

CHAPTER 16.

REINVENTING A NEW VISION
AND *RAISON D'ÊTRE*: HOLISTIC
WRITING CENTER COMMUNITY
OF PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

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The advent of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in education has changed writing instruction, tutoring, and the foundational role of writing centers.¹ AI-powered writing assistant capabilities now extend beyond just grammar correction and plot suggestions to the generation of entire papers based on simple prompts. This dramatic shift has called for a re-evaluation of traditional pedagogical approaches and the operations of writing centers. Linda Adler-Kassner emphasizes that “writing is not just writing” (318), underscoring the multifaceted nature of writing as a critical component of academic and personal development. Thomas Deans et al. further highlight that “tutoring writing is never just tutoring writing” (par. 51), pointing to the broader scope of supporting plurilingual students who are learning in unfamiliar cultural and academic environments in a new country. These students often require guidance not only in language acquisition and writing skills but also in adapting to a foreign educational system, which extends beyond GenAI’s expertise.

In response to the advent of GenAI tools, the responsibilities of writing centers have expanded significantly. Writing centers are now tasked with consulting students on the appropriate and ethical use of GenAI, counseling students who

1 AI Disclosure: In this chapter, like Thomas Deans et al. suggested, we considered the large language model (LLM) as an “(imperfect) third collaborator” (par. 21) in our work to explore and learn how GenAI can support in the writing process. This is how we used AI in this paper: we initially drafted the script for the article and then used ChatGPT to edit. To benefit the most from LLM use, we engaged ChatGPT in a collaborative dialogic process following Deans et al.’s suggestions as we understood them. Our goal was to preserve our original joint author voice but invite ChatGPT to the conversation in the editing process. The script went back and forth numerous times using “prompt engineering” (Deans et al. par. 15) with changes made at every step, similar to a conventional editing process. ChatGPT never had the last word but was thoroughly edited and changed.

face accusations of academic misconduct related to GenAI, and engaging in dialogue with colleagues to develop strategic responses to the challenges posed by GenAI, with very little experience in any of these areas. The diversification of services to meet these new demands has become crucial for the future viability of writing centers. Isabella Buck suggests that writing centers should move beyond a traditional focus on writing tutoring to support multimodal writing projects so that our students are equipped with the skills needed for an evolving academic landscape. Based on anecdotal evidence and observations of a writing center coordinator and writing instructor, this chapter examines the evolving paradigm within a writing center as it responds to the changes brought about by GenAI. The development of educational practices, research approaches, and student demographics calls for a refreshed vision and purpose. This renewed direction is crucial for adapting to the swiftly changing academic context and for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of writing centers in supporting students. To address the challenges and opportunities that GenAI presents, our writing center has started Community of Practice (CoP) initiatives to promote open dialogue between faculty and students on issues concerning teaching and learning.

OUR WRITING CENTER

Our medium-sized university serves a diverse student body of 8,776 undergraduate and 252 graduate students, with 11.8 percent identifying as Indigenous and 18 percent as international students (UWinnipeg Fast Facts par. 3). The writing center (WC), housed in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing, and Communications, offers free writing tutoring services funded through student fees. Undergraduate students who have successfully completed both a mandatory academic writing course and a writing tutor training course are eligible for employment as paid tutors. Typically, the WC employs approximately 30 to 35 tutors annually and has historically facilitated between 1,200 and 1,600 tutoring sessions per year. However, the past two years have witnessed a significant shift.

Students frequently seek support at the WC due to frustrations with writing assignments, often turning to GenAI tools without adequate preparation. Tutors, in turn, face challenges in assisting their peers while instructors grapple with the complexities of assessing and evaluating AI-generated papers. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, in his discourse on decolonizing the university, posits that the modern institution of higher education is confronted with two disquieting mirrors: a problematic past and an uncertain future, which are intrinsically linked (221). De Sousa Santos argues that forging an emancipated future calls for a critical reckoning with the colonial legacies of the university.

While we do not claim comprehensive knowledge on decolonizing a traditionally rigid institution, we are committed to fostering a new paradigm in writing instruction and WC functions. We align with Paulo Freire's assertions in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which suggest that students are not blank slates, but rather individuals who bring valuable knowledge and skills to the classroom. Our aim is to harness this collective potential to construct a more inclusive and responsive space for learning.

THE IMPACT OF GENAI ON OUR WRITING CENTER

Although we lack specific data to explain the reasons behind the observed decline in tutoring sessions, we documented a significant reduction in the number of these sessions after the campus opened following the COVID-19 pandemic and since the emergence of GenAI, as other WCs have also reported (Essid and Cummins par. 6; Lindberg and Domingues 10). The downward trend coincided with a decrease in overall student enrollment, which may be a contributing factor. Besides the decline in students at our university, we recognize that a shift in instructional practices has occurred since the emergence of GenAI, with many instructors increasingly favoring in-class writing assignments over traditional take-home essays. In the past, it was these take-home assignments that prompted students to seek support from the WC.

