

August 2023

Generative AI and Opportunities for Feminist Classroom Assignments

Sarah F. Small
University of Utah, sarah.small@utah.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Technology Commons](#), and the [Other Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Small, Sarah F. (2023) "Generative AI and Opportunities for Feminist Classroom Assignments," *Feminist Pedagogy*. Vol. 3: Iss. 5, Article 10.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/feministpedagogy/vol3/iss5/10>

This Critical Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@CalPoly. It has been accepted for inclusion in Feminist Pedagogy by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CalPoly. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@calpoly.edu.

Generative AI and Opportunities for Feminist Classroom Assignments

Cover Page Footnote

The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and Dr. Christopher Keyes for regularly discussing AI's development with me.

Generative AI and Opportunities for Feminist Classroom Assignments

With the recent popularization of ChatGPT, many educators have been wringing their hands about students using generative artificial intelligence (AI) to complete assignments and, in turn, how instructors ought to surveil students' work (Lo, 2023). Generative AI tools can create text, images, or music based on input parameters. ChatGPT provides text output based on a prompt, but several other generative AI programs are becoming increasingly accessible. Many students may use ChatGPT in their coursework: generating answers to tests or writing assignments in lieu of writing themselves. While this is concerning on some levels, rather than resisting the coming tide, educators can see this improved accessibility of generative AI as an opportunity to reshape their class assignments in feminist ways. I share two processes for educators to intentionally engage with ChatGPT and adopt feminist assignments.

I discuss these approaches through my lens as an economics instructor in the United States. Mainstream economics has largely not adopted the thinking of feminist economists (Pearse, et al., 2019). Therefore, the introduction of feminist pedagogy with the popularization of ChatGPT presents especially disruptive opportunities in the field.

1. Using ChatGPT with a Critical Lens: Examining Knowers and Knowledge Creation.

ChatGPT and other AI models analyze existing data to inform their content creation, which presents opportunities to amplify existing biases. This has raised alarms among feminist scholars for decades (Adam, 1995, D'ignazio & Klein, 2020). For instance, Bolukbasi et al. (2016) find that a generative model trained on a large corpus of text from the internet demonstrated gender bias in its text generation. Other scholars have shown that the groups of researchers developing AI lack diversity and, thus, impart Western, white, and patriarchal value systems on their technology (Prabhakaran, et al., 2022).

ChatGPT is not devoid of these issues: it pulls from a multitude of web sources and currently rarely cites sources nor acknowledges biases. Instructors may use this as an opportunity to challenge their students to be more explicit about knowledge creation and more aware of feminist epistemology and standpoint theory (Ashton & McKenna, 2020). Though citation politics can be used to reproduce hierarchies within the academy, conscious citation can also be a feminist avenue of resistance that demonstrates engagement with authors and voices we want to elevate (Mott & Cockayne, 2017).

For example, an economics instructor may develop an assignment that asks students to use ChatGPT to define a term or measurement that has competing definitions within the field. For instance, feminist economists, Marxists, and historians of economic thought have indicated that the terms 'work,' 'productivity,' and 'economics' are not straightforward and often biased toward mainstream economic thinking (Backhouse & Medema, 2009, Mohun, 2002, Nelson, 1995). When one asks ChatGPT how economists define 'work,' it replies with a paragraph or two explaining the term (See Figure 1). Students could enter such a prompt, or experiment with rephrased prompts as in Figure 2, then critically examine ChatGPT's generated paragraphs by (1) working to provide appropriate citations, then (2) reflecting on the positionality of the scholars which they cite. More specifically, instructors might challenge students to think about why an

individual economist or group of economists researched this topic: are their social locations relevant? Who else has written on these works and how are their perspectives different? Why might one definition be favored in the mainstream and who benefits from that definition's privileged status?

Relatedly, if such an assignment also prompts instructors to think more deliberately about whose ideas are being presented in class, it may challenge us to introduce plurality and diversify our syllabi (Harris et al., 2020). Ultimately, encouraging students to critically cite ChatGPT's work has the potential to demonstrate the program's imbedded biases and nip amplification of such biases in the bud. Students will use ChatGPT, so it is up to educators to encourage them to use it critically: highlighting data and algorithmic biases within AI is one step toward minimizing reproduction of bias knowledge hierarchies.

