CHAPTER 47.

EXCLUDE STUDENTS FROM INSTITUTIONAL CONVERSATIONS AND POLICY MAKING AROUND AI ✨ *STUDENTS SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN INSTITUTIONAL AI POLICY CONVERSATIONS*

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> Academia operates on hierarchies that can cause [students] to forget the value of our thoughts. A struggle throughout my college experience has been remembering the value I bring to the conversation, even if I do not have a master's or PhD.
>
> – Annika Hauser-Brydon

In this chapter, we highlight the importance of student involvement in shaping generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) policy within the classroom and offer strategies to ensure students play active roles in broader institutional decision-making. Too frequently, higher education policies, guidelines, and regulations are ostensibly developed with students in mind—yet students are typically cast as passive end users rather than as engaged stakeholders who are directly affected and could and should meaningfully participate. This exclusion diminishes student agency in their own educational experiences. As Annika's perspective demonstrates, such environments can also lead students to undervalue their voices.

We argue that excluding students from conversations and policymaking about GenAI is misguided. Instead, it is both more ethical and more effective to involve students directly in these dialogues.

Drawing on our recent work as both faculty and students at Michigan State University (MSU)—and, in the case of Kate and Dànielle, as writing program

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administrators experienced in institutional change and policy development—we begin by outlining our broader institutional context. We then describe our experiences teaching and learning in a one-credit special topics course offered in Spring 2024, "Humans, Writing, and AI." Finally, we conclude with practical recommendations for educators, program directors, administrators, and policymakers who seek to incorporate student perspectives into meaningful GenAI policy discussions.

THE CONTEXT

In August 2023, a team coordinated by the provost at MSU released "Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Reminders and Guidance for Students." The guidelines themselves were generous and generative—by necessity, given that they had to be enacted across 17 colleges, 200 undergraduate degree programs, more than 100 academic minors, and myriad graduate programs—and included the following:

- Ask before you use AI and check your syllabus and assignment guidelines.
- Take full responsibility for your writing and the evidence supporting it, including attribution of sources such as generative AI. It should be used as a resource to facilitate your learning, not a replacement for your education.

Know the potential risks and limitations of AI outputs. Results might include misinformation, inaccuracies, bias, or inappropriate or unintentionally harmful content. (Visit https://wacclearinghouse.org/books/perspectives/badideas/ to view the guidelines.) As the guidance was revised, adapted, and adopted in specific units and disciplines, the shape it took was more punitive, more exclusionary, and more limiting. At best, this guidance framed students as seekers of knowledge for whom GenAI use was potentially problematic; at worst, these guidelines created space for any GenAI use to be interpreted as intellectual dishonesty. Because students weren't directly consulted in the shaping of or included in the implementation of the guidance, it veered toward the punitive rather than the generative.[2]

THE CLASS

As scholars—teachers interested in the impacts that AI is having and in students'

2 See Ariel M. Goldenthal and Adams Courtney Adams Wooten (this collection) for a nuanced discussion of institutional policies and a robust argument as to why writing programs should develop their own AI policies, build AI resources, and offer AI-related PD opportunities.

current and future AI use—Kate and Dànielle designed and taught a 1-credit special topics class in the spring of 2024: "Humans, Writing, and AI." Our goal for the class was to create a space and place for us to experiment with, interact with, use, and critique different GenAI tools in a context where we learned from one another. The questions that framed our course design were: How is AI changing writing in college and in the world? As a community of writers, how must we adapt to these changes? Further, Kate and Dànielle pondered: How can we adapt our classrooms and our writing programs to best equip students to navigate and, ideally, influence these changes?