The emergence of GenAI tools has led to a significant increase in academic misconduct cases, compelling the department review committee, which we are both members of, to conduct numerous student interviews to address concerns regarding GenAI usage in graded assignments, particularly those not completed in class. As Ashley Beardsley (Chapter 14) and Kat Greene and Charlotte Kupsh (Chapter 15) in this collection note, many universities and WCs lack standardized guidelines or instructions for the appropriate use of GenAI in academic work, leading to inconsistencies in how such cases are managed. At our university, policies are often left to the discretion of individual instructors, which can sometimes lead to vague instructions and frustrated students. As a WC coordinator, Helen has encountered numerous students who express frustration after being wrongly accused of using GenAI. Eunhee, as an academic writing instructor, has observed students who are afraid of even exploring GenAI because it is prohibited in many classes, and the narrative of GenAI is often associated with academic misconduct. This situation underscores the urgent need for clear policies and a better understanding of GenAI's role in academic contexts.

The rapid advancements in GenAI technology have left the WC and tutors asking several critical questions: How can the WC support students with GenAI

use in their academic journey? What is the purpose and role of the WC in the AI era? What will be a new paradigm for the WC and writing instruction?

RELATIONAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE HOLISTIC WRITING CENTER COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP)

In addressing these issues, we recognize the need for a new vision and *raison d'être*² for the future WC in the AI-mediated era. In response to the emerging challenges associated with GenAI, we launched a CoP initiative (Lave and Wenger), aiming at fostering open dialogues about the impact of GenAI on teaching and learning and providing students with more community-based WC support through small groups such as CoP dialogue, book club, writing club, and other student-centered activities. In alignment with Ellen Cecil-Lemkin and Lisa Marvel Johnson's framework in Chapter 17 of this collection, we also changed our tutor training program to include topics such as GenAI use in writing, institutional AI policies, ethics, and strategies for integrating GenAI in tutoring sessions and guidance for supporting students who have been falsely accused of GenAI misuse.

Drawing on relational epistemology, which suggests that knowing and learning originate from relationships and connection with the people and world around us (Bearman and Ajjawi 1162; Brownlee and Berthelsen; Kang and Wallace; Lysaker and Furuness 187), our vision for the WC includes providing a venue for CoP (Lave and Wenger) to share ideas, construct knowledge and diversify services to better meet the ever-changing needs of students and faculty. We believe these initiatives are necessary today because many students are replacing writing tutors with GenAI and are missing out on learning opportunities that only human interaction can provide. While GenAI can be an effective scaffolding and learning tool, it cannot offer the community-based learning and emotional support that human connections provide. According to Margaret Bearman and Rola Ajjawi, knowledge production is relational and social as it is "contextualized within particular relationships between people, things, and spaces" (1162). We have witnessed how the relationships between students and tutors construct meaningful knowledge and build a writing community through the WC. Additionally, we have observed writing instructors sharing new pedagogical ideas through occasional roundtable conversations, enhancing educational practices. We hope this CoP initiative will offer more consistent opportunities for students and faculty to connect and engage in meaningful dialogues about GenAI in academia.

2 Raison d'être is a French term that refers to the reason for being.

COP DIALOGUES

In alignment with Boaventura de Sousa Santos' call for decolonizing educational institutions and Judith Lysaker and Stacy Furuness' relational and dialogic pedagogy, our CoP dialogues through the WC serve the wider university. We hope to hold monthly dialogue events addressing different topics, such as the impact of GenAI on teaching and learning, GenAI and academic misconduct and ethics, and citation managers. By putting sometimes uncomfortable issues on the table that impact everyone across all disciplines, our goal is to foster open dialogue and honest discussion between students and faculty. In addition, by hosting the events in the WC, we look forward to inviting colleagues and students into our space and introducing them to what we do.

For the inaugural event entitled *Harnessing AI: Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching and Learning*, we recruited colleagues we had met in other university contexts and had heard their position on GenAI. The panelists represented different faculties, including Chemistry, Indigenous studies, and a student tutor. To promote tutor/student ownership of the event, we asked a student tutor to introduce the speakers. Faculty members talked about how they engaged with GenAI in their classes and discussed the pedagogical changes they had made to their classes to inspire authentic learning. The pedagogical shift of adding more oral presentations, skills scaffolding for GenAI use, and more recursive learning had enhanced their teaching, and students attested to a more robust understanding of concepts. The student tutor talked about the challenges students and tutors face when faculty course outlines are vague about GenAI use. Students feel disempowered to enter the conversation about GenAI because they fear being accused of academic misconduct if they admit to using it. After the brief presentations, students and faculty in attendance engaged in a lively discussion, which provided instructors insights into how to introduce GenAI to students. Students also asked questions about GenAI use in their classes, which helped them resolve confusion over the AI policy.

Our second CoP dialogue topic focused on academic misconduct, and we invited a rhetoric professor, the associate dean who manages academic misconduct cases, two students/tutors, and a representative of the university student association who accompanies students to academic misconduct meetings with administration. Although the conversation was not limited to GenAI-related misconduct, much of the discussion revolved around concerns about the use of GenAI in academic contexts. The associate dean provided an overview of current academic misconduct cases at the university and explained the relevant policies. A representative of the university student association talked about the academic misconduct process and encouraged students to seek support from

the association. One panelist expressed significant concern about the ethical implications of AI, noting that while academic misconduct has always existed, accessibility of GenAI tools has exacerbated the issue. During the discussion following the presentations, many participants shared that they were seeing more assignments that appeared AI-generated. Some even mentioned they had to redesign their assignments to prevent students from using GenAI. Although we did not have concrete solutions, the dialogue provided a valuable opportunity to share perspectives, express concerns, and deliberate on these issues as a community.

