TOPcast Episode #145:
"More of the Human Element:" Dolly, Picard, Ray, Dede, and More

Kelvin: Calling all TOPcast listeners, please help us crowdsource the topic to address in the recorded live TOPcast session at the 2023 OLC Accelerate Conference. Please use the following short URL and share it with colleagues.

Get ready to write it down right now. Pause and then write this one down. Bit.ly, B-I-T-dot-L-Y/vote, V-O-T-E_topcastlive2023. That's bit.ly/vote_topcastlive2023. Please take a moment right now and quickly respond to the topic poll; share it with a colleague. We really appreciate it. Thanks. Here's the show.

(*Background Music*)

Narrator: When you realize what your future can be, you want to do it right. UCF Online offers more than 100 fully online programs, plus personalized support from success coaches, so you can get to the future that's right for you.

(*Musical Intro*)

Tom: From the University of Central Florida's Center for Distributed Learning…

Kelvin: And the University of Louisville's Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning…

Tom: I'm Tom Cavanagh.

Kelvin: I'm Kelvin Thompson.

Tom: And you are listening to TOPcast, the Teaching Online Podcast. Greetings, Kelvin.

Kelvin: Greetings, Tom. How's it going?

Tom: Good, good. Although I'll give fair warning, it is an afternoon in the summer in Central Florida where I'm sitting.

So, there may be the occasional flash and a boom. If you hear that in the background, do not be alarmed. It is just the weather. [Laughter]

Kelvin: I'm getting nostalgic now. [Laughter] Afternoon Florida hurricane, I mean thunderstorm. Hopefully, it stays at the thunderstorm level. Here's hoping.

I guess we should say to all of us, this episode will come out at a time that it will be appropriate for us to say, “Happy new school year!”

Labor Day's behind us. We're into it now, no matter when it started. Nobody hasn't started at this point probably.

Tom: Yeah. I was saying to somebody the other day in the office, "Gird your loins, the Ravening Hordes are coming soon." [Laughter]

Kelvin: The Ravening Hordes.

Tom: Soon they will be here, coming over the wall.

Kelvin: Great college mascot, we're the Ravening Hordes. [Laughter]

Tom: Yeah, but we love our Ravening Hordes. We appreciate them and want every single one of them to come here and succeed.

Kelvin: Yes, that is correct. Well, I see you partaking of beverage. Should I ask what you're drinking?

Tom: Sure. I've actually got an iced coffee today because it is summer in Central Florida, and it can get a bit warm out there.

Nothing like a refreshing afternoon iced coffee with a little, I know you don't like it, but a little vanilla flavor to spice it up.

Kelvin: Sure, yeah. I'm not opposed to flavors other than coffee, but sparingly, sparingly.

Tom: I didn't overdo it this time. Sometimes I have a tendency to overdo it.

Kelvin: A little coffee with your spice.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: Yeah, your froof. That's right. I am using my first use of my newest cup in the Kelvin's cup collection, the What Would Dolly Do mug. I got it down the road in Nashville, and the guy I got it from, he does all these caricatures of famous musicians. It has this Dolly Parton caricature on one side and What Would Dolly Do on the other side. He has all kinds of caricatures, artist sell stuff.

I'm like, I like a good story. I like the Dolly as a role model, or whatever, and very human thing. I am into starting my attempt at a connection, by the way. Part of it's in the mug and in the mug, is a single-origin Kenya, and it's something of a callback from the past, in that we've shared a coffee previously. You and I have shared it from the same coffee provider.

Rather than coming from some big, faceless company, this coffee comes to me from a colleague whose family roasted it onsite at their farm. This is part of the batch sent in by colleague and TOPcast listener, Leah Chuchran-Davis. I'll say the coffee is quite good. Can you find a connection to today's topic in my mug and/or description of the coffee?

Tom: Wow. I think it's a bit of a stretch, but if I can pull out a thread or two, you said that it's a coffee we've had before.

Kelvin: Yep.

Tom: It's like a callback to something we've done before, and so I know what we're talking about today.

Kelvin: I feel so seen. You're tuning into the Kelvin wavelength. [Sips coffee]

Tom: Yeah, yeah. That's probably as close as I'm going to get.