For the first day of class, we asked students to read MSU's guidance for students (along with the guidance for faculty: see LINK TO PDF). On the first day of class, we generated content for the AI policy portion of the course syllabus together—a fitting rhetorical/social move, we thought, given the focus of the course and our attention to the knowledge and experience students brought to the class with them. The move offered a type of "structural integrity" as conceptualized by Laurie A. Pinkert and Jonathan Beever (this collection). Our collaboratively crafted course AI policy included:

- Everyone in the class has the option and is encouraged to explore the tools they find most interesting and compelling; no specific AI program will be used exclusively (Grammarly, ChatGPT, Gemini, Snapshot AI extension, Adobe AI, Quillbot, MS photo AI generator, Siri, Alexa, CharacterAI).
- We value robust, thoughtful disclosure; AI use should be disclosed in content production (e.g., journal entries, online asynchronous activities).
- We will find, share, and build different methods of citing AI (as co-author, as tool, as reference; cite prompt, include datestamp).
- AI prompts should be part of how AI use is disclosed and situated.
- Context of AI use should be recognized and discussed (Who is the audience? What was the purpose? Where was AI used? Why was AI used? How is AI acknowledged or not?).

We reviewed, revised, and worked with these policies across the semester while we discussed class readings, explored and critiqued different AI tools, evaluated search results across multiple tools, and analyzed the different tools' use policies.

Across the class, we shared different ways we were using AI tools. Three specific activities students described using AI for included:

- For entertainment: Asking an AI tool to generate and pose a riddle, then asking follow-up questions to discern the answer to the riddle.

- For translation projects: Comparing an English translation produced by different tools or, in a situation where a translation isn't available, asking an AI tool to produce a translation.
- For preparing to submit work: Pasting an assignment, rubric, and a draft response into an AI tool and asking it if the draft meets the assignment criteria. Asking AI for a possible grade based on an instructor-provided rubric, and for revision suggestions (the student who shared this activity mentioned that this allowed him to use AI as a means for feedback, improvement, and growth without judgment and without waiting to speak to a tutor or mentor).

Our experiences as teachers in the course (Kate, Dànielle) and as students in the course (Annika, Margaux, Jonathan, Seth, Nadia, and Jacquelyne) convinced us of the need to center students in policy-making discussions regarding AI.

INCLUDING STUDENTS IN AI POLICY DISCUSSIONS

Why include students? First and foremost, to adapt a claim Zack DePiero makes in his chapter in this collection—drawing on Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle (2015)—just as "writing is a social and rhetorical activity," so, too, are policy discussions, policy crafting, and policy enforcement. Second, those who live under and through policy should be engaged in making policy. Policy without participation leads directly to a specific type of policing—surveillance, control, and punishment via policy. Policy centered in fear or focused on punitive measures may create an adversarial relationship between faculty and students. Faculty members focusing on preventing GenAI use or determining if a student has used GenAI may spend less time deeply engaging with student work, which can negatively impact faculty productivity and student learning.

Additionally, restricting students from policy-making discussions and decisions denies their expertise. Many of the students entering our classrooms were educated *with* today's tools and technologies, and their learning happened *alongside and with* the development and adoption of these technologies. Indeed, students are often among the first users (or even developers—Facebook was created by Harvard students, Snapchat was developed by Stanford students, and WordPress originated at the University of Houston) of technology like artificial intelligence. Too often, university policies are reactionary; indeed, in our class, we found students using AI in exceptionally generative, curious, inquiry-based, creative ways that should inform policy making. Students bring diverse and *different* considerations and unique perspectives to policy discussions.

It's a bad idea *not* to include students in the development of AI policy (and, of course, other instructional/educational policies that influence how and what students do and learn in our classrooms) because of the nature of our higher educational contexts. Faculty are trained, work in, and are rewarded for mono-disciplinary, siloed thinking. Students typically do not think along such discrete thought lines until they are disciplined into disciplinary identities. When sharing their perspectives, students can invite policymakers to think transdisciplinarily.

