10th ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM FOR RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS

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RED

Research. Education. Development.

What We Currently Know About AI and Research Grant Proposals and Grant Administration (as of November 13, 2025)

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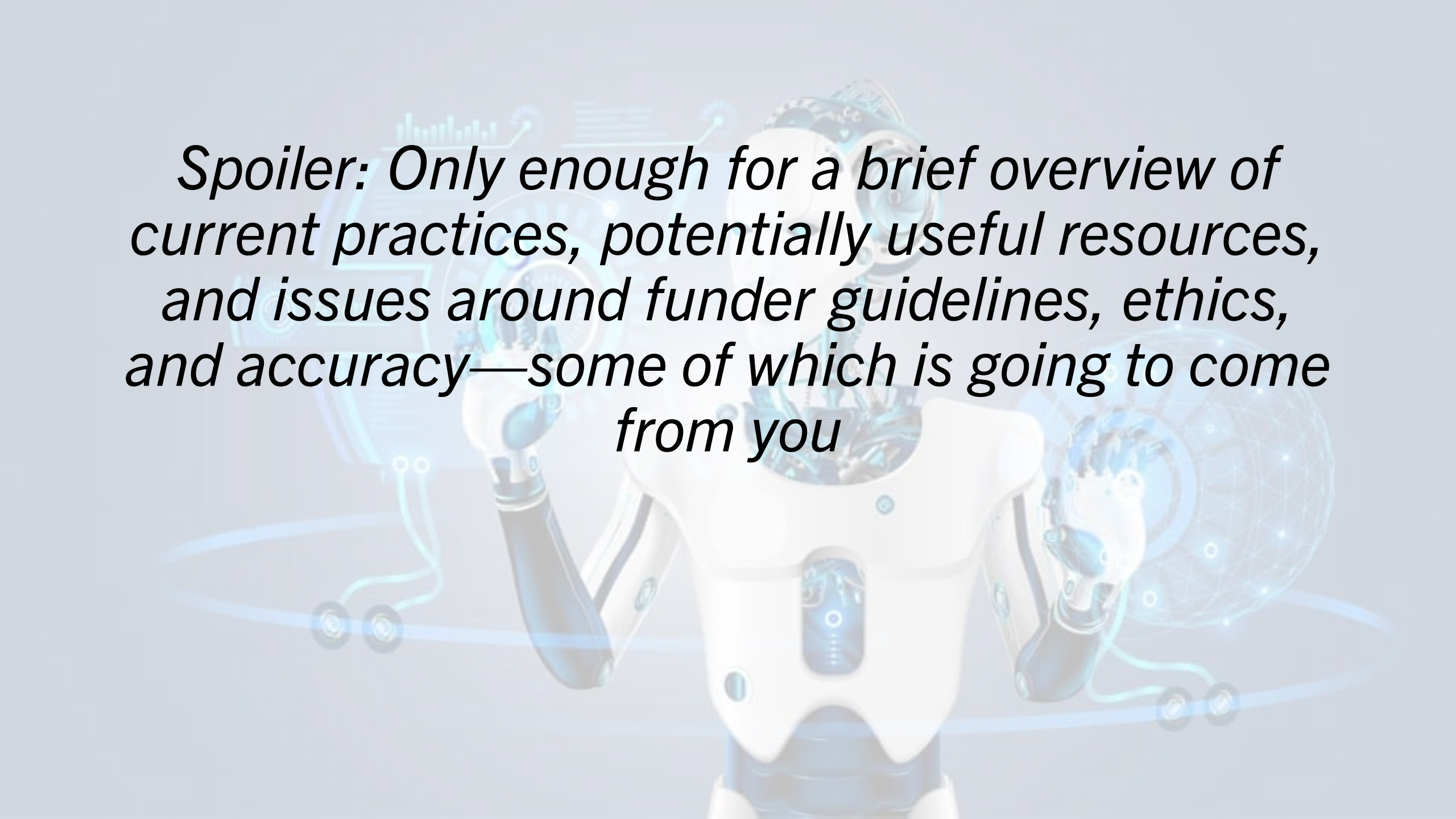

Spoiler: Only enough for a brief overview of current practices, potentially useful resources, and issues around funder guidelines, ethics, and accuracy—some of which is going to come from you

Questions (we'll return to these later)

- Do you use AI in your research admin work?
- If you use it, what do you use it for? How has your experience been?
- If you are thinking about using it, what problems would you like it to solve?
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AI in grant writing and editing

Likely that basically all PIs are using it, especially for formulaic sections or brainstorming. **Many people love it.** BUT:

Generative AI routinely generates errors.
A human (the PI) must review *anything*
created by AI for a grant proposal

- Right now, we do not use it for editing. That could change—IF training the AI is worth the time spent to train it.
- We do use PerfectIt & custom macros in Word. **Currently enrolled in AI for Editors course (aiforeditors.com)**

Problems with AI-generated text

Generative AI does not “write” or reason. It is a “stochastic parrot.” (See Emily Bender & Alex Hanna, *The AI Con*)

- Text is generated based on probability
- **The term “hallucination” is misleading. There is no difference in process between right and wrong**
- Nonexistent citations, flawed summaries & abstracts, invented details

“LLMs…don’t have a genuine understanding of the subject matter. Misinterpreting the outputs of LLMs as anything more than this will lead users to attribute meaning and intent where none exists, amplifying false information and reinforcing biases.”