Kelvin: There's that, and the other bit is a bit in the negative space. It's like those optical illusion things in the psychology textbooks of is it a young lady with her hair up in a hat, or is it an older lady with her hair down? What is it?

In the negative space here, is there's a bit of a human element in the craft roasting on the Davis Farm and Dolly Parton, What Would Dolly Do human element. We want more of that. That's important even though we are talking today about…

Tom: Artificial intelligence.

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: Yeah, interesting. Ironically, there is an AI image generator named DALL-E.

Kelvin: That's true. Not to be confused with WALL-E, that's a Disney property. That's right.

Tom: I am a huge Dolly Parton fan. There's nobody more human than Dolly.

Kelvin: I would think.

Tom: Yeah. All right, so cool. We are going to talk about AI, and you may say, "But wait a minute, Tom."

Kelvin: Wait a minute, Tom.

Tom: You all talked about AI just a couple of months ago.

Kelvin: That's true.

Tom: That is true. We did, but guess what? We're not done talking about it. [Laughter]

Kelvin: Nobody is.

Tom: Nobody is, and this thing continues to evolve. I suspect if your school is anything like our schools, yours is talking about it on campus now too, and people are turning to you and asking questions. I was recently at the UPCEA Solar Conference done in collaboration now with DT&L up in Madison. I had a couple of minutes on the roundtable agenda, and I asked everybody, "Raise your hand if people on your campus are asking you what are we going to do about AI? How are we going to react to AI?"

It was like 99% of the people in the room raised their hand. Yeah, so it's a thing. I think we ought to be talking about it just as much. It's going to become something of probably a recurring theme, much like in years past we've used the Iron Triangle as a framing construct to talk about things. I think AI will be something that pops its little electronic head up every once in a while.

Kelvin: Yes, and it's going to be a little unusual for us because this month, we have a little packaged theme of the month here. We're going to have, here we are at the top of the month with the two of us talking about this topic of generative AI.

But the middle of the month episode right after this one, will be a guest interview-based episode in which we also talk about generative AI.

Tom: Yeah. We haven't done that much, if at all, where we've themed the month with the one at the top of the month, is on the same topic as the interview. I don't know if we can get our act together, maybe we'll do that more often. [Laughter]

Kelvin: It's hard. It is getting our act together, I don't know about that, but maybe. Maybe a place to start is just to pull that thread a little bit that you started on, there is just really continued activity across higher education regarding generative AI. We can hit some, but listservs, and blog postings, and articles, and papers, and conferences, and emails, smoke signals… [Laughter]

I will give one shout out to… I liked, I don't know when it was, it's maybe been a month or two now. Jeff Young wrote an article in which he has a couple of really good turns of phrase. I know one of them, he did not coin himself because he cited his source. But the two phrases I thought were quite evocative were "assignment makeovers" and "homework apocalypse," both in relation to generative AI in higher education. [Sips coffee].

Tom: Yeah. Well, Jeff has a way to turn a phrase, friend of the podcast. He's been on the podcast in the past.

Yeah. This whole idea of changing your assignments, changing your assessment strategies as a result of AI, is something everybody's grappling with right now. The idea of assignment makeover, homework apocalypse, what a name. [Chuckle]

Kelvin: I know, I know.

Tom: I think those are consistent with what everybody's feeling and dealing with right now. It doesn't feel like the ground is settled. I shared with you before we started, an email that literally just came out today as we're recording this in preparation for the start of our semester.

It's very long about stuff about AI, and it was sent from our Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, but it was prepared in collaboration with a lot of groups, including our group. It's just a lot to take in.

Kelvin: It is a lot. I think there are helpful opportunities. I found it helpful, even though I've tried to track this, and keep my fingers in trying things out personally, and watching the

headlines, and popping in now and again into resources. I participated, it must've been late May, early June, in this short course that UPCEA put together, what innovators need to know about generative AI.

That was facilitated by Dr. Ray Schroeder, and that was really helpful. I think he curated a lot of resources, and examples, and facilitated dialogue. That was really, I think more than anything else, driving individuals to be thoughtfully involved. Stay firsthand connected to the affordances and the constraints of generative AI, and so a lot of collegial dialogue.

