

INTRODUCTION

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On the 27th of January 2026, we asked the generative AI (GenAI) tool ChatGPT to respond to the prompt, “Why should writing center practitioners be invested in understanding AI?” This was its response:

Writing center practitioners should be invested in understanding AI because AI is already reshaping how writers think, draft, revise, and learn—and writing centers sit right at that intersection of process, pedagogy, and ethics. A few key reasons:

1. Writers are already using AI (whether we like it or not). Students and faculty are experimenting with tools like ChatGPT for brainstorming, outlining, revising, and even overcoming writer’s block. Writing centers need enough AI literacy to have informed, non-judgmental conversations about how these tools are being used—and how they can be used responsibly.
2. AI challenges traditional ideas of authorship and originality. Writing centers have long helped writers negotiate citation, voice, collaboration, and academic integrity. AI complicates all of that. Understanding AI allows tutors to help writers ask better questions like: What counts as my own thinking? How do I represent sources honestly? How do I maintain my voice?
3. It directly affects writing pedagogy and process. Writing centers are process-oriented spaces. AI tools can support (or short-circuit) stages like invention, drafting, and revision. Practitioners who understand AI can help writers use it as a scaffold rather than a replacement for learning.
4. Equity and access are at stake. AI tools can widen or narrow gaps depending on how they’re taught and regulated. Writing centers often serve stu-

dents navigating linguistic, cultural, or institutional barriers. Being AI-literate helps practitioners advocate for ethical, inclusive uses rather than blanket bans that may disadvantage some writers.

5. Tutors need guidance, not guesswork.
Without training, tutors are left to improvise responses to AI use—leading to inconsistency, anxiety, or misinformation. Understanding AI empowers writing centers to develop clear policies, shared language, and tutor training aligned with institutional values.
6. Writing centers are uniquely positioned as mediators.
Unlike classrooms or disciplinary departments, writing centers are dialogic, low-stakes spaces. They can model critical engagement with AI—helping writers reflect on why and how they use it, not just whether they should.

Bottom line:

AI isn't just a tech issue; it's a writing issue, a learning issue, and an ethical issue. Writing centers that understand AI can continue doing what they do best: supporting writers as thinkers, not just producers of text. (“Why should writing center practitioners”)

It is impossible not to see the radical, and perhaps existential, potentialities that GenAI tools like ChatGPT represent. The above text captures an impressive reply that took approximately ten seconds for ChatGPT to create. While Elisabeth has been for years invested in tracking the ways that technological interventions inform practitioners' ways of thinking about writing and the work of writing center professionals, the sophistication of tools like ChatGPT and other large language model AI software admittedly took her by surprise. In Chapter 3 of her book *Open-Access, Multimodality, and Writing Center Studies*, she traced the ways that the major writing center journals *WLN: A Journal of Writing Center Scholarship* (formerly *Writing Lab Newsletter*), *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, and *The Writing Center Journal* published conversations about computer-mediated technologies, beginning with *WLN* in the late 1970s (Buck). A favorite artifact from this historiography was Daniel Reimer's piece from the September 1984 issue of *Writing Lab Newsletter*. Reimer shared his thoughts about his center's new computer, writing,

When we first brought a microcomputer into the Writing Lab, it was kind of like putting a lion in the front seat of a Mercedes: it looked impressive, but who wants to get close

enough to take it for a test drive? It seems that, immediately after creating the computer, humanity raised it to a super-human level. . . . We are still exploring possibilities and, like many, we have a long way to go. (1-2)

Reimer's piece is now over 40 years old, but the field of writing center studies might see some prescient echoes vis-à-vis his fears about computers in our current discourse about AI.

