CHAPTER 5. DEVELOPING AI POLICIES AND STATEMENTS: A REFLECTION ON WRITING CENTER/WRITING PROGRAM COLLABORATION

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In the fall of 2023, staff and tutors at the writing center (officially called The Learning Hub) collaborated with writing program faculty at the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) to create a generative AI (GenAI) policy and syllabus statement for all first-year writing courses. This chapter (written collaboratively by the writing coordinator in our Learning Hub and the writing program administrator) digs into the process by which the two loci of writing on campus worked together to develop this policy and put it into practice. We believe that it is useful for students to hear consistent messaging around how, when, and whether to use GenAI in their writing from different sources on campus and that the writing center and writing program are key touch-points for new college students—the guidance from the classroom and the center together can influence the approach that students take towards GenAI in the future. By working together, the writing center and the writing program can create a "vibrant community of writing" that provides a shared space for contemplating GenAI (Myatt and Gaillet xi). Moreover, a partnership between the writing center and the writing program in policy creation ensures that the policy represents multiple approaches to writing and learning to write, drawing from a richer pool of theory and practice to create a policy reinforced in multiple places on the campus. We found this shared approach to GenAI policy development led our tutors to feel ownership over the developed policy and feel comfortable raising and engaging in conversations with students about GenAI, specifically in the context of their first-year writing course.

This chapter explores the partnership between the writing program and the writing center at UIS, looking at how the center acts as a hub for instructors, tutors, and students. First, this chapter provides some background and context for UIS, the partnership between our programs, and our collaboration to

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create the GenAI policy, before exploring the writing studies theories from both writing center and writing program scholars that inform the policy. Then, this chapter dives into how our embedded-tutoring model (with tutors assigned to specific sections of composition and attending classes once a week) gives tutors the opportunity to put theory into practice and shape conversations about GenAI on our campus, acting simultaneously as ambassadors, experts, and peers through this collaboration. We hope that this chapter can offer a model for similar collaboration at other institutions, one that is flexible and responsive to the changing landscape of writing in the face of emergent GenAI technologies.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND COLLABORATIVE POLICYMAKING

One bright and sunny day in August 2023, a handful of writing professionals met for the annual Writing Program Orientation, determined to develop a statement and policy for GenAI in the first-year composition classroom at UIS.

UIS is a small, public, teaching-focused institution in the Midwest currently navigating an identity shift, transitioning between liberal arts college to regional comprehensive. UIS serves approximately 2,500 undergraduate students, and 250-300 of those students move through the two-course first-year writing sequence each year, with roughly 15 composition courses offered each semester ("About UIS"). The writing program at UIS, housed in the English Department, is led by tenured faculty member Stephanie Hedge (co-author of this piece). The writing program has two full-time instructors who teach 6-8 sections of composition each semester, with other sections taught by tenure-line faculty, adjunct labor, and the writing coordinator of The Learning Hub, Sarah Collins (co-author). The writing center at UIS is embedded in The Learning Hub, a comprehensive center for academic support services, housed in the library and situated under the Center for Academic Success and Advising, where the Writing Coordinator is a staff position. The Learning Hub employs roughly ten undergraduate and graduate peer writing tutors and a small number of full-time professional writing tutors. UIS uses an embedded tutoring program (see Kurzer et al.; Spigelman and Grobman), assigning the writing tutors to one or two composition sections each semester. Tutors regularly meet with instructors and attend class, working closely with students in the classroom by offering writing workshops and other instructional support.

In attendance that sunny day in August were Hedge and Collins, the full-time writing program instructors and adjuncts, and the peer tutors. The GenAI policy conversation followed from a program overview and general orientation, beginning with a discussion in the room about AI generally. The peer tutors

offered valuable insights into how they personally felt about GenAI and AI-generated writing (broadly: not positively), *and* how their peers talked about and used GenAI (broadly: with enthusiasm and abandon, which largely matches UIS' institutional approach to GenAI). Following a short, grounding talk on the development of algorithmic writing and what it produces, the discussion turned to metaphors about GenAI and the challenges of calling it "intelligence" (see Chiang; Huang; Xiang), thinking about how to frame GenAI for our students, both in the classroom and in The Learning Hub. Finally, Hedge posed a question to the room: Can (and how and should) we use GenAI in the composition classroom?