Today's university students are preparing for jobs that don't yet exist, where they will use tools, technologies, and systems that haven't yet been developed. Our university president declared on March 21, 2024—echoing calls and claims by others in recent years—that we are "training students for careers we can't yet imagine" and preparing them to work with tools and technologies that are still on our collective horizon. Perhaps one of the most important activities we can engage students in is ensuring that they are learners—that they approach the world with inquiry and experience and leave college knowing how to learn. Krystal Rawls, the Workforce Integration Network (WIN) Director at Cal State Dominguez Hills, situated AI in the context of accessibility and equity, arguing that "students have the right to be educated on today's tools and not yesterday's fears" (AACU, 2023). Further, Brian Haugabrook, Former CIO at Valdosta State University, claimed that "this is the age of 'with …'" (Safian, 2012), inspiring us to embrace a "with" and "and" mindset toward AI. Closer to writing studies, Sid Dobrin (2023) argued that "educational institutions need to address the role higher education will play in preparing students for career success in an AI-driven workforce" (p. 3).

Students should be equipped to recognize and respond ethically to both the benefits and drawbacks of these revolutionary and emergent tools. By excluding students from conversations about AI's generative potential and ethical implications, we hinder their ability to navigate and utilize nascent technologies. Restricting student access to AI limits their preparedness for the global workplace, where these tools are increasingly integrated and may soon become essential in most professions. Students involved in AI policy creation will be better able to address ethical issues and support their workplaces in handling the complex dynamics of AI and algorithmic processing.

Relatedly, students will, indeed, be the decision-makers of the future. They will shape policy. They will engage in advocacy. They will contribute to, make, and shape the institutions for which and through which they work. They will write end-user agreements. They will craft and code algorithms. They will collect, analyze, and decide how and when to use data. We must engage them with fundamental humanistic thinking and approaches; it's also our job to equip them to *shape* humanistic thinking and approaches in their futures, whether via

human thinking or computational thinking (and especially as the two intersect more and more).

A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

To best support students in our current context and to face our emergent future in the context of writing and/with digital technologies including AI, in classroom contexts, we'd encourage faculty to consider collaborating with students to create AI policy together, as we did in our class. Not only does this situate students as stakeholders and recognize their expertise, but it also provides the instructor with an initial assessment of student approaches to and understandings of generative AI.

A second practice we adopted in our class that might lend itself well to other classes and contexts is co-building an AI tools spreadsheet. We created a Google Spreadsheet and asked everyone (Kate and Dànielle also participated) to add:

- The name of an AI tool.
- The URL/link to the tool.
- A description of what the tool can generate (just text? just images? just video? a variety of content types?).
- At least one pro (positive aspect) of the tool.
- At least one con (negative aspect) of the tool.

Because our class was entirely devoted to issues of AI, we consistently referred to the spreadsheet throughout the semester. We encouraged students to try out different tools from the spreadsheet, we tried out some of the tools together in class, and we asked students to add more tools as they discovered them.

Thinking toward the institutional, WPAs are situated in disciplinary, professional, and activist ways to advocate for and to shape policy. Indeed, our field has a history of and commitment to not just institutional critique but institutional change (Adler-Kassner, 2008; Charlton et al., 2011; Grabill, Gretter, & Skogsburg, 2022; Grabill, Porter et al., 2003; Kelly, 2023; LaFrance, 2019; Porter et al., 2000) and change as necessary social justice action fueled by the voices often marginalized in institutional conversations (e.g., those around policy; Walton et al., 2019). We are some of the best-equipped thinkers, writers, and rhetoricians to participate in policymaking. Indeed, policies are the writing and the rhetorical means by which the institution is shaped and changed. In our teaching and our WPA work, Kate and Dànielle work to engage students not just as writers but as change agents. We thus recommend that students, at the very least, be invited to review draft AI policy. At smaller institutions, this might happen in the context of classes or via focus groups. In larger institutions like ours, student

government or other student representative bodies should be consulted. Ideally, students should be included on any board, panel, or consortia from the inception of the group's charge throughout the entire academic governance process for policy implementation.

We also recommend that faculty and students champion the creation of policies that encourage learning, playing, exploring, and questioning rather than prohibiting use or blocking access to certain tools and technologies. Students are the foundation of the classroom experience in higher education; student learning, experiences, and expertise should be included if not centered in our policy discussions and decisions. Indeed, if we want to understand how students learn, read, work, and write today, we must understand their processes of learning, reading, working, and writing with AI.

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