

# RETHINKING WRITING EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF GENERATIVE AI

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## Chapter 6

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### “NEVER LET A GOOD [LITERACY] CRISIS GO TO WASTE”

Writing Across the Curriculum Administration Amid  
Artificial Intelligence Anxiety

*Christopher Basgier*

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# 6

## “NEVER LET A GOOD [LITERACY] CRISIS GO TO WASTE”

### Writing Across the Curriculum Administration Amid Artificial Intelligence Anxiety

*Christopher Basgier*

Since at least the 1840s, periodic literacy crises have signaled shifts in the political, ideological, and cultural landscape of the United States (Trimbur, 1991). Because literacy is not only a set of reading and writing skills but also a complex socio-political phenomenon, its meaning changes across time and context (see, e.g., Vieira et al., 2019, p. 36). Those new meanings can spur literacy crises and may lead to structural reforms in higher education. For example, *Newsweek*'s December 1975 cover story, “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” played a key role in launching the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement. Maimon (2006) recalled the day her former dean at Beaver College (now Arcadia University) called her to his office, tossed the *Newsweek* issue at her, and asked what she planned to do about that literacy crisis. In response, she secured a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, which allowed her to fund one of the first writing pedagogy workshops in the United States for faculty across disciplines (Maimon, 2006). Presciently, Maimon recognized “that curriculum change depends on scholarly exchange among faculty members,” a principle that has remained essential to the WAC movement (Palmquist et al., 2020; see also “Statement of WAC Principles and Practices,” 2014).

In the fall of 2022, when OpenAI released ChatGPT, higher education was on the cusp of yet another literacy crisis. Because of ChatGPT’s ability to produce fluent-sounding prose quickly, alongside sensationalist headlines prophesying the end of college writing (e.g., Marche, 2022), many of us wondered how to assign, teach, and assess writing when students have tools that can generate sentences, paragraphs, and even entire documents.

While it may be too soon to understand how the artificial intelligence (AI) crisis will change conceptions of literacy and its attendant political and ideological implications, we have begun to see how it challenges some of the educational structures that arose during previous literacy crises, such as WAC. Indeed, as a full-time administrator for a campus-wide writing center and WAC program at Auburn University, a central part of my job is teaching teachers how to teach writing. WAC programs like mine provide professional development for faculty across disciplines, encouraging them to adopt pedagogical and curricular changes so students get ample opportunities to write, revise, reflect, and deepen their communication

skills and conceptual learning. When it was released, ChatGPT seemed poised to disrupt this entire premise.

Then, in winter 2022–23, my supervisor, Norman Godwin, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, changed my perspective. He encouraged me to explore how I might use the technology to *further* our program’s mission of supporting students as thinkers and communicators. He invoked an axiom that is attributed to Winston Churchill, but often repeated in politics and business: “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” He asked how I might use the ChatGPT literacy crisis to engage colleagues across campus—especially those with whom I had had little contact—to think about the intersections between the technology and disciplinary writing pedagogy. In response, I devised ways of fostering nuanced, intellectually rich conversations about the new technology among faculty members. Could the panic surrounding generative AI—a literacy technology—become a means to grow, rather than eliminate, the use of evidenced-based writing pedagogies across the disciplines?

In this chapter, I will discuss how I answered that question. I will describe how I engaged colleagues across campus in stimulating conversations about generative AI as an emerging technology and led them to transformative learning about WAC pedagogy. To do so, I followed Sandra Tarabochia’s (2017) relational ethic for cross-curricular literacy (CCL)<sup>1</sup> work: “commit to reflexive practice” (p. 146), “maintain a learner’s stance” (p. 148), and “approach CCL conversations as a pedagogical performance” (p. 151). According to Tarabochia, these practices contribute to productive interpersonal conversations “where the possibility of embracing pedagogical potential”—and, I would add, curricular potential—“can be ... strengthened” (p. 145). By taking on this relational ethic as praxis, I sought to move faculty and administrators toward a reflective and proactive, rather than reactive, stance toward generative AI.

In what follows, I first provide an overview of the institutional and programmatic context in which I have conducted workshops and discussions about writing and AI. Then, I define the elements of Tarabochia’s (2017) relational ethic and illustrate how I used it as a praxis to guide my activities. As I reflect on my experiences, I also note ways in which I did and did not practice the relational ethic as successfully as I could have. Finally, I extend Tarabochia’s relational ethic with additional principles attuned to the challenges of leading conversations about generative AI: acknowledging different values, centering intellectual commitments, and recognizing different comfort levels.