Writing centers have always been on the front lines of assessing the impact of new technologies on students' writing processes. Matthew Bryan sees writing centers' histories as in fact essential to understanding our future(s), arguing that "the decades-long history of writing center discourse around software-mediated writing and tutoring practices can and should inform" contemporary conversations about GenAI (16). In *Open-Access*, Elisabeth also traced the ways that writing center researchers have published on their engagement with new technologies, arguing that these conversations exist in three stages: 1) navigating the advent of computers, 2) the development of the internet and sharing best practices for online tutoring, and 3) understanding the utility that new media tools like social media, blogs, and massive open-online courses (MOOCs) have in and to the writing center. We argue that GenAI represents a new, fourth stage in this trajectory. Our published histories demonstrate writing center practitioners' resilience in navigating new challenges, but the contemporary moment should necessitate active reckoning with GenAI's substantial impacts. Editor Genie Giaimo's excellent introduction to *The Peer Review's* two-part special issue on GenAI provides a searing assessment of one of these impacts:

As I write this, there are multiple fires raging in and around Los Angeles. Water has run dry in municipal pumps as tens (if not hundreds) of thousands have evacuated. Online, many are blaming AI's water greediness for the pumps running dry and the fires remaining out of control and unquenchable. While AI might not be literally stealing water from the pumps needed to quell the fires, it does require *massive* amounts of water and energy to power it. We are in a time where the material realities of our lives are deeply intertwined with technology. The digital world is still material; it requires natural resources to run.

GenAI's well-documented environmental repercussions (Rogin et al.) represent only one concerning by-product of increased usage of these tools. In fact, if one were to Google something like *why AI is bad*, the GenAI-powered search

tool will “helpfully” point you to a huge range of other negative manifestations of GenAI. These include massive increases in internet users’ exposure to poor quality and misleading content (Hoffman), GenAI’s tendency to erode critical thinking skills (Turner) and foster delusions (Klee), and the extent to which GenAI is already replacing human workers (McGowan) and preventing recent college graduates from accessing entry-level jobs (Ellis and Bindley). The indisputable truth is that, despite all of these grim realities and prognostications, GenAI will not simply disappear. ChatGPT is quite correct in this case: “AI isn’t just a tech issue; it’s a writing issue, a learning issue, and an ethical issue.” (“*Why should writing center practitioners?*”). We know that students are already using GenAI, and we know GenAI is impacting the work we can and will do in the writing center and beyond. Our edited collection, *Writing Centers and AI: Generating Early Conversations*, explores this transformative moment as we seek to understand the consequences and utility of tools that might, on one hand, lead to our collective irrelevance but that also could have great import for advancing access and equity in our discipline’s long and complex conversation of how to best assist learners.

Our motivation for developing *Writing Centers and AI* emerged from several experiences at the Writing and Multiliteracy Center (WMC) at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, where Elisabeth served as director and Josh as assistant director.¹ It was quite soon after the November 22nd, 2022 launch of ChatGPT that our tutors began to see evidence of this and similar tools emerging in their consultations with students. One tutor, Kay (a pseudonym), was particularly concerned. She saw GenAI as symptomatic of a lack of confidence in writers’ own abilities, and wanted to mount a campaign against its use. With our permission, she created a flyer and peppered it around the liberal arts building that housed our writing center. “We want human connection and innovation, not AI generation,” the flyer proclaimed, “The *pen* is mightier than the *machine*. Don’t support AI essay generators. Visit the writing center instead.” In the subsequent months, we found ourselves, both individually with tutors and at full staff meetings, having complicated conversations about how tutors should (or should not) respond when they suspected writers substantially composed using GenAI and about the utility of these tools in their own writing practices. As a member of the campus committee on AI, Elisabeth participated in equally complicated conversations on developing a cohesive AI policy for the institution. Members of the disciplinarily diverse committee shared radically divergent anecdotes about how GenAI was being taught and talked about in their departments, and, as a branch campus of a larger state system, it was unclear the extent to which our

1 Elisabeth moved to a new role at Fordham University in fall 2024.

university should refer to our sister institutions' policies, given our very different student demographics. Elisabeth recognized that her stance on this committee was greatly informed by her role and perspective as the writing center director and her concomitant on-the-ground knowledge of students' use of GenAI in their writing process.

