

## CHAPTER 14.

# WHAT IS OUR WRITING CENTER'S STANCE ON AI? USING TUTOR TRAINING TO DEVELOP GUIDELINES AND LEARN ABOUT GENAI

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## STARTING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT AI IN THE WRITING CENTER

At the beginning of the fall 2023 semester, I posed the following question and statement to University Writing Center (UWC) consultants:

Is using artificial intelligence (AI) like ChatGPT plagiarism? Some faculty say yes, while others view AI through a more nuanced lens. At the UWC, it's our job to consider how generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) programs can help with content creation throughout the writing process while guiding clients to see GenAI's flaws.

Although this opening statement might seem like I thought implementing GenAI into writing center appointments was essential, the point was to begin thinking critically about AI.

As director of the UWC at Western Illinois University, I began the semester discussing GenAI in response to meetings where faculty expressed concerns about ChatGPT and its virality during the spring 2023 semester. The conversation surrounding faculty perceptions of AI served as the prompt for our first staff meeting of the semester, where we discussed the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum's "Statement on Artificial Intelligence Writing Tools in Writing Across the Curriculum Settings" and the Modern Language Association (MLA) and Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Joint Task Force on Writing and AI's first working paper on AI (Byrd et al.). We

considered if and how we might apply AI to tutoring sessions, and I suggested that consultants play with ChatGPT during their downtime by prompting the program to write a paper about a topic of their choice and test it with some grammar questions. After playing, consultants reflected on using ChatGPT, how it might benefit tutoring sessions, and why they would choose not to use it. Their reflections sparked conversations on addressing AI in the writing center, and in the spring of 2024, we embarked on a semester-long project to understand how AI and writing are discussed in scholarly articles and craft a policy for how to use—and not use—AI tools at our writing center.

In this chapter, I reflect on consultants' responses to AI and our collaborative approach to developing our AI guidelines. I provide a brief institutional overview, then move into the spring 2024 training (the goal of the semester-long project, readings, and activities) to demonstrate how we developed our AI statement. I also connect the resources we used to the specific action items we wrote together. My goal in sharing our work is to provide writing center directors and staff with ideas for developing a shared understanding of AI and policies that fit the needs of their tutors, clients, and institution so that everyone can confidently answer the question, what is *our* writing center's stance on AI?

## **TWO SPACES OPERATING AS ONE: THIRD FLOOR, MALPASS LIBRARY AND QC COMPLEX 2219**

At Western Illinois University (WIU), students, faculty, and community members can receive writing support on both campuses. In Macomb, IL, we're located on the third floor of Malpass Library. The Malpass location is our primary space, as it's in the center of our residential campus. Most consultants work out of Malpass; however, WIU has a second campus in Moline, IL. About an hour and a half from Macomb, the Quad Cities (QC) campus serves commuter students primarily from Illinois and Iowa. Although geographically separate and staffed by students in programs on their respective campuses, the two locations operate as one. We meet in person once a year for pre-semester training, and QC consultants attend staff meetings and professional development virtually throughout the year. As the director, I oversee both locations, typically managing a staff of 20 consultants (a mix of graduate and undergraduate tutors) six days a week.<sup>1</sup> I took on the director

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1 I was fortunate to work with a writing center staff committed to the work we do. Thank you to the consultants who worked alongside me to craft our AI statement during the spring 2024 semester and copyedit our materials in the summer of 2024: Maram Alsufayn, Mark Brown, Emma Cortelyou, Andy Cripe, Adriana Dugbarty, Bukola Fagbemi, Jailene Gonzales, Keilan Goodridge, Abigail Heinecke, Kirsten Lippold, Grace McGill, Bhavika, Leo Ofili, Mary Owusu, Chris Perez, Isabella Perez, Ethan Schuller, Logan Volkert, and Jamariah White.

role in the fall of 2022 when I accepted my position at WIU as an assistant professor of English.<sup>2</sup> Since I began, we've averaged around 1000 appointments each semester (fall and spring). Although I can't be in two places at once or in the UWC during all shifts—we're open for eleven hours most days—I am in Malpass a few hours each day and available to consultants via a UWC Discord server.