There was a Zoom session, and an asynchronous discussion thing, and resource curation. That kind of stuff we probably need even more of.

Tom: Yeah. Well, and Ray's a great expert on that. Really, he's been into it not just since ChatGPT came out, but he's been tracking this stuff for a long time, and I think was well-positioned to be a thought leader when a year or so ago that this really came out widely with ChatGPT-3.

For what it's worth, shameless plug, Ray is going to be the keynote speaker for the Teaching with AI Conference that we're hosting this week as this podcast is released. Sorry if you're hearing about it for the first time, it's too late.

But we'll try and do this on maybe a regular basis, and I'm sure there'll be some publications or things that come out as a result of it.

Kelvin: I think it's great. It seems like everybody's jumping in that bandwagon. I don't mean that in a negative opportunistic sense. I just think there's just a lot to do, and so folks are seeing a need to step into a space. I signed up for this free conference that Stanford hosted and facilitated. It was a virtual conference called AI X Education Conference, and Chris Dede was the primary keynote person.

I think we've both been sharing little courses that we find that are free, and we're going to dump a bunch of these resources in our show notes. If you don't normally get to the show notes, this episode, dear listener, you should go. There'll be a bunch of stuff, and we need to just all continue to share and curate, but the Chris Dede thing I thought was not unlike Ray. He stays dialed in, and he made a couple of interesting comments that he said.

I didn't know this, but he claimed that the first real paper about AI and higher education came out in the early '70s. He said it was predicted that by the end of the '70s, faculty would just be replaced. [Laughter]

Tom: We've heard that before.

Kelvin: That came and went, right?

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: He was so good because early in his talk, he said that he has seen the hype cycle rise and fall, he said about nine or 10 times since then. Ehh? No, never mind.

He was like, "I'm going to try to bring a balanced view between the doom and gloom and the ardent champion." He had just real thoughtful constructs, and information, and reassuring voice.

We need folks like Ray and Chris Dede just bringing the longitudinal view. [Laughter]

Tom: Yeah. Definitely that perspective and don't panic, but also recognize that in some ways, this is a moment, and it's changing things. What's an appropriate response? It may be that it's dependent. The same response isn't going to be appropriate for everybody. Even within an institution, where the class you're teaching, or the way you plan to implement it.

There may be one other that I will mention, which is a course at Auburn called "Teaching With AI at Auburn." It's from the Biggio Center. I heard about it from Asim Ali there at Auburn, a friend of mine, and I would encourage people to check that out. I do think it's open to everyone if they wanted to sign up. I think it's got a nominal fee that just covers expenses.

Kelvin: There is a… as long as we're shouting out courses, I'm trying to remember who pointed me to this, but there is an open course from the University of Sydney in Australia, just called "AI in Education." It's a resource for students built by students to provide ways you can use generative AI productively and responsibly as part of your learning journey.

I thought that was an interesting angle. It's probably good for those of us in more administrative leadership roles or faculty roles, to see what students speaking to students about doing things well might say. We'll put all that stuff in the show notes.

Tom: Yeah, cool. Maybe the last one I'll say is that if you have LinkedIn Learning at your school, I know a lot of schools do, not everybody does, but those that do, there's a bunch of great intro "What is AI" courses in there that are worth watching.

They can be assured as a couple of minutes to as long as hours, depending upon the course that you're taking, learning paths or something. But I've been looking at some of those as well, just for my own personal knowledge.

Kelvin: But you mentioned a moment or two ago at our institutions, there's a lot of context. We were talking off mic about the fact that at each of our institutions, we're at some level of institutional dialogue, and decision-making, and framing.

Maybe it's useful just to, I don't know, briefly share what shape that's taking at each institution. You want to say a little bit about, besides your conference, what else is happening at UCF?

Tom: Yeah, sure. We're trying to lean into it, and I think much to our provost's credit, he's definitely leaning forward into the whole notion of AI and AI across the institution. I do want to give credit to our colleagues at the University of Florida, who've done a lot of really good work there. We've been a little bit inspired by some of what they've done. They were very early in thinking about AI across the curriculum, but I think we're right there with them as we're thinking about it.

