CHAPTER 13.

INTO THE (UN)KNOWN: USING ACADEMIC HABITS OF MIND TO ADDRESS GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE CONCERNS AND POSSIBILITIES IN TUTOR TRAINING

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"A writer mentioned they used ChatGPT to write their project," our tutor said. "What's our policy on this?" As director and associate director, we looked at one another. *Did we have an AI policy?* The question hung in the air between us, but we both knew the answer. We did not, and neither did our university.

Despite conversations around campus, there was no clear guidance—only a hum of concerns and possibilities. William Ramsey discusses the unpredictable nature of writing center sessions, saying tutors must be ready for anything (qtd. in Geller et al. 22). Now, that unpredictable nature includes generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Like many writing center administrators, we knew we needed to move past policy and, as Lauren Short argues, listen to tutors' concerns and help them navigate GenAI in their sessions.

Since there were so many unknowns, we started with the certainties: GenAI was here, students were using it, and instructors had wide-ranging policies about its use. We began by talking to our tutors. As Ashley M. Beardsley notes (this collection, Chapter 14), tutors are the experts on how GenAI is taken up by writers at any institution. Surveying tutors' experiences, we found that more than half the responding tutors (9 out of 16) had worked with writers who used GenAI. Our tutors had complicated feelings about GenAI, from curiosity to resistance. As administrators, our feelings are equally conflicted. But given the pervasiveness of GenAI, we believe we *must* give tutors ways to navigate its use and negotiate their complex responses to this technology.

In this chapter, we use Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky's habits of mind of academic writers as our framework (6-15). Rather than taking a positive or negative stance, this framework enables tutors to approach GenAI—and other

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new technologies—from a place of inquiry and critical reflection. We describe our experience implementing a GenAI professional development (PD) unit based on habits of mind. Focusing in detail on two of the habits—*inquiry* and *seeking and valuing complexity*—we discuss tutors' responses, explore how the habits of mind help us approach GenAI as administrators, and provide reflective questions for administrators interested in using these habits of mind to engage with GenAI.

OUR CONTEXT

Our perspectives on GenAI are influenced by our institutional and departmental contexts. We—Charlotte and Kat—are administrators in the writing center at Ball State University, a Research 2 (R2) university in east-central Indiana serving 15,000 undergraduates and 5,500 graduate students (*Common Data Set*). Our writing center is housed in and funded primarily by the English department. We are assigned between 10-15 English graduate assistants (GAs) to serve as tutors each semester, alongside 5-10 undergraduate tutors. Our tutoring body represents a diverse range of backgrounds and areas of expertise. These tutors bring an equally diverse range of attitudes toward GenAI.

As of fall 2024, Ball State does not have a GenAI policy. Our writing program administrator (WPA) encourages instructors to see GenAI in a positive light; in spring 2024, he led the creation of a GenAI policy statement for the writing program, which discourages instructors from prohibiting GenAI in their classes, focusing instead on setting clear guidelines, requiring instructor approval, and creating assignments encouraging students to think critically about GenAI (Ball State University Writing Program).

Of course, as teachers and scholars, we have our own orientations toward GenAI:

Kat

When I first noticed students using GenAI in their writing assignments, it was hard not to feel frustrated. To borrow from Sidney Dobrin, it seemed some students were taking a helicopter to the top of Mount Everest rather than experiencing the journey from summit to peak (60). This exigence encouraged me to better understand GenAI generally. Through experimenting with ChatGPT on my own and reading more about this technology, I see writing with GenAI is a complex issue that depends, like all writing, on its context. As an educator, it is my job to engage with students about these complexities so they can make better informed decisions about when, how, and why they use GenAI.

Charlotte

When ChatGPT first came out, I was interested in its possibilities. However, I share the concerns voiced in this collection (Johnson and Wynn Perdue, Chapter 1; May, Chapter 15; Cecil-Lemkin and Marvel Johnson, Chapter 17; and Cochran et al., Chapter 18) about the ethical implications and environmental impacts of GenAI, which, as of this writing, remains poorly understood. I also worry some of the efforts to quickly embrace GenAI are an overcorrection: I fear that, haunted by memories of when higher ed was slow to adapt to changes, some institutions are hustling to adopt GenAI before we understand how it might permanently alter education and labor. That said, I don't think it's effective to uncritically prohibit GenAI, either: regardless of how we feel about it, we are now faced with its use on a regular basis, and we do need the skills to handle it—whatever choice we make.