As WC practitioners, we hope to provide students with community-based support by always including student presenters along with faculty and staff in the CoP events. We see CoP events and dialogues as a way to combat the “colonial legacies of the university” (De Sousa Santos) by giving students autonomy and a space at the table in shaping the conversation about GenAI instead of it being prescribed for them by administration and faculty. It will take time for students to feel comfortable voicing their concerns in the traditional hierarchical university setting, and we are aware of our limitations. We recognize that we cannot immediately change a university’s hierarchy, but with an event like a CoP that includes students, faculty, and staff at the table, we can imagine a small change. A CoP brings knowing and learning to the forefront (Bearman and Ajjawi 1162; Lysaker and Furuness 187) and enhances students’ well-being (Prati et al. 921). Universities should be about enhancing student learning, rather than being a space of anxiety and fear of making mistakes. A CoP initiative provides a platform for educators and students to share experiences and develop collective strategies to integrate GenAI effectively into educational practices, ensuring that we adapt to these changes in a thoughtful and pedagogically sound manner.

STUDENT-CENTERED COP

We also encourage current tutors to form the CoP events that contribute to navigating the many complexities resulting from GenAI. As mentioned earlier, we have noticed a decline in tutoring sessions since the emergence of GenAI, and it prompted us to rethink the well-being of the WC and its future role. We did not want our WC to be overshadowed by GenAI but to embrace it through exploration and ethical and responsive use, as Joe Essid and Cady Cummins suggested in their recent article about the future for WCs in the AI era. We also want our WC to continue to contribute to the university community. To this end, we have launched a book club and a writing club through the WC as part of the student-centered CoP. Tutors and students organize, promote, and run these clubs, with us providing support and encouragement. Our goal is to provide

students with a platform for in-person activities and discussions that meet social needs and provide emotional support that GenAI is not capable of. Clubs also bring vitality to the WC, and we are seeing the space slowly being filled with students and activities. In line with these efforts, tutors have also started in-person drop-in tutoring sessions at the center. They came up with the idea, ran it by the coordinator for approval, and then proceeded to run, promote, staff, and manage the weekly event. Although these initiatives are still in the early stages, we are already seeing a positive impact on the WC through stronger community building and increased student engagement.

The student-centered CoP can also serve as a platform for engaging with GenAI. In the book club, students can read AI-related books, learn about GenAI, and share their perspectives. In the writing club, students can experiment with AI-generated writing, compare it to their own work, and discuss their experiences. During in-person drop-in tutoring sessions, tutors can assess whether students are using GenAI in their writing and gain insight into how it is being used. They can also provide guidance on the ethical and responsible use of GenAI in writing to help prevent academic misconduct.

In addition to these initiatives, over the past two years, we have also invited tutors to join us in presenting at WC conferences. This initiative offers tutors an opportunity to learn with us, share their knowledge and experiences, and connect with other professionals in the WC field. Our presentation team consisted of tutors, the WC coordinator, and a writing instructor. We covered topics such as *Writing Reimagined: Unraveling our Tunnel Vision in a Writing Center* and *The Future of the Writing Center: Diversifying through Multi-purpose Groups and Multi-modal Writing*. For many students, it was their first time presenting at a professional conference, and the experience gave them a sense of confidence and community as we observed tutors taking greater ownership and autonomy as active members of the WC. We view this as an extension of our student-centered CoP and plan to continue collaborating with tutors in future WC conference presentations.

Bringing together our CoP dialogues and student-centered CoP initiatives, we can establish a holistic WC CoP framework, which integrates the perspectives of instructors, administrators, tutors, and students through open dialogues and helps students with their academic, social, and emotional well-being through student-centered clubs and WC activities. This holistic WC CoP framework offers a new paradigm for the WC, envisioning its future role as a comprehensive teaching and learning support center, rather than just a traditional WC, which focuses mainly on academic literacy. In the AI-mediated era, students will need support in developing GenAI literacy, as GenAI will be embedded in our lives. The WC should serve as a foundation for this shift, helping students navigate the complexities.

CONCLUSION

Although generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has significantly changed writing instruction, tutoring, and the foundational role of WCs, we are excited about the promising opportunity for new learning for both educators and students. The emergence of a game-changing tool like GenAI forces us to rethink and reevaluate writing assignments, pedagogy, and assessment, and suddenly, they become a fluid, dynamic, and exciting prospect for innovations. We are eager to engage with students in the reinvention of writing instruction and the operational functions of WCs. This represents a new era for writing and writing tutoring, wherein we can choose either to succumb to challenges or to embrace new opportunities. We anticipate the valuable insights and knowledge we will gain collectively as we embark on this new journey.

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