Our policy answers that question (see below), but of note here is the development of this policy through discussion and conversation with all voices in the room. Hedge shared a sample statement as a starting point, and using Google Docs as a space for collaboration and discussion, the writing experts in the room debated definitions of plagiarism, whether invention and revision fall under the broad umbrella of "writing," and potential consequences for not following policies; the discussion culminated in the development and refinement of our GenAI policy.

Working together to create the policy ensured both a breadth of experience and expertise in crafting the policy and buy-in from all stakeholders charged with enforcing the policy. Reflecting on the experience of co-creating the GenAI policy, Learning Hub TA Sami Pierce uses "we" to mean both the writing program instructors and the tutors in the room, saying "while it was obvious to **us** that the use of [Gen]AI was antithetical to developing writing and rhetorical skills … **we** decided that it was best to explain this reasoning in the policy," demonstrating how participating in the process fostered a sense of ownership in the policy for the tutors (Pierce, emphasis added). In the end, our policy came together through the expertise and best judgment of both the writing center and writing program experts, and it represents our combined understanding of writing theory and practice.

THEORY INFORMED POLICIES

Our GenAI policy is calibrated particularly for the student population at UIS who enroll in our first-year writing courses: majority first-generation college students who are still developing their writing and literacy skills. Our students frequently understand the importance of writing (for college, careers, and beyond) while simultaneously feeling that they are not strong writers. Our co-developed GenAI policy centers skill development through practice, aiming to bolster both writing skill and student confidence in their writing. We hope

that by gaining confidence in their writing skills, they will feel better equipped to make strategic decisions about GenAI writing in the future. Our policy for GenAI writing in UIS' first-year composition classrooms is:

> Submitting writing generated by an Artificial Intelligence (AI) or algorithmic writing program (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted in ENG 101 and ENG 102. These courses are designed to help you develop and hone skills in writing, and the best way to develop those skills is to do the writing work yourself, through consistent, sustained practice. The goal of this class is not to produce well-written papers as much as it is to help you develop the skills necessary to do that writing work. Having a machine complete the writing work for you will not aid in the development of your skills. (Hedge et al.)

Two core theories anchor this policy: first, the idea that writing is a skill developed through practice, and second, that a first-year writing course's purpose is to develop students as writers rather than to produce good writing. The latter theory echoes North on writing centers: "in a writing center the object is to make sure that writers, and not necessarily their texts, are what get changed by instruction. In axiom form it goes like this: Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing" ("The Idea" 438). While none of us cited North in the room during our discussion, this idea was clearly at the forefront of our thinking as we grappled with creating a policy. Central to our discussion were the overarching goals and purposes of the classroom, and the voices from the writing center (embedded as they are in these classes) helped us come to this conclusion: "The goal of this class is not to produce well-written papers as much as it is to help you develop the skills necessary to do that writing work" (Hedge et al.). While GenAI writing may produce "better" writing (a debatable claim), our policy argues less for the result of student writing than the process (and practice) by which the student gets there. Moreover, we believe that to successfully assess or edit GenAI text, students need to gain a measure of fluency in their own writing—North's "better" writer has a strong foundation for making strategic and critical decisions about AI writing.

Core to the writing program at UIS, and our statement, is the idea that writing improves via practice—as Yancey argues in *Naming What We Know*, learning to write requires practice to develop fluency with words and language, practice to develop and hone techniques and strategies, and practice to engage with a community of practice and other people (64-65). Yancey likens the act of writing to learning how to swim, and compares the physical act of writing to moving the body in the water, both reminding us that writing is also always a physical

activity as well as a cognitive one, and offering a useful metaphor for GenAI and writing skills: swimmers who always or only use assistive or floatation devices cannot swim effectively without them; writers who rely on GenAI before they develop their own internalized writing skills may struggle without the technology and may lack the foundational fluency to make informed, strategic decisions about writing and GenAI.