The circumstance that most robustly motivated our decision to put together this project involved an accusation levied at a student writer who visited our center regularly. Josh will detail this more extensively in Chapter 27 of this collection, but this writer's experience of being falsely accused of using GenAI helped us to see clearly the role writing centers can and should play as advocates. In brief, the student's instructor was convinced that they had used ChatGPT to substantially compose a culminating assignment in their major. This student's department chair, who was fortunately inclined toward sympathy for the student, asked us to intervene with the student's instructor and help defend them against this accusation. In our conversations with the instructor, we quickly realized that the allegation had discriminatory overtones, with the instructor implying that a student of color could not be capable of producing such "effective" writing, and, thus, it must be GenAI. We were able to successfully assist the student, but not before we produced literal pages of evidence describing the lack of efficacy of GenAI detection software, our own and our tutors' specific interactions with the student, and general arguments about the strength of students' writing as observed in our own classes. This was a story about the intersections of GenAI and writing centers that we did not see being told, and so, we resolved to tell it.

We quickly realized that many others also had stories and research they wanted to share about writing centers and AI. We launched our call for papers for the collection in February 2024 and ultimately received over 50 proposals. It was a difficult process to narrow down the pieces to include as, frankly, we could have made a case for nearly all of them. We are conscious of not labeling this interest as merely reflective of a trend and instead see *Writing Centers and AI* following the path of other collections about writing centers and technology that, we would argue, still have strong relevance both as artifacts documenting significant periods of writing centers' histories and as practical tools. These works include Eric Hobson's *Writing the Writing Center*, Dave Coogan's *Electronic Writing Centers: Computing in the Field of Composition*, and Sohui Lee and Russell Carpenter's *The Routledge Reader on Writing Centers and New Media*.

In their piece for *Praxis*, "Claiming an Education: Using Archival Research to Build a Community of Practice," Molly Teatreault et al. argue that "the possibilities for understanding the past will only continue to grow as we incorporate documents produced by our own assistants into the archival collection, thereby extending the legacy of our community." As we work in this collection to

build an archive about GenAI for our collective writing center community, we understand the importance of including contributions that represent the scope of writing center research. Dana Lynn Driscoll and Sherry Wynn Perdue effectively summarize these research tropes: chapters in this collection engage with RAD (replicable, aggregable, and data-supported) research; narrative conversations about the ways GenAI is being experienced in writing centers and as writing center practitioners (i.e., “lore”); and praxis-based discussion about how to engage with GenAI in tutor training and within writing center consultations. We believed that each of these methodological approaches enabled important and valid explorations of this topic.

Our secondary goal in framing this collection, beyond offering research method multiplicity, was to ensure that we published many different voices. We realize that the application of GenAI within higher education settings is highly contextual. We wanted to represent as many of these contexts as possible. We include in *Writing Centers and AI* perspectives from undergraduate writing consultants through to the current leadership of prominent disciplinary organizations, at institutions of various sizes, geographies, modalities, and student demographics. The perspectives here are also not limited to writing centers in the United States, but also include several contributions from international writing centres/ers. We hope again that the diversity of voices represented will offer a complex and comprehensive portrait of the ways in which writing centers are thinking about and engaging with GenAI and complicate the *AI-is-good* or *AI-is-bad* binary. Many authors in the collection are ready to embrace GenAI as an essential component of writing centers’ continuing relevance and longevity; others are far more skeptical. We also asked contributors to explicitly disclose any use of GenAI in their own composition of their chapters. It is perhaps telling that only two of the 27 chapters opted to incorporate any GenAI tool. The perspectives represented in this collection offer glimpses into the early relationship between GenAI and writing centers, but we believe they will offer continued relevance as GenAI inevitably grows in sophistication and reach.

