

Conversations on Discerning AI at Marquette: Summary Report

Summer 2026

Background

During Summer 2026, the Center for Data Ethics convened a series of informal conversations centered primarily within the College of Arts & Sciences to explore what it might mean for Marquette to engage artificial intelligence through the Jesuit practice of discernment. Invitations were extended to faculty who had previously expressed interest in participating in a proposed Arts & Sciences AI task force, as well as colleagues who had been actively engaged in AI-related teaching, research, curriculum development, faculty support, and other campus initiatives. While the initial focus was on Arts & Sciences, faculty and staff from across the university whose work intersected with these issues were also invited and welcomed into the discussions.

These conversations were prompted by several converging developments: the rapid expansion of generative AI on campus (and across higher education), renewed attention within the Catholic intellectual tradition to the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (including Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas*), and growing recognition across faculty and staff that Marquette has an opportunity to articulate a distinctive, mission-driven approach to AI. Rather than focusing primarily on institutional policies or technological adoption, the starting point of the discussions was to explore how Ignatian discernment might inform decision-making around AI in teaching, research, student formation, administration, and community engagement.

The meetings were intentionally designed as listening sessions. Rather than developing immediate recommendations, the goal was to surface existing work occurring across campus, identify common concerns and opportunities, and begin shaping a more collaborative vision for how Marquette might approach AI in ways that reflect its Jesuit mission and values.

Participants

Three virtual discussion sessions were held between late May and early June 2026, bringing together 25 faculty and staff with perspectives spanning numerous A&S departments in the humanities, social sciences, STEM disciplines, as well as from Raynor Library, the Graduate School, the Marquette Core Curriculum, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Center for the Advancement of the Humanities, and other campus groups and initiatives. The breadth of participation underscored the interdisciplinary nature of AI-related challenges for campus, while the conversations nonetheless coalesced around several common themes, detailed below.

Major Themes

1. AI is reshaping the entire university

Although teaching and learning occupied much of the discussion, participants repeatedly noted that AI is influencing nearly every aspect of university life. Examples included faculty and staff evaluation, promotion and tenure, student assessment, institutional research, administrative decision making, committee work, data governance, and the growing presence of AI in the everyday lives of faculty, staff, and students. Participants emphasized that AI should not be understood as a single institutional issue, but as a complex set of questions with different implications, levels of urgency, and appropriate responses.

Participants observed that approaches to AI are developing unevenly across the university, often with limited coordination across units. This has resulted in differing expectations, practices, and levels of support for faculty, staff, and students. Several participants also raised questions about the processes used to evaluate and deploy institution-wide AI tools, such as campus-wide Copilot licensing, including the significant financial investments involved and whether sufficient consideration had been given to appropriate use, data governance, and the broader ethical implications of these technologies. Collectively, these discussions underscored the need for a more coordinated, transparent, and mission-driven institutional conversation about AI.

2. Discernment should be a framework, not another AI policy

Participants consistently emphasized that Marquette should avoid framing AI primarily as a matter of technological adoption or policy compliance. Instead, they encouraged embracing the Ignatian tradition of discernment as a reflective process for evaluating how AI should – and should not – be incorporated into teaching, research, administration, and community engagement.

Rather than asking simply whether AI *can* be used, participants encouraged asking whether it *should* be used, under what circumstances, toward what human ends, and how its use shapes us as individuals and as members of society. This approach was viewed as a way to balance innovation with critical reflection, ensuring that decisions about AI remain grounded in Marquette's Jesuit mission and commitments to human dignity, justice, and the common good. Many participants suggested that this orientation represents a distinctive contribution Marquette could make to broader conversations about AI in higher education.

3. Existing efforts could be better coordinated

Participants repeatedly observed that substantial work related to AI is already underway across Marquette. Faculty, staff, and students are engaging AI through teaching, learning, research, curricular development, and administrative and operational work while also studying its broader societal implications. These efforts demonstrate considerable innovation and engagement across the university.

