

Course-Level AI Assistant for Higher Education, Built Directly
by Faculty and Grounded in Their Own Course Materials



A marketing professor turns her course materials into an assistant students can reach any time

Six AI teaching assistants for one university professor, each grounded in her own course materials and answering in her own voice, with no developer or IT team involved at any point.

6

Personal AI teaching assistants,
one per course

~100

Students reached in a typical
semester

0

Developers or IT staff involved

1

Faculty member behind every
voice

THE CHALLENGE

Questions at any hour, answers on a delay

An undergraduate in Principles of Marketing works through an assignment at midnight. A graduate student in the online M.S. in Digital Marketing program checks a course policy before a deadline the next morning. Their professor would otherwise be the one answering both, across six different courses, whenever she found the time.

Her courses are fully asynchronous, so a student could be working at any hour, on any day. The answer to a question almost always existed somewhere, in a syllabus, a reading or an assignment brief she had already written, but reaching it meant email, Zoom, phone or D2L chat, and a wait until she was available. A generic assistant trained on nothing in particular would have been no better than a search engine. What she wanted was something that knew this exact course and answered the way she would.

WHAT GOT BUILT

Six assistants, one per course.

Two for sections of Consumer Behavior, and one each for Social Media, Principles of Marketing, Special Topics in Digital Marketing, and Digital Marketing Ethics.

Embedded where students already look.

Pinned to the top of the D2L announcements page, and placed inside a course module too.

Configured to sound like her, not a bot.

Each one tuned to feel like an extension of the course, consistent with how she presents material in class.

Updated the way she updates a syllabus.

Reviewed before each course begins, materials re-uploaded by hand whenever something changes.

THE REQUIREMENTS

Five things Dr. Price-Rhea would not compromise on

- 1 It had to sound like her, not generic.
- 2 It could not replace her as the instructor.
- 3 No technical setup required.
- 4 Materials had to stay current, on her own schedule.
- 5 Students still had to be able to reach her directly.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Kelly Price-Rhea is a Professor of Marketing and the Program Coordinator and Director of the 100% online M.S. in Digital Marketing program at East Tennessee State University. She has more than 20 years of experience teaching marketing and business, with extensive experience in online education. Every figure in this study comes from her own description of building it.

AT A GLANCE

INDUSTRY

Higher education. A public university running a 100% online graduate marketing program.

DEPLOYMENT

One faculty member, six assistants in production, built entirely by the instructor.

ACCESS

Embedded directly in each course's D2L shell, pinned to the announcements page and placed inside a course module.

VOICE, THE CAPABILITY THAT DECIDED IT

An assistant she could make sound like herself, without writing a line of code

What decided whether this worked was not a technical feature so much as how much she could shape each assistant's tone and approach, unaided. She did not want an assistant that gave generic answers. She wanted every one of them to feel like an extension of the course, consistent with how she presents material in class, and building that took nothing more than her own course materials and time spent testing and refining.

THE RECORD

One instructor's report on six assistants, entirely self-built

IN HER WORDS

"The assistant gave them a place to start using the context and guidance I had provided while I remained available as their instructor when they needed me. That was especially valuable in an online learning environment, where students may be working on coursework at very different times of the day. It also had the potential to reduce some of the repetitive, routine questions that naturally occur in a course, allowing my interactions with students to focus more on discussion, clarification, and the kinds of questions where my experience and judgment as the instructor mattered most."

DR. KELLY PRICE-RHEA, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, M.S. IN DIGITAL MARKETING

One instructor built and has maintained six separate assistants, spanning both undergraduate and graduate courses, with no developer or IT involvement at any point. Each one continues to run on course materials she reviews and updates herself, semester after semester.

WHY CUSTOMGPT.AI CAME OUT ON TOP

No developer required. Building an assistant took only course knowledge, so the person who knows the course could build it herself.

A voice, not a script. Each assistant's tone and approach could be shaped directly, so it reads as an extension of her teaching rather than a generic chatbot.

It lives where students already are. Embedded in the existing D2L shell, so nothing new had to be adopted or learned.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

You do not need to be a technology expert, just know your course and your students

Start with the course you know best. Build one assistant, use it, then add the next as that course comes around.

Decide what it will not replace. This instructor kept the assistant to a first layer of questions and stayed directly available for everything else. That boundary is why the relationship with her students did not change.

LOOKING AHEAD

The undergraduate working through Principles of Marketing at midnight gets a first answer without waiting for morning. The graduate student checking a course policy before a deadline gets the same. And Dr. Kelly Price-Rhea, who used to field every one of those questions herself across six courses, now spends more of that time on the discussion and judgment calls where her experience matters most.

ABOUT CUSTOMGPT.AI

CustomGPT.ai is a no-code platform for building AI agents that answer only from an organization's own content: documents, websites and knowledge bases. Every answer is grounded in verified sources with citations, and the platform is SOC 2 Type 2 and GDPR compliant. Organizations use it for customer support, internal knowledge search, website chat and more, across help centers, apps and the API.