NOTES ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE COLLECTION

We grouped the chapters in *Writing Centers and AI* into five different categories that are not all that dissimilar from what ChatGPT suggested we see as important. We encourage readers to explore the intersections and slippages between these sections, as several chapters could feasibly be placed in multiple categories. *Part 1, “Writing Center Professionals as Institutional & Disciplinary Leaders on Conversations about AI,”* takes on the important roles that writing center practitioners are playing to help outline GenAI policies across institutions and disciplinary

contexts. In “Centering GenAI: Leading from In-Between Spaces,” Sarah Z. Johnson and Sherry Wynn Perdue speak to their status as disciplinary leaders in this complicated moment and their efforts to develop and share resources for writing center practitioners in classrooms, departments, and communities, and they offer strategies for writing center professionals to navigate the new terrain of GenAI as a middle ground on campuses. Meghan Velez, Cassandra Branham, Ashley Rea, and Alex Rister’s “Lending Our Voices: The Role of Writing Center Leadership in Institutional Conversations about AI” speaks to the ways writing centers can provide necessary resources to faculty in the shift to wider GenAI adoption. Joseph Cheatle recounts the differences in positionality across various institutional writing centers and provides guidance for how professionals can build social capital across these contexts in “Leading the Conversation: Writing Centers as Institutional Leaders on AI.” Kristi Girdharry’s “From Margins to Mainstream: Writing Center Voices in GenAI Strategy” offers tangible strategies for writing center professionals to position themselves in institutional conversations concerning GenAI implementation. Stephanie Hedge and Sarah Collins describe collaborative strategies between writing centers and writing programs for developing wide-ranging policy in “Developing AI Policies and Statements: A Reflection on Writing Center/Writing Program Collaboration.” Closing the first section, Joella Cleary and Anna Rymer’s “A Springboard, Not a Landing Zone: Student-First Discussions about AI and Ethics” centers student perspectives as a means through which to develop wider GenAI policy.

Part 2, “Researched Inquiries on AI and Writing Center Labor,” includes several Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved studies that provide data-supported inquiries on the intersections between GenAI and writing center labor, along with other chapters exploring GenAI through a theoretical lens. In “‘ChatGPT is good at some stuff . . . but it’s not like it’s a person’: Student Writers Reflect on AI,” Rebecca Hallman Martini collects student perspectives with the goal of first understanding how students are both using and viewing the technology before developing large-scale policy. Julia Bleakney, Lauren Jablon, and Paula Rosinski’s “Understanding the Landscape of Generative AI Use among Writing Center Clients” similarly explores the ways in which writing center clients are using GenAI, so that tutoring staff can be properly equipped to navigate sessions in which such technologies have been used in student writing. Matthew Fledderjohann and Emily C. Perkins’ study in “I Needed Help’: Generative AI as Writing Tutor” collects data describing why students are using GenAI for their writing and offers suggestions for how writing centers can demonstrate their value to the university in the wake of this technology. Hamza Miftah, Dacia Dressen-Hammouda, and Christine Blanchard’s “Research-Based Guidelines for Building More Targeted Writing Center Actions: Faculty and Student Views on AI for Academic Writing” focuses

on the concerns of both teachers and students in regard to GenAI technology as a means of positioning writing centers to act in response to these concerns. Jean Schwab provides an analysis and review of past writing center scholarship as a means of better positioning professionals to make policy decisions in the present in “Conversing with the Past: How Previous Research Can Guide Approaches to Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in Writing Centers.” Rodolfo Barrett concludes the section with “The Machine Genie: Instructional Metaphors for LLM Text Production,” a theoretical underpinning of the various metaphors formed around the wider adoption of GenAI.

Part 3, “Developing Training Materials and Praxis in Response to AI,” takes on practical ways that writing center leaders are approaching GenAI in tutor training and resource development. In “Into the (Un)Known: Using Academic Habits of Mind to Address Generative Artificial Intelligence Concerns and Possibilities in Tutor Training,” Kat Greene and Charlotte Kupsh seek to utilize practices central to habits of mind to frame conversations regarding GenAI held in the writing center to stem from a place of inquiry and critical reflection. Ashley M. Beardsley’s “What Is Our Writing Center’s Stance on AI? Using Tutor Training to Develop Guidelines and Learn about GenAI” recounts the collaborative process of developing an AI statement for her university’s writing center. Amanda M. May discusses the implementation of GenAI in asynchronous tutoring sessions conducted over email in “Re(de)fining Collaboration: Leveraging AI’s Potentials in Asynchronous Writing Center Sessions and Tutor Training.” Helen Lepp Friesen and Eunhee Buettner’s “Reinventing a New Vision and Raison d’Être: Holistic Writing Center Community of Practice Framework” provides students and teachers with a means of articulating concerns with GenAI in an open and judgment-free forum by utilizing a Community of Practice framework. Ending this section is Ellen Cecil-Lemkin and Lisa Marvel Johnson’s “Centering the Human: A Tutor Training Approach to AI-Generated Writing Technology,” which offers a tutor training model centered on human interaction and dialogue.