2. Working in Tandem With ChatGPT: Encouraging Reflexivity and Community Engagement

Scholars in feminist pedagogy have encouraged self-reflexivity in classrooms and have insisted curricula become more connected to lived experiences, especially of those who have been historically excluded from the academy (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993). Namely, feminists have argued that teaching without reflexivity can spur an alienating curriculum or maintain systems of oppressive epistemology. Instructors should instead encourage students to integrate personal experiences with scholarly knowledge (Geerts, 2019).

In my time as a student and educator in economics, I have rarely seen assignments that ask students to reflect on how economic policies or phenomena connect to their personal experiences or that of their loved ones. However, such opportunities abound. For example, ChatGPT could provide students information about trends in trade or globalization, but it cannot describe (1) a personal connection to global trade (e.g. how it has shaped one's education, career, or migration choices) nor (2) a self-reflexive account of how and individual or their particular social location (race, class, gender, geography) might disproportionately accrue the benefits or harms of globalization. Crawley et al. (2008) offer specific suggestions on how instructors might incite reflexivity and may be worth referencing when developing questions for students' reflection.

Instructors might also develop an assignment encouraging learning from community members. For instance, an economics assignment could ask a student to interview a friend, family member, or coworker on their experiences in a specific occupation or industry, then evaluate responses in light of course content. Instructors could encourage the use of ChatGPT to help students develop background knowledge and still make space for hands-on learning community connection (Manicom, 1992). Interviewing may improve learning outcomes (Roulston, 2012), and feminist economists argue that qualitative methods are undervalued in economics (Tejani, 2019), so exposing students to this way of knowing could be transformative for the discipline.

Asking economics students to incorporate lived experiences alongside ChatGPT might challenge them to consider how market institutions have shaped their preferences (Bowles, 1998)

and to consider their role in economic systems that produce inequities (Darity, 2022) in ways that ChatGPT alone cannot do. Generative AI is not able to speak to students' (or students' loved ones) perspectives and experiences. For this reason, privileging individual and community voices as ways of knowing may become central to education the wake of generative AI as it is central to feminist pedagogy (Webb et al., 2002) and provides opportunities for instructors to highlight the clear limits of generative AI.

Questions Going Forward

The popular introduction of ChatGPT could usher in an era of antifeminist pedagogy: concerns over its use may lead to heavy surveillance of students, which comes with unequal outcomes (Logan, 2021) and is not inclusive nor nurturing. Still, instructors must revamp student assessments to contend with radical changes brought on by AI. I believe, if we continue to brainstorm approaches like those I have outlined above, our educational responses to generative AI can be transformative in feminist directions.

Given the socioeconomic shifts that will likely occur from generative AI (Felten et al., 2023), I am optimistic that instructors will help students' embrace use of AI with both a critical feminist lens and with an openness to novel forms of knowledge creation.

References

- Adam, A. (1995). A feminist critique of artificial intelligence. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2(3), 355-377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068950020030>
- Allen, K. R., & Farnsworth, E. B. (1993). Reflexivity in teaching about families. *Family Relations*, 43(3), 351-356. <https://doi.org/10.2307/585566>
- Ashton, N. A., & McKenna, R. (2020). Situating feminist epistemology. *Episteme*, 17(1), 28-47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/epi.2018.11>
- Backhouse, R. E., & Medema, S. G. (2009). Retrospectives: On the definition of economics. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 23(1), 221-233. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.23.1.221>
- Bolukbasi, T., Chang, K. W., Zou, J. Y., Saligrama, V., & Kalai, A. T. (2016). Man is to computer programmer as woman is to homemaker? Debiasing word embeddings. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 29(1), 4356-4364. ISBN: 978-1-5108-3881-9
- Bowles, S. (1998). Endogenous preferences: The cultural consequences of markets and other economic institutions. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 36(1), 75-111. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2564952>.
- Crawley, S. L., Curry, W. H., Dumois-Sands, J., Tanner, C., & Wyker, C. (2008). Full-contact pedagogy: Lecturing with questions and student-centered assignments as methods