Being physically and digitally present is essential because it gives me the opportunity to chat with consultants and students and gain insights about who our students are and how to serve them best. Additionally, our staff meetings create a collaborative learning environment essential to my administrative and teaching philosophies. In both roles, I view learning as a social process where students and consultants create a community of knowledgeable peers (Bruffee). Consultants, students, and I learn from each other through conversation. I strive to create training sessions where consultants engage in collaborative learning, giving them agency to challenge and learn while rejecting the “banking” model of education and embracing wonder that applies an openness to engage in critical thinking (Freire; hooks). Going into the spring 2024 semester, I used this grounding in collaboration to drive our conversation about AI.

### **“I USED GRAMMARLY ... IS THAT OKAY?” DEVELOPING A SEMESTER-LONG PROJECT ON WRITING CENTERS AND AI**

When I was in the UWC one afternoon, a student approached the reception desk to schedule a walk-in appointment. This was their first visit, and while they created their WOnline account, they looked up and almost whispered, “I used Grammarly ... is that okay?” I wasn't surprised the student sounded so unsure because we were at the peak of ChatGPT's fall 2023 virality. Similar to how Kat Greene and Charlotte Kupsh discussed a lack of AI policy at Ball State University in their chapter of this collection, WIU did not have an AI policy, and, at that point, faculty had little guidance around creating policies for their classes.<sup>3</sup> I reassured the student that using Grammarly was okay and often helpful, but hearing their concern showed me the uncertainty students had surrounding AI. It led me to ask, what is our approach to AI and writing, and how do we circulate it? Although we continued having conversations about AI as a writing center, it became clear that the UWC needed to have a statement on AI available that aligns with our mission to “support writers in their growth and development by connecting them with resources and teaching them techniques and strategies for improving and honing

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2 I directed the UWC from fall 2022 until summer 2025. The information about the UWC in this chapter reflects my time there.

3 The university's AI Task Force released an initial guide to GenAI in December 2023.

their writing” (University Writing Center, “Vision and Mission”). At that point, I could’ve written an AI policy from *my* perspective as the director; however, I do not interact with AI during tutoring sessions on a day-to-day basis, so I turned to the consultants. When we returned from winter break, I introduced consultants to our semester-long project on writing centers and artificial intelligence. Through reading writing studies and writing center scholarship and discussing theories and praxis during staff meetings, our goals were to:

- Apply writing studies and writing center pedagogical theories across appointment modalities (face-to-face, online, eTutoring)
- Understand how students, faculty, and staff perceive writing centers’ utilization of AI
- Learn when and how we might choose to apply AI during a session
- Create a “Best Practices for AI at the UWC” list

Such in-depth projects have become standard practice at the UWC as they set us up to read and implement new and new-to-us writing center scholarship (Beardsley). To encourage active engagement in tutor training, consultants chose one text from a provided list or found a source on AI and writing published within the last three years. Table 14.1 provides our selected texts. While AI is not new, I set the three-year publication restriction because I wanted the conversation to focus on contemporary tools and conversations.<sup>4</sup> Consultants were responsible for adding their text to our working annotated bibliography and leading a discussion group where their peers were assigned to read their selected article. During staff meetings, consultants summarized their readings in small groups and created a list of two to five actionable items inspired by the text their group believed we should (or should not) implement at the UWC. After we worked through the texts, we took our annotations and actionable items and created a list of best practices for AI usage at the UWC. I grouped consultants’ responses into five initial sections based on themes that emerged during meetings (our approach to AI, consultant training, teaching clients, workshops, and creating materials), and we organized the lists during the final staff meeting of the semester. The sections below use the articles consultants read to capture their responses to AI, explain how the semester-long project informs future tutor training, and provide guidelines around tutoring with AI.