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/llms-stochastic-parrots-raghu-murali-z1qfe

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

- NIH uses technology to detect AI-generated content in proposals
- They found evidence that use of AI tools enabled one PI to submit *more than 40 distinct applications in a single submission round*
- (July 2025) Announced new rule of no more than six (6) applications from an individual in a calendar year
- Peer reviewers are prohibited from using AI for their critiques

"NIH will not consider applications that are either substantially developed by AI, or contain sections substantially developed by AI, to be original ideas of applicants."

"[I]f you use an AI tool to help write your application, you do so at your own risk."

National Science Foundation (NSF)

Wait-and-see approach

- NSF is “examining use of gen-AI in proposal preparation”
- Will say more about AI in proposal preparation in the next version of the PAPPG (2025?)
- Like NIH, prohibits reviewers from uploading content to “non-approved” gen-AI tools as a violation of confidentiality

“Proposers are encouraged to indicate in the project description the extent to which, if any, generative AI technology was used and how it was used to develop their proposal.”

NSF sample text

The PIs used the GenAI-powered **[list of GenAI tool(s)]** to research existing ideas. To maintain proposal integrity and authenticity, unique ideas were not generated by AI technology. In all cases, the PIs take full responsibility for the intellectual merit, innovation, and content of this proposal.

Spencer Foundation

- Applicants may use AI across all aspects of the grant process—but must check a box and disclose use
- Spencer distinguishes between "assistive" and generative AI
- Like federal funders, Spencer prohibits gen-AI use by reviewers

"Applicants and grantees are required to disclose the use of generative AI within their letters of intent, pre-proposals, full proposal submissions, and progress reports."

Spencer Foundation disclosure

"During production of this work, the author(s) utilized [NAME OF TOOL], in order to help with the creation of this [LETTER OF INTENT, PRE-PROPOSAL, PROPOSAL OR PROGRESS REPORT]. Generative artificial intelligence was used to [DESCRIBE WHERE, HOW, AND WHY GENERATIVE AI WAS USED]. The author(s) reviewed the created content produced by this generative AI Tool and assert the content within this document is factually accurate and free of plagiarism. The author(s) take full responsibility for the submitted document."

Low-risk, high-value gen-AI uses in the preparation stage

Focus on quality over quantity. Small tasks = better

- Literature scan/synthesis
- Formatting bio sketches, references
- Converting reviewer feedback into revision plans
- Plain language summaries; shortening proposal to meet length requirement
- Data analysis
- Creating budget templates
- Improving readability

Can AI help with the many tedious, complicated, repetitive, bureaucratic tasks common to grant management?

Maybe…

New University of Idaho Sponsored Programs project AI4RA

(NSF, $4.5 million)

Goal: To significantly enhance post-award research administration

Check out their website for lots of resources

NCURA conference presentation

by U of Idaho team in early November

“How properly implemented AI can dramatically reduce processing times for routine tasks while maintaining compliance and security standards.”

TaMPER Framework

Task, Model, Prompt, Evaluation, and Reporting

To execute a secure, reliable, and scalable practice every time you implement an AI tool

https://arxiv.org/abs/2504.01037

Prompts:

A “prompt” is the instruction that you give the AI tool. The quality of an AI’s output depends on the quality of your prompt.

Role: Tell the AI exactly who it should be. *“Act as a university compliance officer.”*

Context: Provide the necessary background information. *“…you’re reviewing a new grant award from the National Science Foundation.”*

Task: Give a clear, specific instruction. *“…identify all sub-award requirements and reporting deadlines.”*

Format: Specify how you want the answer structured. *“…present the information in a table with two columns: ‘Requirement’ and ‘Deadline’.”*

AI4RA tool in development: Vandalizer

(yes, that's the real name)

- AI management tool designed specifically for RA workflows
- Created bc commercially available products don't really work
- "One might coordinate a workflow where Vandalizer 1) extracts the deadline dates from a Research Funding Announcement, then 2) formats these deadlines into a table with the deadlines in chronological order."
- Vandalizer Wiki

UW rules

“You may not enter any sensitive, restricted or otherwise protected data into any generative AI tool or service unless it has undergone appropriate internal review.”

