MUC 250: AI and ML in the Arts

CRN 14455, Winter 2026

Times: Tuesday and Thursdays, 10am - 11:50am
Location: Cascade TEB 219
Instructor: Henderson Reed Hummel (you may call me Reed)
Contact: henderson.hummel@pcc.edu (this email is checked once daily in the evening.)
Course webpage: https://henderson.lol/pages/muc250/

Overview:
Covers theories and frameworks related to computational or artificial creativity and approaches to endowing machines with creative behaviors. Involves examination of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) in connection with a comprehensive range of arts and creative enterprises such as musical composition and interpretation, sound design, video game creation, drawing, painting, image generation, writing, storytelling, poetry, and design-related tasks.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of the course students should be able to:

- Define artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) and key vocabularies of AI/ML to understand and engage in public and academic discourse.
- Recount the technological and social histories of AI/ML, including the technological lineages and surrounding narratives.
- Define computational creativity (artificial creativity or metacreation) and illustrate its historical and contemporary roles with real-world examples in multiple arts (sonic arts, visual arts, literary arts) and from artists of diverse cultural and national identities.
- Demonstrate competence with historical and contemporary AI and ML creative applications, technologies, softwares and/or toolchains.

Class Structure:
On *Tuesdays* we will discuss the readings in small groups and as a class. This is a discussion and reading-oriented class, though we will be engaging with the technologies as well to ground our thoughts and discussions.
On *Thursdays* we will work on assignments, do some activities to familiarize ourselves with AI and ML techniques and technologies, and engage in some light critique of art pieces from the broader art world that were created with AI.

Readings:
Links to the readings can be found on the course website (see the beginning of this document). They may include some academic texts, essays, contemporary news articles, and artworks that we will reflect on.

Assessment and grading:

- 60%: participation
- 15% exercises
- 25% final project

Regarding participation/attendance: because it makes up the majority of your grade, this part of your grade is predominantly determined by your engagement with the material and your peers during our discussions and activities, not simply attendance. Attendance is critically important to getting much from this class, but I understand life can intervene - when you have to miss class, *please* reach out and we can figure something out.

Exercises:
What is below are simply short summaries. Each exercise will have an accompanying page of resources when they are assigned.

Exercise 1: generated imagery
Following on from the class activities with generative images, explore the use of image generation tools as a means for creative expression. Does the output of these tools match what you are interested in creating? What images do the AI tend to create?

Pick out a concept and generate a series of images to bring to class and share.

Exercise 2: generated music
In class we worked to generate some snatches of music. At home, research some of the tools available for AI music generation and explore their applications. Consider also listening to some AI music to get a sense of how the broader world is using these tools.

Generate some music, and refine it a few times. Once you're satisfied you've done some exploration, submit the song to D2L, along with a brief (100 word) review of the music that you generated. Write also about the experience of generating the music and how it might fit into your art practice.

Exercise 3: generated code
Although you may not have much or any programming experience, these tools do much to make

programming accessible. Can you use the code these machines generate to produce works of art?

Generate some p5.js code and run it in the p5.js online editor. Submit a shareable link to your generated code, and a 100 word reflection on how this felt as an artistic experience.

Final project:
This final project is a choose-your-own-adventure where you will synthesize the results of your explorations from the prior exercises into a new piece of work that can incorporate any or all of the AI/ML techniques and technologies from this term. This is an opportunity to explore and speculate how these technologies might fit into your practice. You will present your work during the last week of class (3-5m).

Grading:
Your projects are graded from 0 to 4.

0: nothing was turned in
1: all work done in class-time, no additional development
2: you took the demo from class further, turned it into your own.
3: you challenged yourself and found ways to push the boundaries
4: your work demonstrates significant work, research, and learning on the topic

Note that these points are for your *process,* not the final outcome. You can see more specifics of the grading at the end of this document.

Course calendar:
Readings are discussed the Tuesday after the Thursday in which they are assigned.
Weeks without explicit topics may get topics added once I have a sense of the participants' interests and background.

