CHAPTER 15. RE(DE)FINING COLLABORATION: LEVERAGING AI'S POTENTIALS IN ASYNCHRONOUS WRITING CENTER SESSIONS AND TUTOR TRAINING

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In a writing center staff meeting before I left for the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), two tutors asked how to deal with suspected GenAI use. Instructors had already emailed me similar questions. Just like that, and like Kat Greene and Charlotte Kupsh in this collection, I found myself contending inevitably with GenAI. At the time, I encouraged tutors to treat suspected GenAI use like suspected academic dishonesty during sessions: point writers to the syllabus and recommend they check with their instructor to ensure their GenAI use followed course policies. I also promised to provide more information after my conference, as I was both a presenter at and attendee of the 2024 International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Collaborative at CCCC. Themed around emergent issues created by GenAI, the Collaborative provided space to think about GenAI with other directors and tutors from a broad range of institutions and perspectives. During the full-day event, I attended four sessions in addition to presenting, and I even drafted my proposal for this chapter at Elisabeth Buck's session about this edited collection.

Many of our conversations at the Collaborative aligned with discussions of GenAI in informal venues, centering around how GenAI can be used in sessions (Coffill; Deans et al.), teaching (Bedington et al.; Coffill; *The Writing Center*), or at different stages of the writing process (Deans et al.; Stowe; *The Writing Center*).[1] In addition to these contexts, the collaborative prompted

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1   At the time of drafting this article, *The Writing Center and Teaching with AI* was a public-facing handout located on Saginaw Valley State University Writing Center's website. While the content was removed in late 2025, I was able to recover a version of it using the Wayback Machine. I have included this link in the works cited page.

me to consider GenAI's potential roles in tutor training. This chapter presents my early thoughts about how GenAI can function as a collaborator in preparing my tutors, largely multilingual graduate assistants, for asynchronous email sessions through three visions to our asynchronous training: using GenAI to build a bank of writing for future asynchronous sessions, using GenAI to receive feedback on their own writing, and using GenAI to help draft written comments during practice (and by extension real-time) asynchronous sessions. While my thinking is largely framed by recent discussions of GenAI, I also draw on Talin Phillips' recommendation of tutoring multilingual graduate writers holistically with a particular focus on disciplinary writing and continual support for surface issues and on the evolving idea of collaboration in writing center sessions.

HOW I CAME TO AI

My perceptions of GenAI are partly informed by my personal experiences in other writing and composing contexts. I first saw GenAI as a collaborator through video game content on YouTube, as players used character AIs to dictate choices in their playthroughs of open-world games like *Skyrim* and ChatGPT to do the same in *Animal Crossing.* Like writing centers, player-composers in these contexts rely on GenAI as a collaborator rather than as sole composer. Current conversations frame GenAI's potential as collaborator throughout the process (Deans et al.; "Generative AI"). This remains a chief consideration as directors, educators, administrators, and tutors grapple with where AI fits in and, to Eric Klinger's point, how it changes our assumptions about writing and knowledge.

At the same time, I've witnessed backlash against GenAI in creative writing and visual art spaces, as programs are trained using stolen material. Such views tie to Matthew Bryan's argument that GenAI is "ethically questionable." Issues with false information (Deans et al.; "Generative AI"; Lester; Stowe), bias ("Generative AI"; Lester; Rayne), shortcomings that include critical thinking and active listening (Essid), violations of fair use (Essid) and academic honesty ("Generative AI"), and utilization of personal data by these programs ("Generative AI") make GenAI a series of imperfect and ethically questionable tool. From a broader standpoint, ChatGPT and other GenAI programs pose environmental considerations, both in their use of water and in their carbon output (Egbemhenghe et al.). Writing center researchers have also brought up these concerns. Ellen Cecil-Lemkin and Lisa Marvel Johnson (in this collection) advocate for informing tutors about the ethical issues with AI, and both undergraduate and graduate tutors in Kristina Aikens and Hannah Weildon's study expressed ethical concerns about intellectual work.

What results from these considerations, in sum, is the still murky area of whether people should use GenAI and under what conditions. As a writing center director existing in multiple writing contexts, both those that have demonstrated GenAI's potential and its ethical pitfalls, I have arrived at five personal beliefs:

- GenAI can be a useful collaborator in multiple composing contexts, but it is not useful (or welcome) in all contexts or for all writers.
- There is no truly "ethical" use of current GenAI for three reasons: it takes without asking, companies use GenAI to replace human employees, and it negatively affects the environment.
- Because there is no ethical use of GenAI, I use the term "transparent" to describe my own usage. Like the player-composers who rely on GenAI in their content, I identify the text generated by AI and the tool used to create it.
- Tutors, like writing instructors, should have the freedom to decide when and how to use GenAI in sessions and should be notified about its ethical considerations, but they should also be prepared to work with writers using such technologies, depending on the state of writing instruction at their own institutions.
- Given its ethical issues, composers should use GenAI purposefully and in a limited capacity that best benefits their processes and needs. For example, I utilize ChatGPT to create passages that students and tutors can critique or leave feedback on.

