FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 3, 2024

The University of Akron's 8th Annual NEXT Conference: "Bridging Pedagogy and Innovation—AI and Beyond"

Akron, Ohio— The University of Akron presents the 8th annual NEXT (New Explorations in Teaching) conference, a premier gathering for faculty, educators, and industry leaders to explore the future of education through artificial intelligence (AI), lifelong learning, and community engagement.

On November 1, attendees will engage in presentations, workshops, and discussions that help define the impact of artificial intelligence in both teaching and learning.

Featured Presentation: "From UA to AI"

This year's featured presentation, "From UA to AI," will be delivered by David Smetters, founder and CEO of Respondus and a proud University of Akron graduate. While many in education are familiar with Respondus' tools, like LockDown Browser and Monitor, not as many know that Smetters has been a pioneer in educational technology since the 1990s.

Smetters will be exploring the evolution of edtech—from personal computers to AI— showing how AI's impact on education will likely be gradual and driven by solving specific problems. He'll also share how Respondus uses AI, how to evaluate "AI bias," and why universities remain key to technological innovations with AI.

Industry Panel: "Navigating the Future Workforce—The Imperative of AI Skills for Students"

In addition to the keynote presentation, the conference will host a special employer panel: "Navigating the Future Workforce: The Imperative of AI Skills for Students." This session will feature industry experts including:

- **Ben Levicki**, AI Solutions Architect, Cleveland Cavaliers
- **Larisa Popadiuk**, R&D Associate Director, Sherwin-Williams Company
- **Neil Singh**, Technology Executive, ISSQUARED, Inc.
- **Kate Spector**, 1848 Ventures

The panel will provide insights into the growing demand for AI proficiency across various sectors, helping faculty understand how AI competency is critical for student success in today's workforce. This discussion aims to inspire educators to integrate AI education into their curricula, ensuring that students are equipped with all the skills needed to excel in the emerging job market of the future.

Breakout Sessions: Bridging Pedagogy and Innovation

36 sessions presented by 29 universities will explore diverse topics, such as:

- **Integrating AI in Teaching and Learning**: How AI enhances classroom activities, lab courses, and student engagement across Bloom's Taxonomy.
- **AI and Instructional Design**: The evolving role of AI in course design, reflective practice, and in supporting neurodiverse-learners through Universal Design for Learning.
- **AI Tools and Techniques**: A practical dive into AI applications, including 20 AI tools in 20 minutes, crafting effective prompts, and using chatbots in STEM education.
- **AI for Student Empowerment and Support**: AI as "tutor," student-led AI initiatives, and generative-AI fostering critical thinking and creativity.
- **Ethical Considerations in AI**: Addressing the ethical use of AI and examining its future implications for higher ed.
- **AI in K12 and Higher Education**: Tailoring AI strategies for K-12 and higher education, adapting AI models to various educational contexts.

The NEXT conference is more than an event—it is a community of educators that are committed to creating an inclusive and innovative future in education. We invite you to join us on November 1, at The University of Akron, as we explore the intersection of pedagogy and innovation in shaping the future of teaching and learning.

For more information and to register for the conference, visit http://uakron.edu/NEXT

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