Using GPTs as Learning Scaffolds in Community Colleges

Category: Teaching Tools | Published: January 27, 2026

By Dylan A. Bulseco, Ph.D.

SVP R&D, Institute for Future Intelligence

A Bloom's-Aligned Roadmap for Ethical, Rigorous AI Integration

Community colleges sit at the front line of educational transformation. We serve students with diverse academic preparation, complex life responsibilities, and strong ties to local workforce and community needs. At the same time, we are increasingly expected to prepare learners for a world where artificial intelligence is not optional, it is increasingly embedded across nearly every profession.

The challenge is not whether to use AI in community college classrooms, but **how to do so in ways that preserve rigor, support equity, and strengthen learning**.

My approach to using GPT-style tools is grounded in a simple principle:

AI should scaffold thinking, not replace it—and assessment must make that distinction visible.

This post offers a **Bloom's Taxonomy–aligned logic model** that community college faculty can use to integrate AI responsibly across courses, programs, and CTE pathways.

Why Bloom's Taxonomy Matters More Than Ever in the Age of AI

Large language models are very good at operating in the *lower* and *surface* levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. They can:

- recall information,
- summarize content,
- explain concepts fluently,
- and generate plausible examples.

This reality forces an important pedagogical shift:

If AI can perform a cognitive task instantly, that task alone should no longer be the primary evidence of student learning.

Bloom's Taxonomy gives us a shared, discipline-agnostic framework to:

- clarify *what* students are learning,
- align AI use with instructional intent,
- and design assessments that remain meaningful in an AI-rich environment.

Reframing AI's Role for Community College Contexts

In the classrooms and curriculum design work, GPTs are positioned as:

- **Co-developers**, not authorities
- **Reasoning amplifiers**, not answer engines
- **Scaffolds**, not substitutes

This framing is especially important in community colleges, where students may:

- lack confidence in academic discourse,
- struggle with entry-level barriers,
- or be returning to school after long gaps.

AI can lower *access barriers*—but **learning still happens when students make decisions, justify choices, and reflect on outcomes**.

A Bloom's-Aligned AI Assessment Logic Model

1. Remember & Understand (AI-Assisted, Transparent)

Appropriate AI Uses

- Summarizing readings
- Generating definitions or examples
- Translating complex language into plain language
- Asking clarifying questions

Instructor Role

- Normalize AI as a study aid
- Require citation or disclosure of AI use
- Emphasize accuracy checking

Assessment Focus

- Completion, not mastery
- Low-stakes quizzes
- Concept checks
- AI-supported study notes

At this level, banning AI often creates inequity. Guiding its use creates access.

2. Apply (Guided AI Use with Constraints)

Appropriate AI Uses

- Guiding students through worked examples
- Debugging code with explanation
- Applying formulas or procedures to new cases

- Generating practice problems

Instructor Role

- Provide structured prompts
- Require students to explain *why* steps were chosen
- Compare AI solutions to human reasoning

Assessment Focus

- Correct application **plus explanation**
- Short-answer justifications
- Lab notebooks or problem-solving logs

AI can help students practice—but they must still demonstrate transfer.

3. Analyze (Human Judgement Leads to Purpose)

Appropriate AI Uses

- Identifying patterns
- Offering alternative interpretations
- Highlighting missing variables or edge cases
- Generating comparison tables

Instructor Role

- Ask students to critique AI output
- Require comparison between AI-generated and student-generated analyses
- Make assumptions explicit

Assessment Focus

- Explanation of reasoning
- Error analysis
- Comparison and contrast tasks

- "What did the AI miss?" reflections

This is where AI use becomes visible—and critically evaluated.

4. Evaluate (AI Offering a Second Opinion)

Appropriate AI Uses

- Stress-testing arguments
- Checking logic for consistency
- Offering counter-arguments

Instructor Role

- Emphasize disciplinary standards
- Require evidence-based judgment
- Reinforce that AI has no de-facto authority

Assessment Focus

- Justified decisions
- Rubric-based critiques
- Peer review with AI comparison
- Ethical and contextual reasoning

Students learn to treat AI output something to be critiqued rather than an answer to accept. They must recognize that confidence and correctness are not the same.

5. Create (Human Intent, AI as a Tool)

Appropriate AI Uses

- Brainstorming ideas
- Drafting outlines
- Generating alternative designs

- Supporting iteration

Instructor Role

- Require documentation of the design process
- Emphasize originality in framing and synthesis
- Focus on decisions, not polished final products

Assessment Focus

- Design rationale
- Iteration history
- Reflection on AI's role
- Alignment with real-world constraints

Creation is where AI's value depends entirely on human judgment. AI provides the tools but human judgement provides the purpose and will ultimately determine what problems are solved with these tools.

What This Means for Community College Assessment

This approach supports:

- **Equity** – students with less prior academic capital gain structured support
- **Rigor** – higher-order cognition becomes the assessment focus
- **Transparency** – AI use is visible, discussable, and normal
- **Workforce alignment** – students learn how AI is actually used on the job

It also aligns naturally with:

- CURE-style research experiences
- CTE competencies
- Program-level learning outcomes
- Accreditation expectations around learning evidence

What to Avoid

- Blanket AI bans that are unenforceable and inequitable
- Assignments that assess only polished output
- Treating AI literacy as a one-time orientation topic
- Assuming students intuitively know how to use AI well

Closing Thought

Community colleges have always been innovators—responding quickly to workforce needs while centering access and student success. AI does not change that mission; it **clarifies it**.

When we align AI use explicitly to Bloom's Taxonomy, we protect rigor, preserve human agency, and give students something far more valuable than answers:

The ability to think, judge, and create in a world where intelligence is everywhere. It is important to embrace the idea that human intelligence is the guiding force for intent and purpose while AI provides the tools to help accomplish the tasks along the way.

© 2026, Dylan A. Bulseco, Ph.D., AI in Education Blog. All rights reserved.

This work is funded in part by NSF DUE 2300796, NSF ITE 2347375 and NSF DRL 2342700.