While we recognize that, by the time of publication, this policy may seem overly restrictive, it provided a grounding touchstone for conversations about GenAI in the classroom and beyond at a time of turmoil and change. Further, new research, like the MIT study that found a direct relationship between the use of AI and cognitive load struggles when drafting an essay (Kosmyna et al.), suggests that restricting GenAI use for novice writers may support increased skill development, and our policy remains the same in 2025.

Of importance here is not necessarily the specific theories that informed our policy but rather the blend of writing center and writing studies theories that shaped our thinking; the collaboration between the writing center and writing program was key to developing the GenAI policy and, as we will discuss in more detail below, sharing out that policy on campus.

SHAPING CONVERSATIONS INSTITUTIONALLY

Once we crafted our GenAI policy for our first-year writing classroom, we had to put the policy into action, both in the classroom and in the writing center. While scholarship has historically indicated a somewhat contentious, if not outright antagonistic, relationship between writing programs and writing centers (North, "Revisiting 'The Idea'"), our direct and intentionally fostered collaboration is lived out through embedded tutors and the work they do in the writing classroom. As writing coordinator and director of first-year writing, we co-developed, as proposed by Cohen and Mankin, an "action framework" for the partnership undertaken by The Learning Hub tutors and composition faculty which ensured "clear structure and strong interpersonal relationships," including a position description, collaborative paperwork guiding initial discussions, and qualitative assessment surveys solicited from tutors, faculty, and composition students at the end of each semester (qtd. in Myatt 6-7). This partnership grew out of "negotiations … in articulating the shared values and outcomes that are needed to implement and sustain" the relationship (Myatt and Gaillet xiii). We believe in the power of shared values and outcomes when it comes to GenAI and writing for first-year students, and that by working together, the writing program and writing center can significantly impact how new students interpret or engage with GenAI.

Collaboration with an embedded tutor in composition classrooms offers a unique perspective from a peer at a further point in their progression as writers, not only due to their training through The Learning Hub, but also through their experiences as students themselves. As Chapter 1 in this collection argues, writing centers, and by extension their peer educators, are interstitial: existing "between and across" the bounds of particular programs of study on a campus (Johnson and Wynn Perdue). From this position, the embedded tutors serve as valuable sites for discussion about GenAI. As writing tutor Sami Pierce explains, "I think that embedded and peer tutors can open valuable dialogue with students about [Gen]AI usage in academia and personal life. Having the common ground of both being students can help bridge understanding and communication between the instructors' and students' views on the issue of [Gen]AI." Being embedded in the classroom explicitly invites the tutors into context-specific conversations about GenAI, and, in their positions as peers, the embedded tutors can challenge, complicate, or enrich discussions about GenAI for these specific writing tasks.

As the embedded tutoring model favors a stronger bond between the tutor and the instructor and students of their assigned sections compared to external visits to the writing center (Kurzer et al.), the tutors can use that trust and that bond to have conversations about GenAI without judgment. As writing tutor Jacob Laurenzana shares in a reflection on a tutoring session with one of the students from his section, "I posed a question to the student: 'Are there any tools you used to help you write this paper?' The student was caught off-guard and was hesitant to admit they used these tools in their writing until I told them that it is not my responsibility or intention to report them, but rather I am just here to help you make your writing the best it can be." The student was more willing to engage in a conversation about their writing and GenAI because it came from the peer tutor rather than the instructor; at the same time, Laurenzana could have that conversation with the student because he was embedded in the class and afforded the opportunity to read the students' work in context. This example furthers the conversations begun in Chapter 2 related to writing centers' positionality of "speaking from the middle" and affording opportunities for students to discuss topics like academic integrity, writing process, and instructor expectations in a safe, judgement- and consequence-free zone (Velez et al.). Sami Pierce echoes the importance of giving students a space to explore responses to generative GenAI beyond the instructor, reflecting, "I have found that often students are very interested in what [Gen]AI means for them in and out of class…. This curiosity can clash with the uncertainty surrounding the topic and often students can feel uneasy approaching the subject with their professors because of the power dynamic that exists between professors and students." This intermediary position—not-quite-instructor but not-quite-student—creates a space

where the GenAI policy can meaningfully live on the campus as the tutors exercise their expertise as an "interested, rhetorically savvy audience" which "rests in large part on knowledge of the social and rhetorical dimensions of constructing knowledge through writing" as they respond to GenAI use in specific rhetorical contexts and situations (Nowacek and Hughes 181-2). In Laurenzana's specific case, he responded to the student using GenAI by emphasizing the rhetorical power of the individual voice, telling the student that writing "allows you to find and develop your voice in a way that benefits you long term professionally and socially … because your writing is an extension of yourself, and you have your own unique importance that should never be undervalued."