My own involvement in multiple composing contexts and these five beliefs collectively informed my integration of such tools into training tutors for asynchronous sessions, which I consider here because current discussions largely center around use in synchronous sessions (Deans et al.) and because, since their inception at my institution in 2021, asynchronous sessions have gained popularity, necessitating that tutors be prepared to work in such environments. Additionally, GenAI's potential to support tutors conducting asynchronous sessions has not yet been fully been considered. My experiences at the collaborative, especially in Sarah Fredericks' session about GenAI's benefits for tutors working with multilingual writers, pushed me to explore how GenAI can be a collaborator in training, specifically in expanding tutors' knowledge of conducting asynchronous sessions. I consider three potential revisions to our current training structure, which combines asynchronous modules housed in our LMS with mock sessions. In the context of drawbacks, I provide optional GenAI components so that tutors could opt out if desired.

MODIFICATION 1: EXAMPLE GENRES

First, like Aikens and Weildon's use of GenAI essays for mock sessions, I leveraged AI's ability to create examples of academic genres (Deans et al.; "Generative AI") to build a database of sample essays that tutors can use in mock asynchronous sessions. Originally, I identified this potential from my own use of GenAI to create critique examples for in-class workshops in different disciplines, and I've had the opportunity to pilot this with a tutor-in-training already. With the tutor's permission, I prompted AI to generate two different examples of annotated bibliographies, an assignment common in our Composition 2 courses. We discussed the possibility of fabricated citations beforehand, but I emphasized that the purpose was to help the tutor improve their responses to student writing. This tutor had already gone through the two practice sessions I typically offer and requested more practice, given that they felt they were still struggling with leaving asynchronous feedback.

Given the need for more practice, I began building a database of sample asynchronous sessions with a GenAI option, itself a collaboration of tutors and GenAI across time. During week one of training, I asked tutors to either contribute one of their own essays or generate one using GenAI following Thomas Deans et al.'s four-step process: they must provide an identity, be specific in their request, guide the model through the process, and refine the result. To this, I added two additional considerations based on my own experiences with AI: a specific assignment and a specific issue, grammatical or otherwise. I allowed tutors who would rather not use AI to upload one of their old assignments. Regardless of which option they chose, tutors also included contextualizing information, such as the prompt they used, their imagined college course, and details that may help tutors leave mock feedback. As an example, I provided ChatGPT with the following prompt: "Write an essay about a major historical event in Ireland using only passive voice. Cite three sources. The essay should be at least six paragraphs." ChatGPT generated an essay about the potato famine that included the sentence, "This essay will discuss the causes, consequences, and responses to the Great Famine, *using exclusively passive voice* and citing three scholarly sources" ("Write an essay," emphasis mine).[2] Refining this sentence

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2   It should be noted that, between writing the first draft of this chapter and copyediting, both ChatGPT and MLA's citation guidelines changed. In consultation with the collection's editors, we determined the best course of action was to leave the original text rather than regenerate the prompts. This both allows my chapter to accurately reflect my GenAI training in the moment and the collection's efforts to capture an historical moment in writing centers. (This text was generated at a time when ChatGPT did not offer permalinks, and the original conversations with that software disappeared in the shuffle between work laptops. In lieu of permalinks, I have provided a general link to ChatGPT and included as much information as possible in the works cited entries.)

in my case involved prompting ChatGPT to remove that sentence, as it cues readers to one of the underlying issues in the essay. To further assist tutors completing this task, especially those new to GenAI, I created a template that they could use or modify along with my example. In weeks two and three, I asked tutors in training to use an essay from the bank for a mock email session. In both cases, I left feedback on these sessions geared towards helping tutors improve their asynchronous practices. Together, this approach has two advantages: it continually expands the practice email sessions available, and for those who do opt into GenAI, it gives tutors experience using such tools so they may assist writers in doing so.

