

Build the "Second Brain" for Real Life

Undergraduate Track | AI for Life, Learning & Work

What You're Building

An AI-powered tool that helps students, early professionals, or creators process complexity, understand tradeoffs, and move from uncertainty to meaningful action.

Build window: June 14–21, 2026 | Teams: 2–5 students | Format: Fully virtual, global

The Problem

Modern life is overloaded with information, difficult tradeoffs, and constant mental switching. Students and early professionals are expected to make high-stakes decisions with incomplete information and turn ideas into execution without clear frameworks. Most tools either **oversimplify** (pros/cons lists) or **overwhelm** (too much information). There is a real gap for AI systems that help people **reason**, not just retrieve or generate content.

Your Mission

Build an AI-powered MVP that helps students, early professionals, or creators process complexity and make better decisions — or turn ideas into action. Choose ONE direction below:

Direction A: Life Decision Simulator

Help a person compare major life or career paths by modeling tradeoffs, surfacing hidden considerations, and showing likely outcomes.

- This is NOT a simple pros/cons list — help users reason with structure and confidence
- Model different scenarios and surface hidden tradeoffs
- Help users explore 'what happens if...' questions
- **Examples:** Graduate school vs. job vs. startup, moving cities for work, comparing career pathways, degree vs. bootcamp vs. self-taught

Direction B: Zero-to-One Builder

Help someone turn an early-stage idea into a realistic execution plan.

- This is NOT just a task generator — help users move from vague idea → structured plan → first real step
- Clarify the idea and identify key assumptions and risks
- Break work into milestones and guide toward a first prototype or pilot
- **Examples:** Startup idea → MVP roadmap, class project → pilot plan, big ambition → 30/60/90-day execution steps

Who You're Building For

Your user: a college student, recent grad, aspiring founder, creator, or career-switcher facing complexity, uncertainty, or stalled progress.

Guiding question: How might we use AI to help people think more clearly, understand tradeoffs, and move from uncertainty to meaningful action?

What a Strong Solution Looks Like

- Focuses on a **clear decision or execution challenge** with real constraints
- Uses AI to **structure thinking**, not just generate content
- Shows a coherent system: input → reasoning → output → action
- Demonstrates how insights **change user behavior or decisions**
- Represents **uncertainty honestly** — doesn't hide tradeoffs or present false certainty
- Includes at least one **responsible AI safeguard**

⚠ Common Mistakes — Judges will mark down:

- AI that generates lists without reasoning through tradeoffs
- Presenting outputs as 'correct answers' rather than decision inputs
- No clear user decision moment — what specifically does the user decide after using your tool?
- 'Machine learning analyzes patterns' without specifying what it learns is a red flag at undergrad level

Data & Technical Approach

You may use:

- Synthetic user scenarios and decision contexts
- Public labor market, education, or cost-of-living data
- Public research on decision-making, productivity, or behavioral science
- Structured planning frameworks or templates
- Knowledge bases or external APIs

⊘ Avoid: fully automating high-stakes decisions, presenting outputs as definitive or 'correct' answers.

Responsible AI Requirements

1. One Realistic Risk — e.g. over-reliance, biased recommendations, false confidence in uncertain outcomes
2. One Concrete Mitigation — e.g. uncertainty framing, showing multiple perspectives, confidence indicators
3. Human-in-the-Loop — identify one decision your AI does NOT make, and explain why the user must remain in control

AI Capabilities You May Use

- Natural Language Processing (NLP)
- Decision-support systems and reasoning chains
- Recommendation systems
- Scenario simulation or outcome modeling
- Generative AI for explanation or planning support

Real-World Partner Inspiration

You may draw inspiration from organizations such as:

- Center for Humane Technology · Behavioral Insights Team · Mozilla Foundation · Digital Promise · Wellcome Trust

Examples of real-world domains:

- Career navigation platforms · Learning and skill development systems · Productivity and planning tools · Decision-support systems