From these positions, we began considering the impact of GenAI in our writing center. Whether we choose to embrace or prohibit GenAI, our tutors are certain to encounter it. As administrators, we must ensure they have the tools to respond.

WHAT ARE HABITS OF MIND?

Habits of mind are patterns of thinking or ways of orienting oneself to problems. While many fields promote various habits of mind, in writing studies, the most common set appears in the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." Developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project, the framework is designed to promote college readiness. It focuses on eight habits of mind: curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition ("Framework for Success" 1). In later work, Dana Lynn Driscoll and Jennifer Wells frame the habits of mind as "dispositions" that play a pivotal role in writing transfer (par. 3). This speaks to the functional nature of the habits of mind in writing practice.

However, critics have pointed out that the habits of mind are not exclusive to writing nor do they speak to curriculum change. As Kristine Hansen points out, students can develop these habits of mind in other disciplines but still not be ready for college-level writing (541). Neal Lerner echoes Hansen's concern about the lack of correlation to writing, adding that these habits do not enact meaningful curriculum reform, but instead reinforce process pedagogy (90).

With these criticisms in mind, our approach to GenAI is based on habits of mind specifically tailored to academic writing. In their textbook *From Inquiry*

to Academic Writing, Greene and Lidinsky define habits of mind as patterns of thinking academic writers use to think critically about claims, consider alternative possibilities, and keep open minds (6). They introduce five key patterns of thought for critical writing skills:

- Inquiring, or observing, asking questions, and examining alternatives (6)
- Seeking and valuing complexity, or avoiding binary thinking and moving beyond simple answers (6)
- Understanding academic writing as a conversation, or listening instead of dominating, and having empathy and respect for other positions (8-10)
- Understanding writing as a process, or collecting ideas, drafting, and revising instead of creating an argument as quickly as possible (12)
- Reflecting, or monitoring what one is learning and using that information to create effective strategies for oneself going forward (15)

These habits mirror common writing center practices. For example, the habit of writing as a process is woven throughout writing center practice: Leigh Ryan and Lisa Zimmerelli describe the dynamics of the writing process and how it shapes tutoring in *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (pgs. 17-40). Similarly, writing center scholars often focus on the importance of reflection: Lindsey Allgood encourages writing center staff to be "mindful practitioners" and take a reflective approach. As we thought about how to broach conversations about GenAI in the writing center, we began to envision how the habits of mind could be applied not just to academic writing but to writing and tutoring amidst GenAI.

USING HABITS OF MIND TO ADDRESS GENAI IN THE WRITING CENTER

Each semester, our writing center administrative team creates 3-4 PD units for tutors to complete during downtime. In spring 2024, Kat created a PD module about GenAI using the habits of mind framework. In each lesson, tutors explored GenAI tools and how they might interact with the writing process. Ultimately, this process led tutors to deeper inquiry about whether, why, how, and when to think about or use GenAI in tutoring.

In Lesson 1, tutors took a survey assessing their comfort and knowledge of GenAI, both in and outside the writing center. We were curious about what tutors knew, their opinions, and where they needed support. As administrators, this survey helped us negotiate the knowns and unknowns of GenAI. Next,

tutors chose from a selection of readings introducing them to GenAI (e.g., Deans et al.). Finally, tutors explored GenAI tools themselves.

Lesson 2 introduced tutors to Greene and Lidinsky's habits of mind. Then, tutors reflected on and responded to GenAI writing center scenarios using the first two habits of mind: inquiry and seeking and valuing complexity.

Finally, Lesson 3 focused on entering a conversation, considering writing as a process, and reflection. Tutors continued reflecting on and responding to scenarios using habits of mind. These three weekly lessons addressed the complexity of writing and tutoring with GenAI and ways to negotiate ethical concerns, professor expectations, and benefits and constraints of the technology.

Given the space constraints of this chapter, we have chosen to focus on describing Lesson 2 in more detail. This lesson, which focused on inquiry and seeking and valuing complexity, yielded the most energetic and fruitful discussions among tutors. These habits of mind were also most useful to our early conversations about GenAI as administrators, and we hope they might help other administrators begin conversations too.

For each habit of mind, we describe the activities tutors engaged with and how they responded. Then, we discuss how the habits of mind might lead us as administrators to critical understandings of GenAI. Each section ends with recommendations and prompts for how others can adapt the unit. These tools are intended to lead writing center professionals to engage in conversations with tutors, colleagues, and WPAs.

