

Editorial Note: Introduction to the *MARLAS* Special Section on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

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In response to the ever-evolving landscape of education and technology, the *Middle Atlantic Review of Latin American Studies* (MARLAS) issued a call for commentaries on the integration of AI technology in Latin American Studies. This special section explores how AI tools are reshaping research, publication, and instruction in the field. Given the inevitability of AI's influence in education, it is crucial to examine both its potential benefits and risks. My brief essay and one by Marina Malamud of CONICET, Argentina, provide insightful perspectives on these issues, highlighting the transformative power of AI in the classroom and its environmental impact in Latin America.

The integration of AI in education is not just a possibility, it is an inevitability. AI has the potential to revolutionize the way we teach, learn, and do research. It offers new tools that can enhance educational experiences, foster creativity, and develop critical thinking skills. Historical figures like US filmmaker Martin Scorsese, who used AI to transcribe quotes from novels into dialogue for screenplays in the 1980s, faced criticism from the Hollywood Writers Guild, which was wary of jobs being taken over by technology—much like some debates today!

Fast forward to now, and AI's role in creative production and education has expanded significantly. Salman Khan, founder of the free, online, nonprofit education platform Khan Academy, argues in his book *Brave New Words: How AI Will Revolutionize Education (and Why That's a Good Thing)* (Viking 2024) that AI can serve as a lifelong tool for learners, helping them explore their interests and master new skills.

However, as Marina Malamud's commentary cautions, the adoption of AI must be approached with ethical and environmental considerations. Besides such pitfalls as

deepfakes, false information, and biased content, the cost of AI can be considerable in terms of the consumption of natural resources and energy.

“Enhancing Hispanic Literature Courses with Large Language Models: The Power of AI Tools” by Meghan McInnis-Domínguez

In my commentary, I explore the practical applications of Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, and Gemini in Hispanic literature courses. I outline how these tools have been incorporated into Spanish and Latin-American Survey of Literature courses to enhance classroom dynamics and develop critical thinking skills. By transforming course materials into Open Educational Resources (OER) and using platforms like Perusall, educational content becomes more accessible and interactive.

One of the key strategies I employ is using LLMs to generate comprehension and discussion questions tailored to specific texts. This approach has not only improved student engagement in my courses but also fostered deeper analytical skills. I note that while initial fears about AI stifling creativity were defensible, students instead used AI-generated responses as a springboard for more nuanced analyses. Additionally, LLMs were utilized for concise summaries and creative writing exercises, further enriching the learning experience.

I will be creating YouTube videos on how I use LLMs @AI for the Humanities over the summer and fall semester. The method is applicable to other disciplines. You can check them out later in the year: https://youtube.com/@aiforthehumanities-ob2ly?si=L_b92uNCs9wodL.

“AI Hub in Latin America Skyrockets Water Crises” by Marina Malamud

Marina Malamud’s commentary shifts the focus to the environmental impact of AI in Latin America. While the region is rich in natural resources, it faces significant challenges in water quality and access. The rise of data centers and chip manufacturing has exacerbated these issues, consuming vast amounts of water and energy and straining already fragile infrastructures. Malamud discusses the geopolitical implications of AI investment in Latin America, noting that while it offers economic opportunities, it also brings environmental risks.

Malamud highlights the paradox of AI: its potential to improve efficiency and mitigate climate-related crises versus its substantial resource demands and environmental footprint. The author emphasizes the need for ethical and sustainable AI practices, citing

initiatives like Waterplan and Kilimo, which use AI to address water management and conservation. She calls for a collaborative approach between governments, companies, and social organizations to ensure that AI's benefits do not come at the expense of environmental health.

Conclusions

These initial commentaries underscore the dual nature of AI's impact on education and the environment. On one hand, AI tools can significantly enhance educational outcomes by fostering creativity, critical thinking, and engagement. On the other, the environmental cost of AI for infrastructure demands careful consideration and responsible management. As educators and scholars, it is imperative to balance these benefits and risks, ensuring that AI serves as a tool for progress without compromising ethical standards.

The future of AI in Latin American Studies holds immense promise, but it requires thoughtful implementation and continuous evaluation. As we navigate this landscape, it is essential to address the ethical implications and environmental impacts of AI technologies.

I encourage readers to engage with this special section on AI, contribute their insights, and participate in the ongoing dialogue. Your questions and comments are valuable, and I invite you to reach out to me directly (mmmd@udel.edu). Selected commentaries—short scholarly pieces (1,000–1,500 words) that analyze themes related to AI in Latin American Studies (approved by editors, not peer-reviewed)—may be published in future issues of *MARLAS*, fostering a collaborative and informed approach to integrating AI in our field.