### **Institutional and Programmatic Context**

Auburn University is a research-intensive land grant institution located in the Southeastern United States, enrolling approximately 30,000 students annually. Launched in 2010, the Office of University Writing (or just “University Writing,” for short) is a comprehensive writing center and WAC program centrally located in the Office of the Provost. Our primary mission is to support students as thinkers and communicators by helping them become better writers, primarily through the Miller Writing Center (MWC) and graduate support services, and to extend our reach by supporting faculty who teach high-impact, writing-focused courses and curricula across the disciplines. We offer free one-on-one appointments with any student at any stage of the writing process in the MWC, multi-session programs tailored to the needs of graduate writers, and WAC workshops and workshop series that help faculty learn about effective, discipline-specific writing pedagogy. In addition to supervising two

associate directors who run the MWC and graduate programs, my main responsibility in University Writing is to lead our WAC efforts. In that capacity, I developed or co-developed a slate of AI-focused programs, activities, and resources in late 2022 and into 2023, and I mobilized Tarabochia’s (2017) relational ethic in the process.

### **Defining and Practicing a Relational Ethic**

Tarabochia (2017) argued that CCL professionals need a relational ethic so they can “adjust communication strategies to foster productive conversations with faculty in other disciplines, build sustainable relationships, and revise writing curricula amid complicated, ever-changing dynamics” (p. 6). These needs apply as much to campus-wide discussions about generative AI as they do to more traditional WAC or writing center discussions. AI discussions require adjusting to others’ relative comfort with the technology, sustaining engagement over time, and contemplating revisions to courses and curricula in response to rapid technological advancements. Such conversations are also fundamentally pedagogical and ethical. In what follows, I define the three pedagogical and three ethical dimensions of Tarabochia’s (2017) framework and illustrate how I put them into practice with specific examples from my campus-wide work on AI in University Writing’s WAC program.

### ***Pedagogical Principles and AI Conversations***

To build her relational ethic, Tarabochia (2017) first identified three main pedagogical practices used by CCL professionals in their interactions with colleagues across disciplines: negotiating expertise, transformative learning, and play.

#### *Negotiating Expertise*

For Tarabochia (2017), negotiating expertise involves “putting one’s knowledge and experience in conversation with others’ differently situated knowledge and experience” (p. 24). This pedagogical principle is especially important in CCL contexts where the kind of expert-novice relationships typical of classrooms do not apply. Instead, those of us who lead CCL programs like WAC often find ourselves sharing expertise about rhetoric, writing, or literacy with individuals who have expertise in a different domain—usually another academic discipline—with their own disciplinary and idiosyncratic writing processes and practices. We need to find ways to share our expert knowledge without discounting theirs.

With this principle in mind, I contacted department chairs in early spring 2023 with an offer to lead department-wide conversations about generative AI and writing. At the time of this writing, I have conducted more than 20 such conversations, usually lasting between 30 and 60 minutes, with departments like English; Mechanical Engineering; Nursing; and World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. Early on, these conversations typically involved a hands-on demonstration of ChatGPT and a discussion of different modes of response to generative AI, which I discuss in detail below (see “Pedagogical Performance”).

During these conversations, I sought “to recognize faculty members’ existing expertise and productively shift or expand” our responses to this technology’s limitations and affordances (Tarabochia, 2017, p. 146). To that end, I focused these conversations on hands-on experimentation with AI, typically by soliciting a prompt related to faculty members’

discipline. For example, the Aerospace Engineering faculty asked me to prompt ChatGPT to explain how to calculate the aerodynamics of a frisbee. After they observed that the explanation included no math, I prompted it to rewrite the output with an equation. The faculty pointed out that ChatGPT's equation was incorrect and that the response had no references. I asked it to rewrite the response with references, and, unsurprisingly, the faculty quickly realized that it had fabricated references. I did not need to guide this conversation in any specific direction; instead, I invited the faculty to identify key places in which the ChatGPT output was doing the intellectual work of their discipline, and they proceeded to use their expertise to attend to conceptual accuracy, mathematics, and citations, all of which manifest in discipline-specific writing conventions.

