

CHAPTER 31.

AI WON'T ADD TO THE
WORKLOAD OF WRITING
PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS AND
WRITING CENTER DIRECTORS
✦ *THEY NEED SUSTAINABLE
PRACTICES IN THE FACE OF AI*

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As generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools have become widely available over the past year, they have been marketed as options for “saving time” and “reducing labor” for jobs in education. A quick Google search for “AI timesaver education” yields results from varied sources, including Microsoft, education websites like *Edutopia* or *Education Week*, and Reddit threads and blogs full of teacher voices. An *EdTech* article, for instance, highlights the various ways that “AI can help teachers lighten their workloads” (Slagg, 2023). For tutors, GenAI is suggested as a way to streamline the feedback process, such as by correcting mechanical issues, so they have more time to focus on higher-order concerns. One of the most laborious and time-consuming tasks for teachers and tutors is providing feedback on student writing, and GenAI tools are framed as a way to provide individualized feedback on student work instantaneously. Writing for *Harvard Business*, Ethan Mollick and Lilach Mollick (2023) contend that GenAI “can act as feedback generators, providing quick, customized responses to student work and helping them refine their drafts.” As the essays in Part 1 of this collection underscore, there is a great deal of hype around the potential of GenAI to make the work of writers and teachers more efficient.

While arguments for the use of GenAI to increase productivity in education abound, those that acknowledge the increase in the labor involved in learning how to effectively leverage and critically evaluate GenAI are rare. However, the GenAI adoption process significantly adds to the workload of teachers and tutors—especially for the writing center directors and writing program

administrators who lead writing programs, centers, and teaching and tutoring staff through this seismic educational shift. Even if GenAI makes the job of working with student writers more efficient over time, the labor required by writing program administrators, writing instructors, writing center directors, and peer tutors to effectively adopt GenAI must be made visible. Beyond visibility, sustainable practices for managing this labor are needed.

HIDDEN LAYERS OF LABOR IN AI ADOPTION

The adoption of GenAI involves layers of labor which are analogous to a three-tiered cake, with each layer relying on the support of the one beneath it. The topmost layer of labor is the student layer. As Mollick and Mollick (2023) acknowledge, for GenAI feedback to be effective, students must learn how to prompt GenAI and critically evaluate and reflect on its output. Supporting this top layer is the teacher/tutor labor layer, the one where teachers and tutors learn these skills and think about how to teach them. The final layer, the one that supports the entire cake, is the work of writing administrators. This layer contains the labor of guiding teachers and tutors through this learning process. It also draws on directors' disciplinary expertise to decide if and how the use of GenAI for everyday tasks such as giving feedback on writing fits within the values, policies, and objectives of the programs and centers that teachers, tutors, and students inhabit. Additionally, because GenAI tools are often language-based, writing administrators can easily become the *de facto* experts on GenAI literacy on their campuses. Because writing administrators often act as a resource for those teaching writing across the curriculum, faculty may turn to them for advice about how to navigate writing and GenAI in their classes.

The third layer is also made up of the emotional labor that GenAI adoption requires of writing administrators. Efficiency narratives assume that writing teachers and tutors *want* to adopt GenAI to save time. Yet on college campuses around the world, resistance to GenAI isn't hard to find, as it poses an existential threat to the future of creative, highly intellectual jobs like teaching and tutoring. For instance, in "Refusing GenAI in Writing Studies: A Quickstart Guide," Jennifer Sano-Franchini et al. (2024) critique the narrative that GenAI will make writing education obsolete, arguing that "We will not be fooled into thinking that LLMs can take the place of human writers and writing teachers." Teachers have serious concerns about how much students are using GenAI to circumvent the learning process and "cheat" on assignments, and tutors are caught in the middle of these conflicts between teachers and students. Writing program administrators and writing center directors exert emotional labor as they listen and respond to their staff's feelings and concerns about GenAI,

all the while trying to reassure staff that their jobs won't become obsolete in the ways that articles like "Eliminate the Required First-Year Writing Course" (Nicolas, 2023) suggest. As *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration* (Wooten, et al., 2020) explains, in times of uncertainty, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, the emotional labor demanded of writing administrators surges. The rapid integration of GenAI in education has been a time rife with uncertainty, adding unexpected emotional labor to the jobs of writing administrators as they manage the conflicting feelings of their staff, as well as their own emotions.

While GenAI integration could eventually save teachers and tutors time, failing to acknowledge the layers of labor that thoughtful GenAI integration involves can be harmful. When administrators are forced to take on this additional labor without proper acknowledgement and support, feelings of despair, isolation, and, ultimately, burnout and resignation can result. When the process of GenAI integration is oversimplified and unaccounted for in workload assessments and tenure and promotion, it undermines the intellectual and interpersonal efforts of writing administrators that go into the effective use of GenAI. The cake analogy makes it clear that without the labor of writing administrators, the structure of the entire "cake"—a.k.a. the first-year writing programs, writing centers, and WAC programs—crumbles.

