

Discerning AI: An Interdisciplinary, Cross-Campus, Community of Practice

Artificial intelligence is reshaping learning, teaching, and decision-making across society. At Marquette, growing experimentation with AI tools creates a need for structured opportunities to support ethical reflection and shared, responsible use. This presents a clear opportunity to lead in advancing mission-aligned, values-driven engagement with AI.

To address this opportunity, this project will launch *Discerning AI*, an interdisciplinary community of practice that brings together faculty, students, staff, and community partners to explore AI through the lens of ethical discernment. Rooted in the Jesuit tradition, discernment emphasizes reflective, context-sensitive decision-making oriented toward human dignity, justice, and the common good. Applying this framework to AI represents an innovative shift away from reactive or compliance-based approaches towards a proactive, values-centered model for teaching, using, and developing AI.

Discerning AI will convene collaborators from across STEM, the humanities, social sciences, education, communication, business, the health sciences, the library, and related fields, alongside students and external stakeholders, including regional technologists, educators, and nonprofit professionals. Through various collaborative activities, participants will surface shared challenges, develop novel pedagogical strategies, and explore new research directions in AI ethics and education. The Center for Data Ethics will serve as the central coordinating hub, leveraging its interdisciplinary mission and partnerships to organize activities, connect stakeholders, and position the initiative for future growth and external funding.

Discerning AI is innovative in three ways. First, it reframes a traditional “research community” as a Community of Practice (CoP), integrating research, teaching, learning, and public engagement outside traditional silos. Second, it centers student and community voices as co-creators of AI-related practices, rather than treating them solely as passive recipients of instruction or objects for policy enforcement. Third, it introduces discernment as a unifying framework for AI ethics, offering a distinctive, mission-aligned approach and positioning Marquette as a national leader in this space.

CoPs draw on the expertise and positionality of all members involved through discernment – in our case, to improve thought and action related to AI. During the year of funding, the CoP will undertake a series of interdisciplinary convenings, including campus workshops, reading groups, a student-focused forum, and a community-facing event. We will develop teaching modules, pursue new research directions, and engage community partners, while also exploring early-stage design concepts for an interactive Discerning.ai tool – modeled on scenario-based ethical engagement platforms such as MIT’s Moral Machine – that could support future teaching and public outreach activities.

The central goal of this pilot is to generate concrete, scalable outputs that position Marquette for long-term leadership in AI ethics, education, and community engagement through an innovative approach of involving researchers, educators students, and community partners. These may include:

- piloted teaching modules and curricular resources integrating discernment into AI-related courses;
- a proposal for an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor focused on AI, ethics, and human flourishing;
- a graduate, professional certificate in AI Ethics and Responsible Innovation;
- professional development programs for faculty, staff, and external partners on responsible AI use;
- a concept and initial prototype plan for the Discerning.ai interactive platform;
- and/or a white paper outlining Marquette’s distinctive approach to AI ethics and pedagogy.

Discerning AI is a sustainable, early-stage initiative with the potential to scale. By connecting stakeholders across campus and community, it will generate actionable outputs and lay the groundwork for future external funding. In doing so, Marquette can lead in shaping higher education’s response to AI, grounded in ethical discernment, human dignity, and the common good.