Inquiry

Lesson 2 began with an overview of the habits of mind. Then, we presented tutors with writing center scenarios to help them apply each habit of mind to a real-world context. We began by asking tutors to consider this scenario:

In a writing center session, your client discloses they used ChatGPT to complete their writing assignment. They did not get a good grade and want to revise based on feedback from the instructor. As a tutor, how can you use the inquiry habit of mind and to what end? In other words, how can this move your session forward?

In response, tutors discussed using the GenAI text as a tool for idea generation and to get something on the page. Most said they'd use the GenAI-generated draft as a starting point, but redirect the writer to include their own ideas. Tutors also discussed using an inquiry mindset to explore why the writer used GenAI, which they imagined might range from a lack of confidence to a time-saving decision.

In their responses, we noted two larger takeaways. First, the inquiry mindset seemed to encourage tutors to put aside personal feelings about GenAI and center

the writer's motivations and goals: "I have my own opinions about the ethics of the situation," one tutor reflected, "but if it just isn't the moment to get into that with this student, it may be better to just [go] through it together to help spark their curiosity." Tutors likely have deep-seated opinions about any new writing technology. As administrators, we must remember to listen to their insights and think about how to help them serve writers who have different opinions.

Second, focusing on inquiry has benefits for tutors *and* writers. One tutor described using GenAI output as a way to begin a conversation with the writer:

I think a potentially valuable question to ask in this scenario would be something along the lines of … "Did ChatGPT go about this question the way you expected?" Instead of focusing on and leaning into the [Gen]AI generated material, I think these types of questions can open up the writer to considering their own ideas in relation to the ideas generated by the [Gen]AI program. This way, ChatGPT is not being used as a mouthpiece but as a point of reference for further inquiry and investigation.

In their response, the tutor uses inquiry in two ways: he's asking genuine questions about the writer's intentions, and he's prompting the writer to engage in inquiry themselves. Inquiry and writing center work go hand in hand: asking questions and making space for alternative perspectives is ingrained in tutoring practices. But perhaps focusing explicitly on inquiry can help tutors think about how tutoring skills can transfer to writing contexts too.

As administrators, we find the habits of mind are useful not just as tutor training tools, but also as thinking tools for ourselves. Inquiry asks us to observe, ask questions, and consider alternative perspectives (Greene and Lidinsky 6)—including GenAI. As of summer 2024, there is a massive push in higher education and writing studies to learn to use GenAI and adapt our teaching to incorporate this tool (see, among others, Dobrin; Vee et al.; Morgan). But our tutors may think differently. One piece of feedback that stood out in our pre-survey was that some tutors felt it was "not their job" to teach or monitor GenAI. For some in our field, the response to this is simple: you must adapt to new technology because it is the future, and students already use it. But with the inquiry mindset, we might instead choose to ask more questions: How *do* our tutors feel about GenAI? Where do these feelings come from? What do they see as the stakes of GenAI? What other narratives might they bring to the table? And how are these perspectives influenced by our context? Moving beyond tutor training, we might use the inquiry mindset to remind ourselves to keep asking questions and observing as GenAI develops: what do we know about this technology at any given time? What can it do, and what are its limitations?

We recommend GenAI tutor training begin with an inquiry mindset toward the technology and toward tutor perspectives: even if the training does not

revolve around habits of mind, beginning with inquiry helps gauge where tutors and writers are coming from. Those designing tutor training might consider these inquiry-based reflective prompts:

- What does GenAI look like at my institution? What do tutors encounter in writing center sessions?
- What does our student population look like, and why might they want or not want to engage with GenAI? What factors might enable or limit the use of GenAI?
- What does writing look like at my institution? What kinds of writing assignments do students complete, and how are they assessed? How might our institutional culture around writing influence students' choices about GenAI?
- How do tutors feel about GenAI? What are their experiences with it, and what concerns might they have?

SEEKING AND VALUING COMPLEXITY

Next, tutors considered the seeking and valuing complexity habit of mind. We began the discussion with this scenario:

Your writer is struggling to brainstorm keywords around their research topic. Since the instructor does not have a policy about GenAI, you suggest using ChatGPT to create some keywords to jumpstart the brainstorming process. However, the client wants to copy and paste the application's answers into their writing assignment. How can you use seeking & valuing complexity to address the issues arising from copying and pasting?