This first alteration could also support tutors in learning more about disciplinary writing, both in asynchronous sessions and beyond, which Talin Phillips identifies as part of a holistic approach to supporting multilingual graduate writers (6). As our writing center has grown more multidisciplinary, tutors have an increased need to understand how to work with writers outside of their own discipline. While tutors build such knowledge over time in real-life sessions, practice sessions—including those using GenAI writing—provide opportunities to begin exploring disciplinary writing differences. After gathering sample essays, I encouraged first-semester tutors to conduct at least one practice session using a piece of writing outside of their own discipline, which gave them opportunities to practice posing questions about disciplinary writing in comments. While not a specialist in every discipline, I am mindful of these differences and can provide feedback that better equips tutors for asynchronous sessions with writers from different disciplines. In my example prompt above, I used history as my disciplinary focus, and asking tutors to do the same can help expose tutors to writing in other disciplines within asynchronous training.

MODIFICATION 2: USING GenAI TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

In line with Deans et al., and to provide prompting practice like Jessica Craig does in her tutor training, the second GenAI task involved asking first-semester tutors to get feedback from GenAI on a portion of their own writing, in this case, their training reflection. Deans et al. discuss using GenAI to assist with conciseness or clarity on a sentence level, which multilingual tutors could leverage in asynchronous sessions if they are struggling with word choice. Tutors complete a reflection during training, making revisions and additions throughout each of the four weeks, to represent key points in their learning. Using GenAI to refine part of a writing outside of coursework reduces the potential risk of academic dishonesty accusations. Regardless of whether tutors use GenAI for this process, they receive feedback from another tutor, and tutors who opt

out receive feedback from three tutors, twice during practice sessions and once in a less formal setting. In the week two reflection, tutors address how the feedback differed, either between tutors or between tutors and GenAI.

To clarify this process, I provided an example sentence I wrote for a mock week one reflection. I prompted ChatGPT with, "Comment on this sentence: This first week of training, I learned what a writing center is, what our writing center does, and what is expected of me as a tutor." In response, ChatGPT opened with praise, then offered constructive criticism: "This sentence is clear and well-structured, but it can be made more dynamic by varying the structure and reducing repetition" ("Comment on this sentence"). While I understand why ChatGPT made this suggestion, I am also aware that some disciplines of writing are, stylistically, more repetitive than others. By showing tutors my example, ChatGPT's suggestion verbatim, and my revision, "My first week of training focused on three areas of knowledge: general writing centers, our specific writing center, and tutor expectations," I aimed to demonstrate that GenAI's feedback is something to critically think about and with. ChatGPT's suggestion may work in certain disciplinary contexts, but others may call for more concision and directness rather than "creating interest." As part of training, I want tutors to understand how GenAI gives feedback, how that differs from the feedback given in writing centers, and, as Deans et al. underscore, that part of using GenAI in writing necessitates critical thought and revision rather than simply copying text word for word.

MODIFICATION 3: ASYNCHRONOUS COMMENTS AND GRAMMATICAL EXAMPLES

My final modification to training, building on the above revision, was asking tutors to use GenAI for comments in asynchronous sessions with writers, primarily for examples or definitions. I see this approach being especially useful with first-year or non-traditional writers who are not familiar with academic genres or conventions, as GenAI can create example outlines ("Generative AI") and thesis statements (Deans et al.). Moreover, I see a potential for GenAI to create examples—and potentially explanations—of repeated grammatical issues that tutors could use in sessions more generally. If tutors think critically about these examples and cross-check them, this use of GenAI can be especially useful for multilingual tutors who are working to expand their knowledge of grammatical issues and structures. Especially in outlines or genre examples, I encouraged tutors to use topics or examples that are not identical to the writer's to allow for critical thinking and application. The non-GenAI alternative asked tutors to locate and implement pre-existing examples on writing center websites.

Regardless of what option they chose, I emphasized explaining the example clearly and thoroughly, especially in asynchronous sessions.

Within the training itself, I tasked tutors with creating examples—either of genres, prewriting tools (like outlines), or sentence constructs, using GenAI. Those using sentence constructs were encouraged, as Fredericks demonstrated during her presentation, to compare English and their home language/s, as a tutor or the writer's home language if indicated. Like the feedback they received in week two, tutors were encouraged to revise GenAI's examples as needed. Continuing to utilize ChatGPT's essay about the potato famine, I exemplified what an email session comment about passive voice could look like. I prompted ChatGPT to "Write a comment explaining passive voice to a first-year writer using one of the above sentences. Include a correction and a note that other similar issues will be highlighted." ChatGPT's text, at least in my reading, lacks audience awareness and clarity for some audiences, like first-year writers at my institution: "Other similar issues will be highlighted throughout your writing to help you improve clarity and engagement" ("Write a comment"). A first-year writer may not know what clarity is. Further, the tone feels stale and unnatural for a writing center session, at least for my style of leaving comments. In this case, I decided to alter the comment's full text on my own while maintaining the content, rephrasing the last sentence to, "I'll highlight more passive voice in the next couple of paragraphs." In this case, I retained the idea but rephrased it to be in my own voice. This alteration may help multilingual tutors better explain stylistic issues they may be less familiar with, such as passive voice. At the same time, this presents opportunities for them to hone their voice for written feedback, as they can alter GenAI's responses to be more concise, friendly, and accessible to writers.