At the same time, participants noted that many of these activities have developed independently, with limited awareness of related work occurring in other departments or units. As a result, opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and institutional alignment are often missed. Participants expressed interest in creating more opportunities to connect colleagues across disciplines, share emerging practices and resources, and develop a more coherent institutional conversation around AI that reflects Marquette's mission and values.

4. Student formation and curriculum should remain central

Rather than focusing exclusively on AI literacy or prompt engineering, participants emphasized the importance of helping students develop ethical judgment about the use of AI. Students need opportunities to critically examine how AI affects learning, creativity, intellectual growth, and professional practice while also understanding the broader social and ethical implications of these technologies. Participants also emphasized that students themselves should be active participants in shaping these conversations, and that the university should support research that deepens understanding of these emerging issues.

Discussion of curricular innovation consistently returned to the importance of focusing on enduring human questions rather than rapidly changing technologies. Participants suggested exploring opportunities within the Marquette Core Curriculum, Discovery Tier themes, interdisciplinary certificates, and faculty development while ensuring that AI is situated within broader conversations about ethics, human flourishing, technological change, and civic responsibility.

Participants also recognized that different disciplines will engage AI in different ways, making it important to establish shared ethical foundations while allowing flexibility in implementation across academic fields.

5. Marquette has an opportunity to lead

Participants believed that Marquette's Jesuit mission provides a distinctive opportunity to contribute nationally to conversations about AI in higher education. They noted that some Marquette faculty and staff are already participating in – and, in some cases, leading – cross-institutional conversations as representatives of the university. However, these efforts are not always widely known or shared across campus, limiting opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and broader institutional impact. By connecting and supporting this existing work, Marquette could articulate a positive vision grounded in discernment, human dignity, justice, and the common good.

Participants also encouraged extending this work beyond the university through partnerships with schools, nonprofit organizations, healthcare systems, industry, and workforce development initiatives. They noted that many organizations are grappling with similar questions surrounding responsible AI adoption and would benefit from leadership rooted in ethical reflection. Several participants also highlighted the importance of considering the broader societal and environmental impacts of AI technologies, reinforcing the need for engagement that reaches beyond the campus community.

Next Steps

While these conversations were intentionally exploratory, several practical next steps emerged. Some concerns – particularly those involving teaching, learning, academic integrity, and assessment – require more immediate attention, while developing a broader framework for discernment, curricular integration, and institutional leadership will require more sustained collaboration and planning.

The recently funded *Discerning AI Community of Practice*, anchored in the Center for Data Ethics, provides an important foundation for convening and coordinating this work across the university.

- Launch and sustain the *Discerning AI Community of Practice* as a university-wide forum for bringing together faculty, staff, students, and community partners and advancing collaborative, mission-driven approaches to AI.
- Address immediate needs related to teaching, learning, academic integrity, and assessment by developing shared resources, faculty-development opportunities, and practical guidance responsive to different disciplinary contexts.
- Improve coordination and visibility across existing AI-related initiatives, research, and external engagements by systematically documenting and sharing work already underway, helping members of the Marquette community exchange expertise, identify collaborators, and learn from colleagues representing the university in cross-institutional conversations.
- Support interdisciplinary research into how AI affects individuals, communities, institutions, society, and the environment, and ensure that this scholarship informs Marquette's teaching, policies, and broader institutional approach.
- Explore curricular initiatives that integrate discernment, ethics, and human flourishing into AI-related education across disciplines, including within the Marquette Core Curriculum.
- Strengthen partnerships with other Jesuit institutions, community organizations, industry, and other external collaborators, building upon existing engagements to position Marquette as a leader in mission-driven approaches to AI.

The Center for Data Ethics will serve as the institutional anchor for advancing these priorities through the *Discerning AI Community of Practice*. This work will also require continued collaboration with the Center for the Advancement of the Humanities, Raynor Library, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Marquette Core Curriculum, academic departments, and other campus units, drawing upon their distinct expertise to develop a more connected and coherent university-wide approach.

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