Our provost has charged a group to think across three dimensions when it comes to AI. The first is how can AI be used in research? Our institution, like yours, is a research one (R1) institution. Research is a big deal. How can it help? How can it help in the process of applying for grants, and sponsored research, and other kinds of things? But just across the whole research enterprise, how can AI be used to improve things? That's the first one.

The second one is how can AI be used with faculty in the development and teaching of courses? How can it be used in instruction? But in my mind, that also includes actual production of courses and the production of content. But in his mind, he defined it as teaching. Research, teaching, and in the last area, is how do we teach students how to effectively use it? I think it goes back to something that you were involved in even before my arrival at UCF, which was the Information Literacy modules.

Kelvin: Yeah, yeah.

Tom: How can we teach students to be informationally literate? I think it's something similar here with AI. How do we teach them how to be literate with AI? How to make effective use of it, especially in the professions that they're going to be going into once they graduate.

What's an appropriate use? How's an effective use? Because that will actually differentiate them in the marketplace if they know how to use AI and don't get steamrolled by it when they become a part of the workforce, that is having to adapt to these tools just like higher education is.

Kelvin: Yeah. No, that's good. That's good. I think it is helpful when you have a big effort at a big university to try to… I don't know that simplify is quite the right word, but to render pithy and clear the relationship between several different constructs. You broke it down like you could research, teaching, student literacy, that's memorable, and it helps you hang your hat on it. We have a similar trajectory going on here at the University of Louisville.

I am maybe violating a principle by getting slightly ahead of our provost in that there is information as we speak, a university committee, but I've seen a draft of the in-development charge. I'm going to just describe the current shape of that charge as it plays out now. It's not quite as elegant, but the outlines are very similar, I would say, to what you described, Tom. There's really four things rather than three.

One is the articulation of a range of use cases across academics and student research, rather than you said, "Okay, here's the research part." A range of use cases that involves student research and academics more broadly. That's the first thing. The second thing is, and I like this framing, enhancement of teaching and learning, and trying to look for and pursue enhancement, rather than building a fortress wall or something.

I think even in the draft charge I saw, there's some examples, hints like personalization, stimulation of critical thinking, and so forth. Ethical considerations is the third item. Very, very important, just in articulation, what are the different directions that takes us consideration of ethics? It's beyond just don't use it, or it lies, or cite your sources. How do you flesh that out?

Then finally, similar to your last point, training and support needs of faculty, students, and staff, in appropriately using. This University of Sydney course by students for students using it. Well, what's needed and how do we get there? I think all of that's a lot. [Laughter] We're talking about this committee that hasn't begun yet, producing some kind of a report that gets at that stuff sometime in the spring semester.

We're in the fall semester, so we're talking about doing something in a handful of months. That's a lot to undertake.

Tom: Yeah, yeah. But good for all the schools I think that are taking it seriously, and not just sitting back, and waiting to let things happen to them, because that's going to help shape it I think as much as anything else. The ones that don't lean into it, I think are at risk of potentially suffering because you're not going to be able to shape it for the institutional context that you have.

But it's easy for me to say, because this is a cake that's still baking. We're not done with that task force, even though it's broad across the university and they've had a number of meetings and we've had representation on it, but I'm not sure that there's anything that's completely settled, yet. Even when it comes to policy and practice, I think there's just a set of if thens to help guide faculty to make some good decisions about the use of AI.

Kelvin: As you say, boy, that's challenging when the very environment that you're trying to shape and respond to, is changing constantly.

Tom: Yeah.

Kelvin: Very, very challenging task. It's not like there's a canon of done stuff that you're dealing with. It's constantly evolving, but I will maybe pull out something that I heard Chris Dede say. I won't be able to summarize it well. But he talked about, he had some kind of a summary phrase around this that I don't recall right now. But he talked about there's an assumption that if things are at this state today, it's only going to get more so, and he said that's not necessarily the case.

He said with things like artificial intelligence, you can get to a point and then other things happen. He used as an example, I think this has been widely reported, like, "ChatGPT, whatever, gets an 80% on this test, or whatever." A few months later, "It failed the test." The term there is like drift. There can be drift in the responsiveness, accuracy, whatever. Dede just said, "Just because you're on a trajectory, doesn't necessarily mean that trajectory's going to stay the way it is today."