What to Submit on Devpost

Devpost Field	What to Include
Qualifier Approval Code	Enter your 8-character code sent via email after passing the AI Qualifier (e.g., XX26-Q7H9K2M1). Submissions without a valid code will be disqualified.
Project Description	A complete description of your solution, the problem you solved, and who it helps.
Track & Challenge Selection	Select your track (High School / Undergraduate / Graduate) and your challenge number.
AI Architecture Explanation	Describe: (1) Inputs — what data goes in, (2) AI capability used (e.g., chatbot, classification, recommendation), (3) What processing happens, (4) Outputs — what the user receives.
Human-in-Loop Design	What is one decision your AI does NOT make? Explain why a human must remain involved at this point.
Responsible AI Guardrail	What is one risk in your system and how did you reduce it? Examples: bias, misinformation, misuse, over-reliance, exclusion.
Tools Used	List all AI tools, models, APIs, and any AI coding assistance. Indicate which are free vs. paid.
Data Disclosure	What data did you use? Include datasets, APIs, or synthetic data. If synthetic, explain how it was created.
3–5 Minute Pitch Video	A video covering: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a live or recorded walkthrough, (4) your responsible AI choice.
Working Demo or Walkthrough	A functional prototype, chatbot, workflow demo, interactive mockup, simulation, or decision-support model.

 Your video should show: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a walkthrough, (4) your responsible AI choice.

How You'll Be Evaluated

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Problem Understanding	20%	Is there a clear decision context and user? Are constraints acknowledged?
AI Reasoning	30%	Is AI justified? LLM vs. rules vs. automation — reasoned, not buzzwords
Solution Design	25%	Coherent system with clear data → AI → output pipeline

Dimension	Weight	What Judges Look For
Impact & Insight	15%	Does this meaningfully improve decision-making or execution?
Responsible AI	10%	Risks identified and mitigated (bias, over-reliance, hallucination)?

💡 Judge's Lens: At undergrad level, judges look specifically for justification of your AI approach. Why is an LLM better here than a rules engine? Why does this problem need AI at all? Answer that explicitly.

Impact

The strongest projects will:

- Help users move from **confusion** → **clarity** → **action**
- Improve real-life decision-making — not just productivity
- Reduce cognitive overload and uncertainty
- Turn ideas into tangible progress

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I need coding experience?	No. You are encouraged to use no-code and low-code AI tools. What matters is your thinking, not your technical stack.
Can my team be from different countries?	Yes! Teams of 2–5 can span different schools, cities, and countries. Register together on Devpost.
What counts as a prototype?	Anything that demonstrates your AI working: a functional app, a chatbot walkthrough, a workflow demo, an interactive mockup, or a clearly narrated simulation. It does not need to be production-ready.
What should my video show?	Cover four things: (1) the problem and user, (2) how your AI works, (3) a live or recorded walkthrough of your solution, and (4) your key responsible AI choice.
Do paid AI tools give an advantage?	No. Judging rewards reasoning and design thinking, not technical resources. Open-source and free tools are equally valid.
What happens after submission?	Submissions go through AI screening, then judge review (Round 2), then a final panel (Round 3) for the top 10 teams per track. All teams receive results by email.
Can I use AI tools to help build my project?	Yes. You must disclose which AI tools you used in your submission. Using AI to help build does not disqualify you — transparency does.
When will I know if I qualified?	Qualifier results are released June 11–13. You will be notified by email and can also check your status on the hackathon platform.
Direction A vs B — which is better for my team?	Direction A suits teams interested in life decisions, psychology, and career planning. Direction B suits teams interested in execution, startup thinking, or project management. Both are equally valued.
Can my tool focus on a non-career decision?	Yes — any significant life decision (housing, education, personal goals) works. Just make sure there is a clear decision moment and a real user who faces it.

Questions? Contact us at aihackathon@usaii.org or join our Discord: discord.gg/ePjenJnyh4
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