My conversations with these faculty members thus helped me refine a technique I had learned from other WAC scholarship (e.g., Glotfelter et al., 2020): to center the intellectual work of the disciplines in my conversations about generative AI. As the above example illustrates, the disciplines' intellectual core can be a means for faculty to engage with the technology deliberately and critically, and we cannot negotiate expertise if our colleagues' ways of thinking and communicating are not central to the conversation. When we work to surface faculty members' intellectual commitments, we can better practice a relational ethic because our respective areas of expertise and their associated values are more transparent and therefore open to negotiation.

### *Transformative Learning*

Negotiations of expertise helped me take up the second element of Tarabochia's (2017) pedagogical framework, transformative learning, which promotes iterative and recursive "change in [faculty] perspectives and practices" (p. 73).<sup>2</sup> I follow this approach to transformative learning in my signature program, the WAC Academy, a five-part workshop series that engages departmental teams in focused conversations about disciplinary threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2019), writing in the discipline, scaffolded writing instruction, and effective design for writing assignments and peer review experiences. The outcome of the WAC Academy is a plan for integrating writing across a departmental curriculum and sample classroom artifacts that can be used or adapted to facilitate implementation.

Frequently, I adjust the default sequence of WAC Academy activities to suit particular needs and desires (e.g., to focus on ePortfolios in Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences or undergraduate research in Psychology). In fall 2023, I incorporated material on critical thinking and AI at the request of a team of political science faculty. These faculty members were understandably concerned that students might use ChatGPT to write for them. In response, I invited them to consider bringing the technology into the classroom explicitly and turning its output into an object of inquiry rather than simply a tool for composing. They seemed to find this idea provocative, and together we brainstormed several AI-engaged activities for multiple courses in the undergraduate political science major.

In one such activity, the faculty wanted students to learn how to apply and evaluate game theory, which they had identified as a persistently troublesome set of concepts in the major. They asked students to prompt ChatGPT to explain a recent political event using several different possible games, and then evaluate which explanation was most compelling and why. To me, this kind of assignment represented a transformation in the political science faculty's

conception of teaching and writing pedagogy in the age of AI. They saw how it could be leveraged as a means of reinforcing students’ learning in a way that is akin to writing-to-learn, with ChatGPT as a sounding board rather than a replacement for thinking and analysis.

### *Play*

While most of my interactions with faculty about generative AI were based on academic inquiry—how it works and what it means for teaching—I also utilized play to encourage colleagues to learn about the technology. Tarabochia (2017) defines the pedagogical principle of play as the use of “metaphor, storytelling, and silliness” to “invigorate[] the epistemic, reflexive, and relational dimensions of pedagogical activity” (p. 108–109). For me, the relational aspect of play is especially valuable. I regularly use play in many of my interactions across campus because, like Tarabochia, I find that humor and storytelling help alleviate tensions and build meaningful relationships. Low stakes and highly relational engagement seemed especially beneficial amid fears over generative AI’s disruptive potential, fears that coincide with pre-existing anxiety over the contraction of higher education (Basgier, 2023). Aware of these fears, my colleague Chesly Hooper (Auburn’s Adobe expert) and I explicitly promoted play in an event we designed called the Generative AI Playground.

During the Generative AI Playground, we invited faculty and staff from across campus to experiment with ChatGPT and Adobe Firefly, an AI-powered image generator now part of Adobe’s Creative Cloud. After introducing basic definitions of generative AI and the technology’s ethical complications, we tasked participants with generating a children’s book about their area of expertise using those two platforms. Chelsy and I demonstrated the process with our AI-generated children’s books, one about rhetoric (one of my areas of expertise) and one about creativity (Chelsy’s area of expertise).

When we first conceptualized the workshop, we wanted to give participants an immersive, low-stakes experience of using generative AI to compose so they could better understand what it could and could not do. We decided on the idea of a “playground” to make the event sound inviting and to avoid any expectation that we might be training participants in best practices. Instead, we wanted participants to take up the opportunity for playful experimentation. Tarabochia (2017) named storytelling as one possible playful technique that can be used in CCL conversations, and we saw firsthand how the events encouraged participants to create stories that mattered to them. For example, Carrie Hill, a research librarian, created a story about a child who convinces an adult community member to stop attempting to ban books from the library. The story she created is compelling and timely, and she and Chelsy continue to use it as an example in other workshops about AI.