You have to stay attuned in terms of knowing how this all fits. It is not a body in motion stays in motion.

Tom: Yeah. Well, you put me in mind of the Gartner hype cycle. I feel like we're in that right now when it comes to AI. At some point, we're going to hit that trough of disillusionment and we're going to have to see how it evolves to slowly become mainstream and whatever.

Having said that, I've played a little bit with the ChatGPT-4 in comparison to 3, and it is significantly better from my little just surface level testing. I can only imagine somebody who really knows what they're doing can really kick the tires.

I've seen the same articles. Apparently, ChatGPT can pass the freshman year at Harvard, and that ain't nothing.

Kelvin: I suppose. I can't not maybe pull out one other Dede plug. He had a construct that I really liked, and it has with it a very evocative simile metaphor. We've talked before about it seems like to me anyway and I think us, that the key forward in thoughtful, responsible use of generative AI in education, is really humans in the loop, the human element. Chris Dede in his talk in this conference, referred to intelligence augmentation.

Intelligence augmentation, that's really what you're shooting for. That's the benefit intelligence augmentation of humans, but only if humans bring more to the table, more human, more humanity. He used words like judgment and wisdom, that's the human side. We have to upskill in those areas, in order to partner effectively with generative AI. If we don't bring those things, then the end result will be that we de-skill, which is very interesting.

He uses this comparison, for the Star Trek fans out there, like Star Trek: The Next Generation Captain Picard has all this experience and wisdom and humanity. Commander Data is a human looking artificial intelligence that has calculation, and reckoning, and facts, and whatnot. But you need the two together, partnering effectively. Let Data do what data does, let Picard do what Picard does, and Picard's the one in charge. [Laughter]

Tom: That's interesting. That's a really great framing for it. I don't think it's at a much bigger scale and maybe was much more at stake, but it's not that far conceptually from the idea of just like the iPhone. The iPhone, I've heard it referred to as like a prosthetic brain. You carry it around in your pocket, and it contains the sum total of the world's knowledge that you can just look up at any point.

You don't have to memorize things; you don't have to memorize phone numbers. I can just ask my virtual assistant to call anybody in my contacts, and it just does it. I don't even have to do anything. It's still dependent upon me though, to take that action to decide who I should call. Maybe somebody is much better to call than someone else, but it can do all of that.

When we think about the idea of all of this information, I remember when these phones first came out, and working in higher ed and in online learning, that people were like, "Wow, what's going to happen to instruction? Because all the information that you need is in your pocket right now." But first of all, it's information overload. There's too much, and we still need the human, the expert to curate.

Then to your point about wisdom, to sense-make between what is important and why is important. What are these connections between things that maybe the bot isn't as good at? I think that's a really interesting framing, how can we partner with it as opposed to resist it, or just use it. There's a give and take that we may end up evolving into.

Kelvin: No, that's excellent. Do you want to try to put this plane on the runway and maybe we make a little time for a shameless plug?

Tom: Sure. I think you and I both agree, generative AI is not going anywhere in higher education. We're barely getting started with wrestling through the implementation issues necessary, so that we can use it well.

As online education professionals, we need to stay engaged in the institutional dialogue; make sure you're at the table.

Kelvin: That's right. I totally agree with that. Here's a shameless plug picking up from what we said before. This episode will be filled with links, I think, to all manner of resources, some of which we've given shout-outs to. But you know what? Every episode has show notes, including links to related publicly available resources, available in every podcasting app or platform on which you can find TOPcast. There's a way to get to these show note resources. Just drill down into the episode details from your app, or just go check out the public website at topcast.online.ucf.edu. It's topcast.online.ucf.edu. We curate these things, and this one should be chock-full of links. That'll be the new title of our podcast, “Chock full o'Links.” [Laughter]

Tom: [Laughter] Chock full o'Links. Maybe that's the newsletter, Chock full o'Links. [Laughter] Yeah, cool. Well, there is a Chock full o'Nuts coffee. That's a theme for us, right?

Kelvin: That's right.

Tom: Yeah. I doubt it's one that you drink, but that's all right. [Laughter] All right. Until next time, for TOPcast, I'm Tom.

(*Musical Outro*)

Kelvin: I'm Kelvin.

Tom: See you.