The embedded tutors can offer multiple perspectives on many aspects of writing theory and praxis, helping to make connections between our program policy, writing theory, and the work the students are doing. For example, many emerging writers lack an understanding of writing as "an ongoing and iterative process" full of recursion and metacognition and failure and, eventually, success (Downs and Robertson 109), an idea key to our GenAI policy, and many students get stuck at the failure stage. In their discussions with students, writing tutor Sami Pierce recognized a lack of confidence in writing skills/processes as a "common theme in LLM usage," which led to "many meaningful conversations about skill building as a process," showcasing how an embedded tutor embodies putting theory into practice for students while reinforcing the GenAI policy. Through the embedded tutors, and working together, learning centers and writing programs alike can fight the stigma of students not "being good" at writing—they can invest students in healthier ideas, including "writing is not natural" and "failure is part of the process" and other threshold concepts, and can help defeat the nagging anxiety related to the expectations for a product of writing which can push a student to rely on GenAI or turn to other academic integrity issues (Adler-Kassner and Wardle).

Our embedded tutors also facilitated conversations about using GenAI critically and thoughtfully. If our goal in our writing program is to develop foundational writing and literacy skills so students can achieve the goal of, as Anson notes, "being rhetorically flexible" when it comes to making decisions about GenAI, then through our partnership, the tutors actively practice those critical skills with our students (qtd. in Dryer et al. 78). Writing tutor Audra Liniger shares that she frequently has conversations with students about the reliability of AI-generated research and notes, "I emphasize how important it is to learn the writing and research skills that [Gen]AI claims to offer because, if one is not proficient in these skills, they will not be able to easily recognize when information is inaccurate." Liniger and others lean on the threshold concept that "writing creates new meaning rather than transmitting information unaltered"

and invites students to think critically about the perceived-as-unaltered information shared by predictive text models (Downs and Robertson 109). Pierce has had similar conversations with their students in the context of "an interesting shift in a zeitgeist," where students are asking ChatGPT for results instead of saying "let's Google it." As students expressed a lack of confidence in responses given by GoogleAI, Pierce pushed back by asking students why they trust responses from other [Gen]AI sources, inviting students to think critically about where they source their information.

Ultimately, the embedded tutors in our classrooms bring the GenAI policy to life. As they work with their peers on their writing work, the tutors can have discussions about the theory and practice of writing and using GenAI in contextual and practical ways for the students, discussions that come from a familiar and trusted source.

CONCLUSION

The relationship between the first-year writing program and The Learning Hub at UIS shows how "the unique influences of both the Writing Program and the Writing Center, individually and together, can be powerful, effective, and harmonious" (Myatt and Gaillet x) as we work together to respond to GenAI in theory, practice, and policy. Writing centers need to respond to GenAI flexibly as it continues to evolve and change, and at UIS we have fostered a model of collaborative responsiveness driven by a theory-based approach that articulates our institution's core values on writing grounded within the writing center and first-year writing program—as Boquet and Lerner affirm, "It will take all of us who are invested in literacy education … to maximize the potential of these exciting new opportunities" (186). By collaboratively writing a GenAI policy that was then brought to life in the classroom by our embedded tutors, we were able to create a consistent, sustained response to GenAI for our students—and one that may grow and change as we continue to adapt to advances in GenAI. After all, the August orientation, where we developed the policy, continues to be held every year, offering an ongoing space for continued exploration, refinement, and engagement.

We hope that our example serves as a way of thinking about not just GenAI, but other emergent writing trends or practices that may benefit from collaboration between these two sites for writing on college campuses.

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