Readings will be posted to the class website, ***you don't need to purchase any of these.***

Week 1 (Jan 6/8):
Topics: Introductions, review of this document, opening class discussions about the topic.
Reading assigned: *Art in the Age of Machine Learning* Ch. 1
Week 2 (Jan 13/15):
Topics: Theories of machine creativity, impact of mechanization in art
Reading assigned: *Art in the Age of Machine Learning* Ch. 2
January 13th is the final day to drop classes
Week 3 (Jan 20/22):

Topics: Generating images, how do neural networks work?

Week 4 (Jan 27/29):

Exercise 1 (generated imagery) presentations: January 29

Week 5 (Feb 3/5):

Topics: Authorship, remixing, copyright

Reading assigned: *Art in the Age of Machine Learning* Ch. 10

Week 6 (Feb 10/12):

Exercise 2 (generated music) presentations: Feb 12

Week 7 (Feb 17/19):

Reading assigned: posted excerpt from Walter: *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

Week 8 (Feb 24/26):

Exercise 3 (generated code) presentations: Feb 26

Week 9 (March 3/5):

Reading assigned: Artificial Aesthetics, Ch. 8

Week 10 (March 10/12):

March 14th is the last day to withdraw from grading options

Week 11 (March 17):

Final Presentations on Tuesday March 17. No class on March 19th

Student Responsibilities:

- Your number one responsibility is to engage meaningfully with your peers about this topic.
- Please communicate early and often regarding absences, late/missed work or accommodations you may need. I would like to be flexible but I need your communication in order to be so.
- If you experience challenges that might prevent you from succeeding in this class, please discuss available options with me early.
- It's recommended to bring some sort of mobile internet-connected device to class on Thursdays at least, as we will be exploring these technologies on those days.

AI Policy:

Naturally, we will be using AI heavily in this course, and I wouldn't teach this course if I didn't think there were some really interesting applications of this category of technologies. However: in any *writing* you submit, I would greatly prefer that you not use homework-help type LLM assistance.

I'd much rather read a raw, un-edited draft of your original thoughts, than one that has been massaged into corpo-speak by one of these machines.

I understand that many of you may have experiences with nitpicking or difficult graders on their writing, and I respect that you may still choose to use these tools. However, I will not be grading on grammar or other kinds of technical aspects of your writing, and am more interested in what thoughts you are communicating.

Grading Appendix:

The grading scale below will be used in this course to be an accurate reflection of your comprehension of the course learning objectives. We encourage students to take risks, practice, and have autonomy over their learning and we believe your grade should only include information that directly relates to your understanding of those learning objectives.

Practice is necessary to understand any content and you will be expected to complete required practice work which will directly affect how you perform on assessments of your understanding.

4 (A/81-100%)

Student meets comprehension of learning goal and shows ability to apply and transfer learning with depth and complexity.

3 (B/60-80%)

Student meets comprehension of learning goal.

2 (C/41-60%)

Student meets partial comprehension of learning goal and will be supported in revision of work

1 (D/21-40%)

Student provides little evidence of meeting learning goal and will be supported in the revision of work.

0 (F / 0-20%)

Student provides no evidence of meeting learning goal and will be supported in the revision of work; student provides no effort.

College Policies:

Accessibility and Accommodations:
PCC is committed to ensuring that classes are accessible. Accessible Ed & Disability Resources works with students and faculty to minimize barriers. If students elect to use approved academic accommodations, they must provide in advance formal notification from Accessible Ed & Disability Resources to the instructor.

Title IX/Nondiscrimination:
PCC is committed to creating and fostering a learning and working environment based on open communication and mutual respect. If you believe you have encountered sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, or discrimination based on race, color, religion, age, national origin, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability please contact the Office of Student Conduct and Community Support at (971) 722-7511 or titleix@pcc.edu.

Student Rights and Responsibilities:
The Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook establishes students' freedoms and protections as well as expectations of appropriate behavior and ethical academic work. The Handbook includes items such as the Policy on Student Rights, and the Student Code of Conduct Policy and Procedures.

Flexibility:
The instructor may revise the class calendar, modify content, and/or substitute assignments in response to institutional, weather, or class situations.

Sanctuary College:
PCC is a sanctuary college. For more information and resources, see www.pcc.edu/resources/undocumented-students/.