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<sup>4</sup> Although these texts are a starting point, I encourage readers to add or swap more recently published scholarship to stay as current as possible. For instance, since leading this training, the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) AI Taskforce collected practitioner narratives and resources to help guide writing centers (Giaino). If I were curating readings for tutor training now, I would include the IWCA’s work along with Timoteo Pereira Neves’ tutor narrative that provides a point of view that emphasizes enhancing in-person tutoring sessions by incorporating GenAI as a tool. The training is designed as a reading group to create space for materials to be easily updated.

**Table 14.1. Training Readings on AI**

Author(s)	Pub. Date	Title	Pub. Title
Gallagher	2023	Lessons Learned from Machine Learning Researchers about the Terms “Artificial Intelligence” and “Machine Learning”	Composition Studies
Gayed et al.	2022	Exploring an AI-Based Writing Assistant’s Impact on English Language Learners	Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence
Hubbard	2023	The Pedagogical Dangers of AI Detectors for The Teaching of Writing	Composition Studies
Johnson	2023	Don’t Act Like You Forgot: Approaching Another Literacy “Crisis” By (Re)Considering What We Know about Teaching Writing with and through Technologies	Composition Studies
Laquintano et al.	2023	Introduction to Teaching with Text Generation Technologies	TextGenEd
Leaver and Srdarov	2023	ChatGPT Isn’t Magic: The Hype and Hypocrisy of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Rhetoric	M/C Journal
Liang et al.	2023	GPT Detectors Are Biased Against Non-Native English Writers	Patterns
Marzuki et al.	2023	The Impact of AI Writing Tools on the Content and Organization of Students’ Writing: EFL Teachers’ Perspective	Cogent Education
Morgan	2023	What Students Can Do with AI In the Writing Classroom	Composition Studies
Stanton	2023	A Dis-Facilitated Call for More Writing Studies in the New AI Landscape; Or, Finding Our Place among the Chatbots	Composition Studies
Terry	2023	I’m a Student. You Have No Idea How Much We’re Using ChatGPT.	The Chronicle of Higher Education
Vee and Laquintano	2023	Dear Students: Should You Use AI For Writing?	AI and the Teaching of Writing

## INITIAL REACTIONS

Consultants often shared initial reactions about AI during group discussions. The following reactions demonstrate how we thought about AI as a staff and

helped inform our “Artificial Intelligence at the University Writing Center” statement (University Writing Center).

- **Understand AI usage.** Staying informed about AI usage at WIU and beyond allows us to determine the best way to assist consultants (Morgan).
- **Advocate for using AI in the classroom.** Create informational documents that support and encourage instructors to use AI (Johnson).
- **Develop workshops that support the writing process.** Taking a step away from AI, the UWC believes that workshops tailored to teaching clients about the writing process can help them build skills that apply to current and future projects. By helping clients understand the writing process and how to best approach their assignments, we aim to develop their skills to decrease their reliance on AI (Stanton).

## CONSULTANT TRAINING

In addition to developing guidelines around AI usage, consultants identified readings and activities for continued tutor training. The AI readings were added to existing training activities to build a robust understanding of how we tutor and AI’s role. Although incorporating readings and activities might seem like we’re solely interested in adding GenAI tools to training sessions and not leaving room for refusal, I want to acknowledge that such conversations encourage consultants to consider GenAI’s ethical implications. The three points related to consultant training highlight discrimination, misuse, and data privacy.

- **Discuss bias and the promotion of Standard American English (SAE).** We believe students have a right to their own language and that promoting SAE erases an essential part of a writer’s identity. AI contributes to this erasure.
  - During the weekly fall training sessions, we focus on empowering writers and considering multiple Englishes. We read texts like “Should Writers Use They Own English?” (Young) to discuss vernaculars and code meshing alongside “Inclusive Sentence-Level Writing Support” (Draxler et al.) to discuss how to navigate providing feedback that doesn’t prioritize SAE. We’ve added “GPT Detectors Are Biased Against Non-Native English Writers” (Liang et al.) to connect language bias to AI tools.
- **Build a foundational understanding of AI terminology.** To begin unpacking definitions consultants might encounter in scholarship or AI usage, we incorporated two readings into our training materials:

“Dear Students: Should You Use AI for Writing?” (Vee and Laquintano) and “Lessons Learned from Machine Learning Researchers About the Terms ‘Artificial Intelligence’ and ‘Machine Learning’” (Gallagher). By building a shared vocabulary, consultants are better equipped to address AI-related questions and explain why they opt not to use such tools (e.g., bias, unintentional plagiarism, and data privacy concerns).