- for inciting self-reflexivity for faculty and students. *Feminist Teacher*, 19(1), 13-30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40546071> .
- Darity Jr, W. A. (2022). Position and possessions: Stratification economics and intergroup inequality. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 60(2), 400-426. <https://DOI.org/10.1257/jel.20211690>
- D'ignazio, C., & Klein, L. F. (2020). *Data Feminism*. MIT press. ISBN: 9780262547185
- Felten, E. W., Raj, M., & Seamans, R. (2023). Occupational Heterogeneity in Exposure to Generative AI. *Available at SSRN 4414065*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4414065>
- Harris, J. K., Croston, M. A., Hutti, E. T., & Eyler, A. A. (2020). Diversify the syllabi: Underrepresentation of female authors in college course readings. *PLoS One*, 15(10), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239012>
- Lo, C. K. (2023). What is the impact of ChatGPT on education? A rapid review of the literature. *Education Sciences*, 13(4), 410. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040410>
- Logan, C. (2021). Toward abolishing online proctoring: Counter-narratives, deep change, and pedagogies of educational dignity. *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, 1(20).
- Manicom, A. (1992). Feminist pedagogy: Transformations, standpoints, and politics. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 17(3), 365-389. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1495301>
- Mohun, S. (2002). Productive and unproductive labor: A reply to Houston and Laibman. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 34(2), 203-220. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0486-6134\(02\)00116-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0486-6134(02)00116-X)
- Mott, C., & Cockayne, D. (2017). Citation matters: Mobilizing the politics of citation toward a practice of 'conscientious engagement.' *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24(7), 954-973. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1339022>
- Nelson, J. A. (1995). Feminism and economics. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9(2), 131-148. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.9.2.131>
- OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT (Mar 14 version) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com/chat>
- Pearse, R., Hitchcock, J. N., & Keane, H. (2019). Gender, inter/disciplinarity and marginality in the social sciences and humanities: A comparison of six disciplines. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 72, 109-126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.05.007>

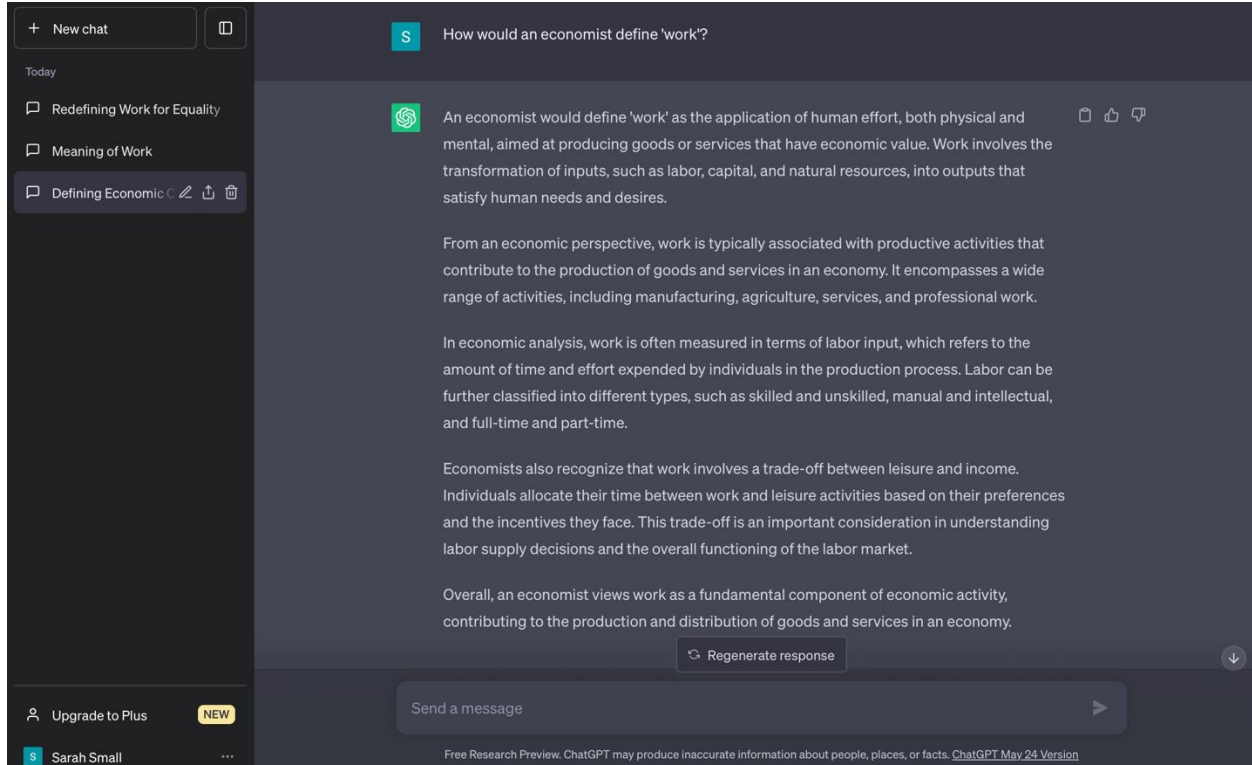
Prabhakaran, V., Mitchell, M., Gebru, T., & Gabriel, I. (2022). A human rights-based approach to responsible AI. *arXiv preprint*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2210.02667>