Part 4, “Practices for Navigating AI within Writing Center Consultations,” addresses innovations taking place within writing center consultations via conversations about or implementations of GenAI. In “Countering AI Shame in the Writing Center: Cultivating Tutoring Practices of Openness and Vulnerability,” James M. Cochran, Kathryn Pilliod, and Madilynne Smith discuss the importance of framing conversations of GenAI use with an open mind and with a sense of understanding regarding student vulnerability. Chloe Crull and Nicholas Stillman’s “Embracing AI as a ‘Second Reader’ in Writing Center Consultations: Exploring New Opportunities for Learning and Reflection” responds to the growing concern that GenAI might replace services offered by writing

centers and, in an effort to adapt to the new technology, offer strategies for GenAI to be used to instead enhance tutoring sessions. Deirdre Vinyard and Carly Schnitzler discuss the important limitations in GenAI technologies, and the ways in which writing centers serve as vital sites of transfer in “LLMs Generate Answers, Writing Tutors Ask Questions: GenAI as Sites of Transfer for Writing Center Practice.” Eric Mason and Kevin Dvorak’s “Looping Generative AI into Writing Center Consultations” proposes methods that position writing center staff to effectively and ethically utilize GenAI in their sessions. Kirkwood Adams and Maria Baker conclude the section in a rebuttal against neo-liberal policies, which devalue the human agent in “De-Centering AI Outputs & Re-Centering Student Labor.”

The collection culminates with *Part 5, “Writing Centers’ Role in Fostering Accessible, Anti-Racist, and Ethical AI Practices,”* which explores the ways that writing centers can advocate for and model accessible and principled applications of GenAI, as well as counter the ways that GenAI might be perceived or utilized as a tool to perpetuate oppression. Austin Anderson, Alexandra Omogbadegun, Sabrina Bramwell, and Paola Yuli begin the section with “HBCU Writing Centers Confronting the ‘Canonized Corpus,” in which they analyze the ways GenAI training models rely heavily on and thus perpetuate standardization of the “canonized corpus,” offering writing centers as a means by which students can reject such homogeneity. Cara Violini positions GenAI as an assistive technology that allows students to take control over their writing process in “Disrupting the Writing Process: How Generative AI Helps Students with Disabilities Communicate.” In “Recentering Writing Centers to Address the Hidden GenAI Curriculum,” Joni Hayward Marcum and Lisa Bell position writing centers as a campus space in which students can learn crucial digital literacy skills relating to GenAI and other emergent technologies. Joseph Franklin and Anna Laura Falvey place translanguaging as a crucial factor in pushing back against the hegemonic language practices of GenAI in “Reclaiming Agency: AI Hallucinations and Translingual Interrogations in the City Tech Writing Center.” Finally, in “‘How Do We Stop Students from Using AI?’ Writing Centers, Generative AI, and Linguistic Justice,” Joshua Botvin responds to bias-driven plagiarism accusations and offers the writing center as a campus space well-positioned to hold conversations concerning linguistic justice.

We hope that *Writing Centers and AI* will stand as both an important, enduring contribution to writing center scholarship and as a valuable resource to readers as they navigate this complicated moment *in medias res* in their own writing centers, classrooms, and institutions. GenAI is *our* lion in the front seat of a Mercedes, but we believe that this collection might render this lion rather less fierce. Writing center practitioners have always demonstrated durability in

the face of constant change, technology-mediated and otherwise, but we see in this text an important new discourse that advances our collective goal to advocate for the agency and potential of all (human) writers.

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