MAKING LABOR VISIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE

To prompt others to understand that the promise touted by GenAI enthusiasts requires a serious undertaking in their time, talent, and attention, writing administrators need to record and make transparent the labor that GenAI demands. Directors cannot assume that others will understand the significant time and energy that they extend in keeping themselves as well as staff informed; they need to document the efforts taken helping others in their programs and on their campus become educated about GenAI. Included in these efforts are collecting and providing resources, investigating how other institutions are considering and managing GenAI, and evaluating the best way to incorporate practices in these directors' specific programs. While the labor of writing administrators is often misunderstood as service, as the Council of Writing Program Administrators (2019) argues, it should also often be classified as scholarship, as it requires the application of disciplinary knowledge to create sound learning practices and products. These records of labor could be reported to university administration to establish that engaging with GenAI effectively is a scholarly pursuit that requires time and long-term institutional support. However, writing program and writing center directors have limited control over how this work is

valued. Regardless of their efforts, upper-level administration may not recognize or support this work—especially at smaller, service-heavy schools.

So what else can be done? Sharing the burden of this labor—ideally with the support of university administration—is important, as this labor is not sustainable and will likely lead to burnout. Forming a committee, with faculty and staff representatives from across the campus and the student body, allows for workload distribution. This group can better address concerns from all stakeholders and give them ownership in decision-making. Directors can also facilitate ways for the campus to learn together. These information-sharing opportunities do not need to include advanced preparation, which causes additional labor. Even regular, impromptu conversations with participants discussing their GenAI use or concerns can be extremely beneficial. Crowdsourcing resources about GenAI and adding them to a website, attributing them to contributors, is another way to distribute the work and acknowledge others' involvement. Including other stakeholders on campus with interest and expertise can support directors' efforts. Talking with local professionals in various fields could provide insight into how GenAI is used in their work and might provide some focus for training others. Along with traditional research methods, writing administrators might glean information from resources such as Substacks like Ethan Mollick's "One Useful Thing" or Facebook groups like "Higher Ed discussions of AI writing & use." Collaborating with and learning from others, as well as coordinating efforts, can ease the labor involved.

Writing administrators and their staff may also find it helpful to consider how much of their expertise and current practices are transferable to integrating GenAI. As the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (2023) emphasizes in their statement regarding GenAI, "designing meaningful and specific assignments that foster learning and develop skills; focusing on processes and practices such as peer-response and revision; encouraging writing in multiple genres, including ones connected to specific disciplinary practices" are already among the best practices of WAC programs. Writing teachers and tutors know how to scaffold their assignments and feedback to encourage learning, a technique that works well when utilizing GenAI. Additionally, directors can talk with their staff about ways GenAI can complement the work that's already being done, such as using GenAI with students to come up with potential organizational methods for a paper, or examples of strong thesis statements. In both these scenarios, instructors and tutors could assist students in analyzing the quality of the results. Emma C. Johnson's (2026) essay in this collection details some possible activities for creating and analyzing outlines. Another strategy that instructors use in developing assignments and tutors utilize at the beginning of sessions is asking leading questions; this skill is essential to effective prompt engineering for use with GenAI.

Considering the uniquely human talents and strengths of writing tutors and teachers can also help to ease the emotional labor involved in GenAI adoption, especially the angst of job security. Directors might help staff see the importance of their role in forming relationships with student writers. As Joe Essid (2023) points out, “Generative AI cannot presently engage in the richly collaborative work that occurs in a one-on-one conference with a fellow writer.” As shown in several studies and discussed frequently at conferences, both the writing center tutors and first-year composition instructors prioritize connections with students. Other essays in this section of this book, particularly Kristi Girdharry’s (2026) “AI Will Make the Writing Center Obsolete,” highlight the importance of the human connection that occurs in writing center sessions. Reminding staff of the value of these relationships, which contribute significantly to student belonging and retention, is one way writing administrators can productively engage with the emotional labor of GenAI adoption.

Although GenAI is marketed as a time- and labor-saving device for educators, its adoption requires extensive intellectual and emotional labor on the part of the writing administrators who lead and mentor teaching and tutoring staff. Institutional acknowledgement of this labor is a necessary first step, both to account for the changing scope of writing administration work and to prevent burnout. Additionally, writing program administrators and writing center directors can take actions to mitigate this labor by sharing their concerns and knowledge, considering what they already do well, and reinforcing what they do better than GenAI. While there will continue to be a good deal of uncertainty during this transitional phase, administrators can be proactive by making others conscious of and invested in the workload required.

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