AI in Action: Using Innovative Tools to Enhance Digital Marketing Communications Courses

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Background

JMC 640 Campaigns in Digital Marketing Communications, Advertising, and Public Relations is a capstone level course where students apply knowledge and skills from previous classes to develop a campaign with an actual client.

In Spring 2024, twenty-two students enrolled in the course and the client for the semester was C You in the Major Leagues Foundation, a nonprofit founded by former KC Royals General Manager, Dayton Moore. The organization supports families in crisis in addition to funding youth baseball, education, and faith-based events throughout the greater Kansas City area and beyond.

Goals for the Program

While JMC 640 has consistently been an effective class for preparing students for roles in strategic communication, recent innovations in artificial intelligence have created new opportunities for incorporating dynamic technology into the Campaigns process. I recognized the potential of specific AI tools to enhance student research, organize data, improve collaboration, and offer greater audience insights. My ideal outcome was that students would explore and expand their knowledge of how to use AI tools, that we would discover which AI tools were most beneficial to the process, and that our client would benefit from the deeper insights uncovered by the students.

Implementations

As a result of receiving funds from a CTE course transformation grant, I was able to provide Campaigns students with access to two professional, subscription-based AI tools, FileGPT and CrawIQ.

FileGPT helps users build a custom knowledge base. Recognizing that one of the primary issues with AI is the lack of transparency and credibility about its source material, our class built our own "closed-loop" AI model where all input would be managed by the students and based on their own research. At the same time, the AI capabilities would allow the students to organize, summarize and find new connections in the data.

CrawIQ is an AI-powered audience research app that can be used to complement students' secondary and primary research. This tool was helpful in the analysis stage by aiding in the development of customer personas and customer journey mapping.

The images above feature segments of the collaborated plansbook that students created with AI tools listed above. They feature a Marketing by Objectives (MBO) page, a visualized plan for a mural the company could make, and an image of the class.

Student Outcomes

The plansbooks, created by the students and presented to our client, improved in quality compared to previous semesters. As shown in the images throughout the poster, these visuals reflect clear student engagement, strong designs, and useful marketing strategies for the client.
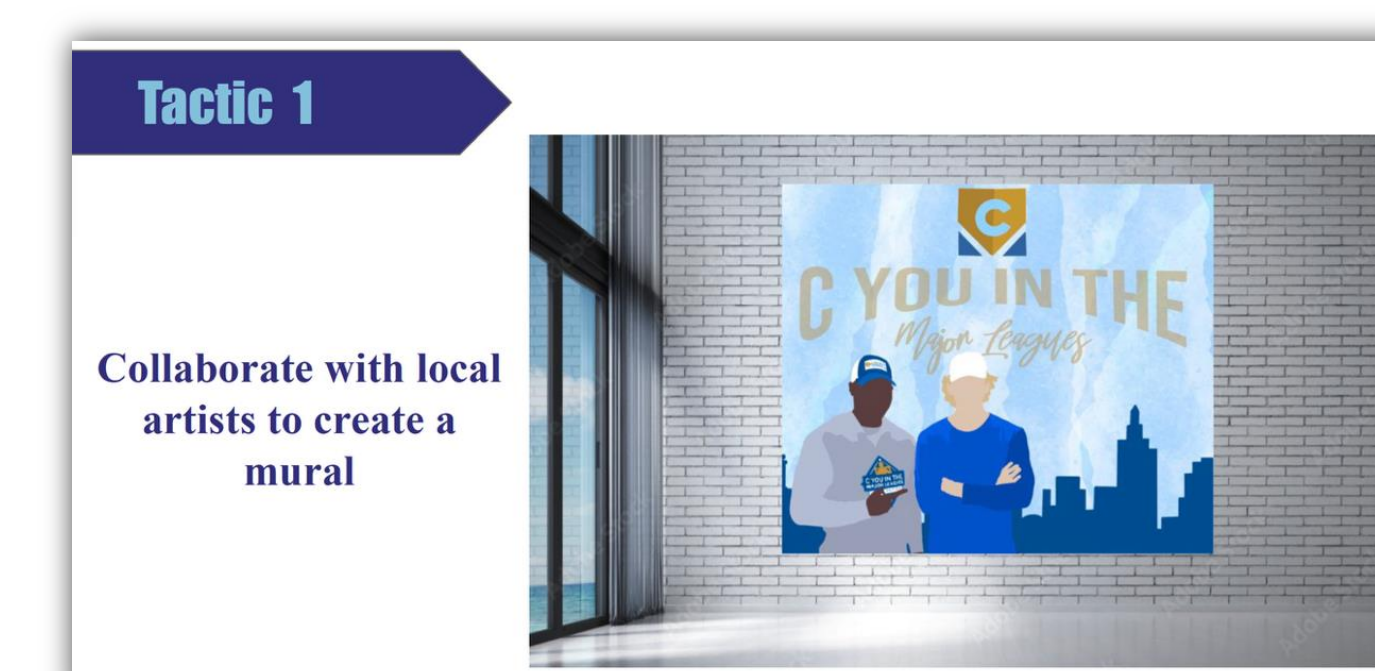
Students also reflected each week on their use of AI tools and the feedback indicates that the tools benefited their work in both the Campaigns class and their other courses.

Reflections

Overall, this was a positive experience. As a benefit of introducing the paid tools, I found that students became more comfortable with exploring additional AI tools such as Perplexity. I also found that student groups in the class were more open and collaborative than in previous semesters as they shared what they were finding. The AI tools helped them to know what their classmates were finding in their research, and that promoted better in-person conversations in the classroom.

I am continuing to incorporate the use of specific AI tools into the Campaigns course, and am informing students about when and where they can be used in the research process. I am also being more intentional about creating opportunities for collaboration between student groups, both in digital and in-person spaces.