Tutors overwhelmingly said they'd try to discourage the writer from copying and pasting—perhaps in part because of the way the prompt is worded, which we admit inherently assumes tutors agree copy/pasting is inappropriate. Tutors again talked about using GenAI as a "springboard" or a starting point but pushing the writer to bring their own ideas into the assignment. Some tutors talked about using multiple sources to brainstorm keywords, such as using dictionaries and thesauruses in addition to or instead of GenAI. Others said they'd ask the student to reflect on what their instructor might think about the choice to copy/paste directly from GenAI.

In our tutors' responses, three key ideas stood out. First, our tutors immediately applied the habit of mind to the writer (in contrast to the inquiry unit, where tutors primarily talked about using inquiry themselves). Their first instinct was to engage the writer in conversation beyond the simple "answer" of using the GenAI output wholesale and pushing the writer to value complexity. One tutor described a real-life tutoring experience where they'd tried to encourage

the writer to take more autonomy over their work after using GenAI. Using a list of phrases generated by GenAI, the tutor prompted the writer to talk about why they might prefer one term over another, which pushed the writer to think more about tone and voice in particular genres. Second, several tutors applied the habit of mind to GenAI itself: they said they'd talk to the writer about how GenAI models come up with responses and encourage them to think critically about GenAI biases and what perspectives could be excluded. Finally, one tutor applied the habit of mind to her own practices:

> I will seek complexity in the matter, considering the differing angles of the student's struggle and even the potential problems the writer did not mention…. In being aware of my bias, I would also maybe inquire about their actions in order to not assume the intentions of the writer.

While most tutors focused on helping the *writer* seek complexity, this tutor's reflection demonstrates how she might push *herself* to search for and value nuance. As the wording of our own scenario reveals, we all walk into conversations about GenAI with biases and preconceived ideas. Tutors are often trained to encourage writers to identify biases, but of course, tutors (and administrators) bring their own perspectives to the table. Much like inquiry, seeking and valuing complexity is already a core value in writing center work—but again, we find when our tutors engaged directly with this habit of mind, they were more likely to apply it to more parts of the tutoring session.

As administrators, this habit of mind reminds us to take the time to understand new technologies and sit in the murky unknown. Conversations about GenAI can be anxiety-inducing in part because we see it as an urgent issue requiring immediate response: we must adapt *now* so we don't get left behind. Caught in the urgency trap, we focus on binary questions ("Is GenAI good or bad for writing centers?") and seek instant solutions ("How can we incorporate GenAI into tutoring practices today?"). But by seeking and valuing complexity, we grant ourselves space to learn. This habit of mind also helps us stay open to the possibility we may not get it "right" on the first try, as we saw in our analysis of our own training scenario.

For administrators designing GenAI training, we recommend an approach that focuses on moving beyond binary thinking—both for tutors and for administrators! Early on, it may be helpful for both groups to consider the following prompts:

- What is my opinion about GenAI? How might my perspective impact the way I approach conversations about this topic? How might it impact the decisions I make in tutoring sessions or in setting policies?

- What are some "simple answers" or dominant narratives I've heard about this technology? What would it look like to add nuance to these narratives?
- Who has a stake in the conversation about GenAI in our writing center? At our institution? In my discipline?
- What do I know about GenAI, and how nuanced is my understanding? Where could I go to learn more?

Beginning from a place of reflection is a key first step in moving beyond binary thinking and toward a place of valuing nuance in these conversations.

CONCLUSION

If we can be certain of one thing with GenAI, it's that the landscape is constantly shifting. Unknowns are uncomfortable: as administrators, we often battle the urge to fall back on easy answers and quick solutions that immediately transform the unknown into the known. Kristina Aikens and Hannah Weildon describe using the values of their writing center to help them create a "nuanced approach" to GenAI in their center (par. 2). We, as administrators and instructors, have done the same with Greene and Lidinsky's habits of mind. For us, this is the real value of Greene and Lidinsky's habits of mind: they encourage us to apply the same considered, analytical thinking we teach our students to our own practices as administrators, teachers, and scholars. We cannot predict exactly how GenAI will evolve, but we *can* focus on equipping ourselves and our tutors with patterns of thinking that empower us to approach new technologies with critical, tempered thinking. As an institutional thirdspace (Grego and Thompson)—within the institution but outside of the teacher-student-classroom dynamic—the writing center has a unique opportunity to educate and empower writers about their use of GenAI. By explicitly addressing conversations around GenAI through the academic habits of mind framework, we believe we can best equip tutors and writers to face the known and unknown, in every iteration.

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