This includes **“Material under confidential review, including research papers and funding proposals.”**

AI workslop: Bad work output that creates more work for others. Makes colleagues lose trust and respect for the workslopper

See: Harvard Business Review, "AI Workslop is Destroying Productivity“ (Sept 22, 2025)

- Multiple nearly-identical cover letters in response to job posting
- Social media post with wrong research results
- Meeting transcription filled with errors and inventions

MIT’s The State of AI in Business 2025 . 95% of AI initiatives failed to create profit

Ethical issues: Plagiarism, deskilling, job loss, even more employee/citizen surveillance, loss of literacy and cognitive abilities, work and social behavior used without consent to train AI, huge environmental impact, experience not living up to marketing hype, new forms of emotional and financial manipulation, financial bubbles, chatbot emotional dependence, AI-induced psychosis, teenage suicide, new kinds of digital abuse/trolling/harassment, fabricated political and social media content, loss of ability to verify truth or accuracy of online content, destruction of artist and writer careers, destruction of media and information website revenue streams, need to justify multibillion-dollar stock valuations with hype and exaggeration, "invisible armies" of low-paid workers who train AI and moderate horrifying content, yet another overly complicated digital "tool" that makes work less—not more—efficient, bait-and-switch profit models (offer product for free, get everyone hooked/dependent, then charge $$$), Google getting more useless by the day…

Does AI provide benefits that justify these problems?
Where/when is AI an appropriate technology?

Discussion & questions

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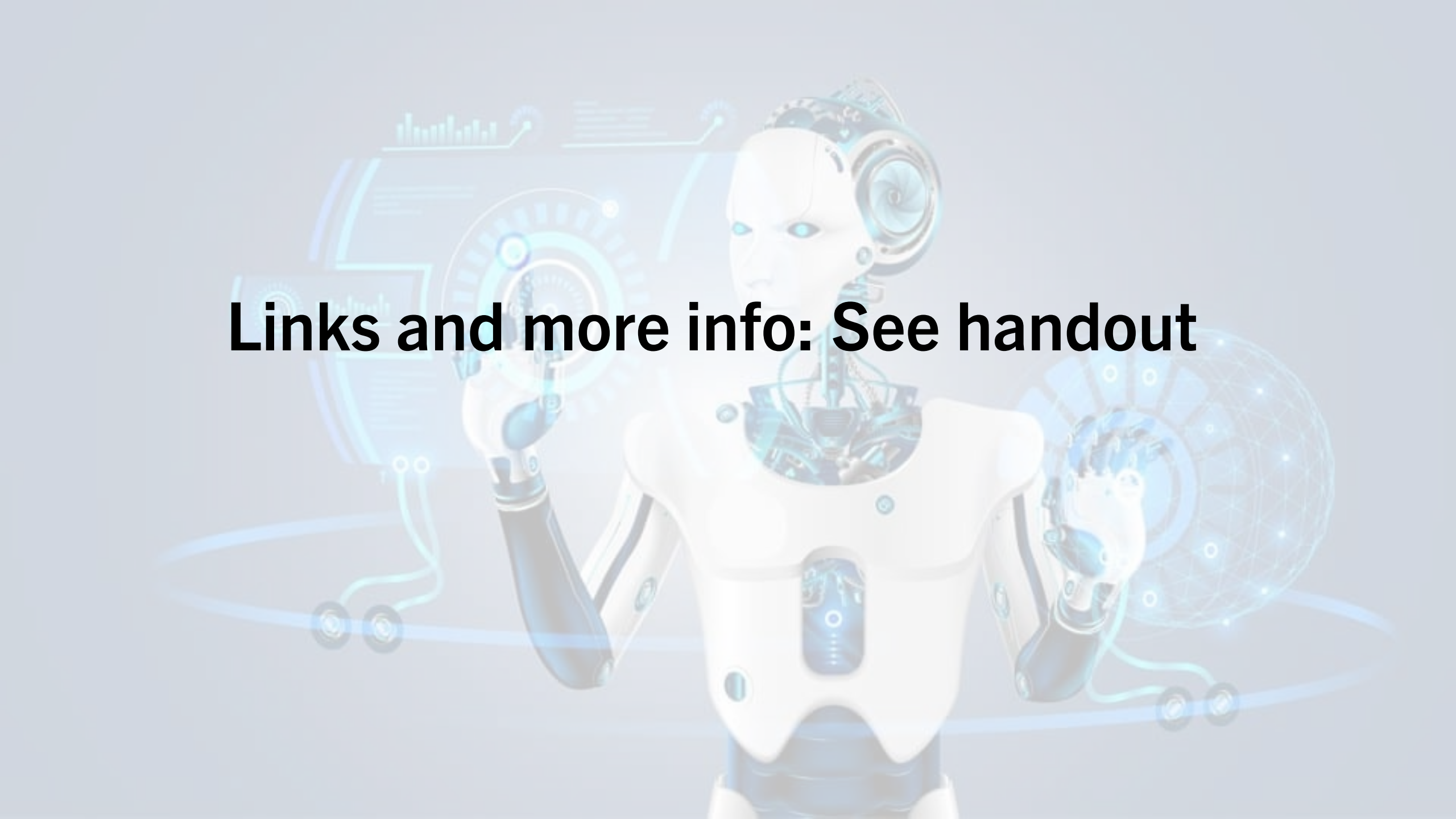

Links and more info: See handout

Thank you!

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