- **Train consultants on AI writing tools.** Our philosophy is that the best way to understand how students might use AI and the benefits, disadvantages, and biases of different AI tools is to try them ourselves. Throughout the semester, our training:
  - Prompts consultants to read about or use AI writing tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Grammarly, Jenni, and QuillBot) to answer a grammar question, provide information, or draft a paragraph about a topic of interest and critically examine the output, asking what the benefits of the writing tool are and how it is showing bias.
  - Uses activities from *TextGenEd* and encourages consultants to apply similar approaches during tutoring sessions. The open-access collection features assignments that incorporate GenAI. With semi-annual addendums, completing one or two prompts and familiarizing ourselves with the collection as a resource helps us continue learning as AI adapts and becomes more integrated into our daily lives.
    - Early in the fall semester, training uses “Transforming Writing Assignments with AI: Approaches for Using Artificial Intelligence for Fostering Student Engagement and Comprehension” (Hutchinson and Jensen) to prepare consultants who want to use AI to help clients understand readings.

## USING AI DURING SESSIONS

Lastly, consultants generated ideas about how we could use AI during sessions. By considering AI's ethical implications during training, consultants can make informed decisions about whether or not they want to incorporate AI. Before doing so, we ask clients if their instructor has an AI policy, and we encourage them to consider whether their writing goals align with their instructor's expectations (Vee and Laquintano). Then, there are two primary ways we use AI during sessions. First, consultants can use AI to help clients generate a claim about the given topic or outline that argues their claim while

establishing an environment that embraces AI by emphasizing the value of independent critical thinking (Leaver and Srdarov). Second, consultants can introduce students to AI writing tools, demonstrating how helpful they can be for improving ideas, grammar checks, and organization of said ideas (Marzuki et al.). We emphasize that GenAI programs are tools that can help us, but they shouldn't do all the work.

## **CONCLUSION: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING AI GUIDELINES**

Throughout this chapter, I've explained that developing a statement on AI for the UWC at WIU was a collaboration between me (the UWC director) and the consultants. We worked together to respond to GenAI and its usage at the writing center in a way that fits the needs of our clients and the WIU community. Through small group discussions on AI's role in writing and reflections, we crafted guidelines that align with our mission to support writers' growth and development while accounting for consultants' diverse perspectives about AI as a quickly evolving writing tool.

When I began receiving questions from faculty about GenAI's impact on writing, my initial reaction was to write a policy or general statement to address my immediate concerns, specifically around language bias. As the writing center director, I could've written a statement for us; however, taking a semester to wrestle with different ideas and approaches to using AI alongside my staff allowed me to incorporate consultants' concerns into our policies. Our semester-long project highlighted the importance of staying informed about AI writing tools and the need for ongoing conversations and tutor training. By reading current scholarship and listening to consultants' ideas about AI usage, we developed guidelines accounting for consultants' practical, day-to-day experiences that manage faculty and clients' diverse perspectives (University Writing Center, *Best Practices for AI*). Going forward, these guidelines will serve as the starting point for ensuring that tutors and clients understand the benefits, disadvantages, and biases of AI, training consultants on integrating AI into sessions and providing transparency regarding how the writing center does and does not use AI to students, faculty, and staff across the university.

Overall, writing centers developing AI policies can use the collaborative approach we implemented to ensure the various stakeholders (consultants, clients, and the university writ large) are reflected. By employing tutor training as a space for open dialogue and critical engagement surrounding AI, writing centers can determine the potential and limitations that implementing AI tools can have at their institution.

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