Roulston, K. (2012). The Pedagogy of Interviewing. *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* (61-74). Edited by Jaber F. Gubrium, James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti & Karyn D. McKinney. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403>

Tejani, S. (2019). What's feminist about feminist economics?. *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 26(2), 99-117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350178X.2018.1556799>

Webb, L. M., Allen, M. W., & Walker, K. L. (2002). Feminist pedagogy: Identifying basic principles. *Academic Exchange*, 6(1), 67-72.

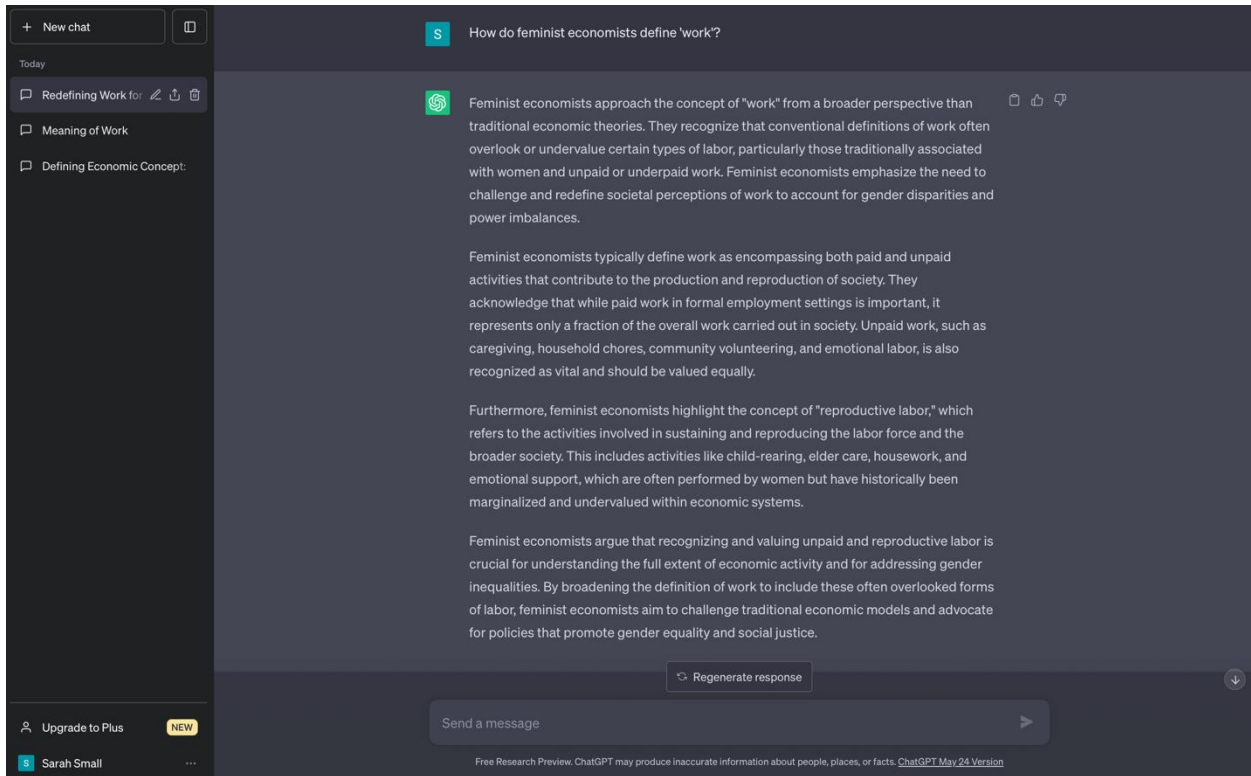
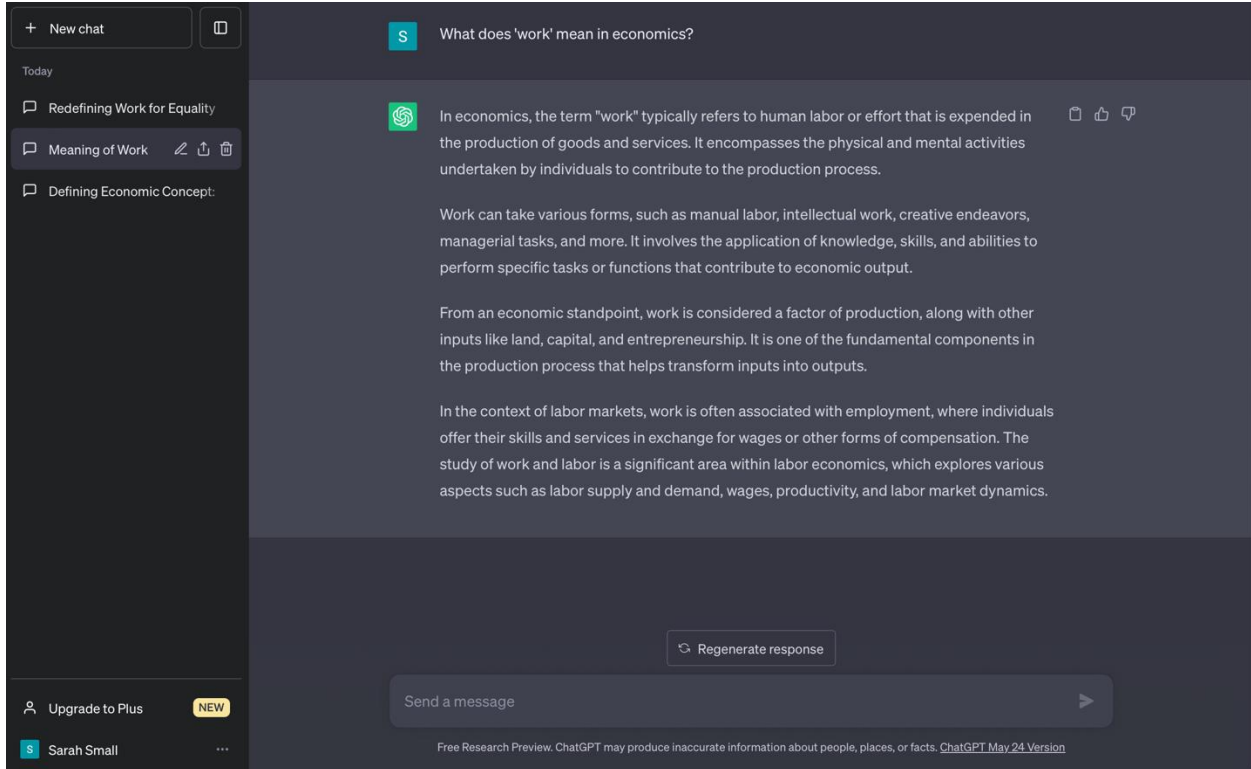
Figure 1. Screen Shot of ChatGPT Responding to Prompt About Economists' Definition of 'Work'



Note: Prompt entered in June 2023 using the open access version of OpenAI's ChatGPT May 24 Version.

Source: OpenAI (2023).

Figure 2. Screen Shots of ChatGPT Responding to Varied Prompts About the Definition of ‘Work’



Note: Prompt entered in June 2023 using the open access version of OpenAI's ChatGPT May 24 Version.

Source: OpenAI (2023).