who they are



Faculty's many conceptualizations of "humanizing" AI



Humanizing as division of labor: Humans do what humans are good at (finding connections, ascribing meaning, detecting anomalies); machines do what machines are good at (processing large amounts of data). Assignments are designed around this split.

Humanizing as originality of thought: Designing assignments where the student's own reasoning is what gets produced and graded — assignments that require, and reveal, genuine human contribution.

Humanizing as detection of humanity: Designing assignments such that instructors can recognize the student in the work — distinctive perspective, voice, or reasoning rather than generic output.

Humanizing as personal connection: Inviting student voice, lived experience, community knowledge, storytelling, and personal inquiry into the work. (This became the FLC's formal working definition.)

Humanizing as process over product: Grading the messy middle — sketches, drafts, kitchen-table experiments — rather than only the final polished artifact.

Humanizing as experiential and hands-on learning: "You hear, you forget. You do, you learn." Group work, parallel problem-solving, lived practice over passive reception.

Humanizing as struggle-as-learning: Honoring the value of getting something wrong through your own reasoning (Case B) over getting something wrong via AI hallucination (Case A) — because the struggle brings the student closer to the why.

Humanizing as intrinsic motivation: Designing assignments that students don't want to outsource — work that matters to them on its own terms.

Humanizing as critical thinking made visible: Engaging the material deeply, questioning sources, learning to evaluate information (including AI output) rather than accepting it.

Humanizing as AI-as-foil: Using AI as a comparison object — show what AI got wrong, evaluate AI's response against your own — so the human contribution is clarified by contrast.

Humanizing as AI-as-learner: Reversing the role so the student teaches the AI (e.g., debugging code by explaining it), making the student the expert in the room.

Humanizing as AI-resistant by design: Choosing tools, contexts, or problem framings (like specialized simulators, schematics, or physical experiments) that AI currently can't handle well — keeping the human necessarily in the loop.

Humanizing as contextual and lived-reality framing: Translating abstract textbook problems into scenarios anchored in students' physical world — a kitchen lab, a neighborhood, a workplace.

Humanizing as personalization: Asking students to apply theory to their own neighborhood, career interest, or specific community.

Humanizing as multimodal expression: Letting students choose how to show learning — video, podcast, art, performance, voiceover — instead of defaulting to the essay.

Humanizing as instructor humanity too: Recognizing that designing and grading experiential assignments is exhausting; humanizing includes lowering the load on faculty so they can teach humanely.

Humanizing as formative feedback enabled by AI: Using AI to do things instructors couldn't do before — e.g., monthly student check-ins, pattern detection in evaluation data — to make the course more responsive.

Students' many conceptualizations of "humanizing" AI:

- Humanizing as connecting course concepts to my own life:** By far the most common student answer — reflection projects, personal narratives, applying theory to family, culture, or workplace.
- Humanizing as bidirectional trust:** Examining faculty AI use too, not just students'. Asking openly whether professors are competent, over-reliant, or transparent in their own use.
- Humanizing as transparency and disclosure:** Making AI use visible — LLM disclosure as part of the grade; documenting prompts and conversations as part of the assignment.
- Humanizing as policy co-creation:** Inviting students to draft, debate, or shape AI policy themselves rather than imposing it from the top.
- Humanizing as listening and safe space:** Creating student-only and faculty-only spaces to surface anxieties and questions about AI without judgment.
- Humanizing as refusing shame:** Recognizing that shame shuts down honest discourse and data; humanizing means making it safe to talk about AI use openly.
- Humanizing as mutual expectations:** Replacing surveillance and policing with a meaningful, ongoing conversation between students and faculty about what counts as appropriate AI use.
- Humanizing as flexibility for student lives:** Small structural gestures (e.g., 5 free late days) that acknowledge students as whole people with lives outside the classroom.
- Humanizing as student agency and power skills:** Centering soft skills, self-direction, and student voice over hard-skill transmission: leaning into UMBC's identity as a minority-serving institution.
- Humanizing as choice of format:** Students explicitly named multimodal options (video, podcast, presentation, art, voiceover, "un-essay") as what made an assignment feel human.
- Humanizing as building or making something:** Coding a Jeopardy game, designing a sonic warning, building a hydrogel, creating a TikTok on an indigenous issue, programming a personal informatics project.
- Humanizing as collaborative and community-built work:** The coloring-the-whole exercise, group dynamics presentations, fair-style showcases where students see and critique each other's work.
- Humanizing as personal inquiry:** Researching your own dream job, your own data, your own question — driven by genuine curiosity rather than a prescribed prompt.
- Humanizing as creative writing rooted in self:** Non-fiction memoir, personal essays, writing about culture, recording stories from one's country of origin.
- Humanizing as reflection:** Exam wrappers, monthly check-ins, journals connecting course concepts to lived experience, end-of-semester reflections.
- Humanizing as voice in classroom dialogue:** Small-group discussions, going around to hear everyone's interpretation, philosophy circles, kahoot-style participation.
- Humanizing as transparency about AI:** Several students named the yellow-light policy itself as humanizing — being trusted with boundaries rather than banned outright.
- Humanizing as care from the instructor:** Students described professors who "step out so we could talk to a person from the department," who relate through pop culture, who reduce pressure so motivation can come back.
- Humanizing as critical comparison with AI:** Students cited assignments where they compared their own work to AI's output, or evaluated where AI got it wrong, as especially valuable.