REFLECTION

My choice to integrate optional GenAI components into initial training provided mixed results. Of the five tutors who started this semester, only one tutor, who is a native English speaker and American citizen, opted to use it. One potential reason that our international students chose not to engage with GenAI training tasks relates to learning other technologies during training, such as our learning management system (LMS), the Microsoft Suite, and Zoom. They also experience a variety of cultural changes, both in terms of the institution and the region. That said, the tutor who chose to implement GenAI in their training noted it was useful in giving feedback and offering alternatives for sentence structure and order. However, she and I agreed that GenAI's suggestions to expand certain points of her reflection were less helpful because they seemed unnecessary. The mixed results

of AI represent its varying level of helpfulness for her, and I would argue for writers and tutors more generally. Nonetheless, I still viewed GenAI as an important topic to cover in training, given the ongoing conversations on campus and some instructors requiring it in their assignments, so in our second staff meeting of the semester, I required my tutors to read Deans et al. and walked them through prompting GenAI. I gave each of them an audience (e.g., children, first-year college students, parents) and a genre (e.g., a research paper, a poem, a personal essay) to provide ChatGPT or Gemini with. Because some tutors were opposed to getting their own accounts, I had them do this in small groups of three or four. This approach also worked to limit the number of prompts ChatGPT received while giving everyone present a chance to see how it worked. I personally feel this was more successful, as tutors were able to engage in the tools and refine their prompts. Additionally, the text generated varied in quality, but by the end of the meeting, we had three additional essays to add to our asynchronous training database. In the future, I will consider redoing this training but with more commentary from the participating tutors, following Beardsley in this collection, so that I can have a better understanding of their perceptions.

CONCLUSION

Together, these three alterations to existing training at my center represent how AI could be integrated to support multilingual tutors conducting asynchronous sessions. In addition to helping prepare tutors to conduct asynchronous sessions, the above three GenAI components can help support tutors across session formats, both with writers required and permitted to use it, by introducing how GenAI can support writers at all stages, how GenAI's prompts and wording frequently require refinement and revision, and how GenAI is limited in the feedback it provides. In light of GenAI's ethical drawbacks and potential biases, I encourage writing centers to avoid requiring GenAI in sessions so they can honor both tutors' curiosities and standpoints, although, depending on writing assignments across campus, tutors should be prepared to draw on such tools when supporting writers required by their instructors to use them. For that reason, at the time this chapter is being revised (August 2025), I have decided to require the minimal training components above, with the option to complete them in collaboration with others, so tutors are prepared to help writers using GenAI.

Outside of sessions, tutors could also apply what they learn about GenAI use to collaboratively develop workshops on GenAI with other departments or with each other. As well, administrators using GenAI in their centers could adapt the above modifications to address instructors during professional development days. In centers with on-site training, in the classroom or in the center itself,

tutors could complete these AI tasks collaboratively, and the activities could be modified to better suit each context. For instance, while I plan to have tutors use their week one reflections in practice sessions and to get feedback from AI, other training programs could use tutoring philosophies, research papers, journal entries, or assigned writing.

Looking ahead, the future of GenAI is still uncertain and evolving, and while writing centers often focus on the ethical implications related to the writing GenAI steals, their conversations could expand to the resources such technologies consume. As Bryan notes, technologies have always been at the forefront of writing centers. Given how fast AI is evolving, itself a concern (Stowe), this is just a starting point. Rather than ending my considerations at AI, I hope that my viewpoints and considerations of GenAI can be extended to other technologies as well. With GenAI, writing centers have asked how GenAI fits into the tutoring work that we do, leaving room for conversations about how GenAI fits into preparing tutors to work with writers. Beyond GenAI, writing centers could consider not only how GenAI is integrated, but whether (ethically) and how other technologies can be integrated into training as they develop, either as something tutors use and learn as part of training or as a kind of writing they use as practice material. Preparing tutors to work with writing technologies across formats can better support writers who may also be unfamiliar with them, and while this approach may mean technology remains an integral part of what we do, the question of "whether" can help centers identify ethical concerns within and beyond writing.

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