Our choice of genre, too, centered play. Children’s books can address serious subjects, like book bans, through humor and play. In doing so, they render the complexities of life approachable. By asking participants to create a children’s book about their area of expertise, we hoped they could experience the often-challenging blend of the new and familiar that our students experience when writing in new curricular contexts. Additionally, we selected a multimodal genre for participants to familiarize themselves with text and image generators and explore their expertise in visual modes. Altogether, the low-stakes task provided participants with an opportunity for meaning-making, as they could compose with AI without fear of reprisal or pressure to publish.

### *Ethical Principles and AI Conversations*

Based on her analysis of negotiating expertise, transformative learning, and play, Tarabochia (2017) also distilled three core ethical principles that she recommended CCL professionals pursue in their work: reflective practice, a learner's stance, and pedagogical performance.

#### *Reflective Practice*

Tarabochia's (2017) first ethical principle involves "reflecting systematically on one's own values and assumptions in relation to new, sometimes counterintuitive ideas" (p. 146). Reflective practice can be ethical when it supports connection and transparent negotiation of values with others who are often positioned differently in the institution.

Because generative AI can appear "new" and "counterintuitive," it can be a convenient starting point for reflective practice for CCL professionals ourselves. To me, ChatGPT looked like a challenge to one of my core values: collaboration. I attempt to bring a collaborative ethos to my teaching, faculty development, administration, and research, even as I recognize the uneven power dynamics that can arise in those situations (Trimbur, 1989). With ChatGPT, however, I could imagine a future with very little collaborative writing. It seemed to value speed over slower, more deliberate collaborative work. I did not, and still do not, see the technology as a collaborator because collaboration requires intentionality, the understanding that people bring multiple experiences and identities to bear on their work, and attention to power dynamics that can interrupt group functions and exclude individuals from meaningful labor. ChatGPT cannot access this information about me; it cannot analyze and respond to my unstated assumptions as a collaborator might.

After reflecting on my own values, I was in a better position to respond to others' reactions to generative AI. Most readers will probably be familiar with criticisms of ChatGPT as a direct affront to the values of novelty, textual ownership, and academic integrity that circulate in many Western academic contexts, including institutions and disciplines. How could we be sure that students' and scholars' words and ideas were "their own?" Gavin P. Johnson (2023) argued that such responses to generative AI amount to "paranoia and an impulse of surveillance" (p. 173). In some group discussions with faculty, I saw the paranoid impulse on full display, such as one faculty member who likened students' use of generative AI to copying from a roommate. Although I did not have the opportunity to talk with this individual at length, it occurred to me afterward that his response may not have been so different from mine. After all, what is "copying" but an illicit form of collaboration? Perhaps, like me, he simply did not see ChatGPT as a legitimate learning collaborator. In this way, reflective practice enabled me to build empathy for an individual I might otherwise dismiss as paranoid and destructive. I could also respond constructively, which I have done in subsequent workshops by discussing the circumstances that might lead students to cheat and ways of curbing academic misconduct via effective assignment design (e.g., Anderson et al., 2016; Winkelmes, 2013).

#### *A Learner's Stance*

These reflections also positioned me to occupy what Tarabochia (2017) called a learner's stance, "discursively acknowledging the knowledge and expertise others bring to CCL conversations and to teaching writing" (p. 149), a point that intersects with the pedagogical principle of negotiating expertise.

For example, while I was conducting departmental discussions, I learned that several faculty members had been investigating the extent to which ChatGPT could accomplish the intellectual work of their disciplines. David Marshall and David Naff (2024), experts in educational research methods, conducted a study about researchers’ perceptions of the ethics of using generative AI in qualitative research. Based on a descriptive survey of 101 researchers, they found that study participants thought it was acceptable to use the technology for transcription and initial coding, but not for all coding, analysis, and manuscript writing. Similarly, James Long and his many colleagues in accountancy studied ChatGPT’s performance on accounting assessment questions (Wood et al., 2023), finding that students generally outperformed ChatGPT at the time of the study, but not always. These interactions showed me how generative AI could be addressed in different disciplinary contexts, and they helped me develop a more nuanced understanding of the spectrum of faculty’s responses to the technology, between the poles of complete rejection and uncritical embrace.

Sometimes, however, I let these discussions devolve into cautionary tales instead of deeper pedagogical opportunities. For example, when the English Department faculty asked if ChatGPT could cite and analyze poetry, I said, let’s see. We quickly learned that it could, especially with well-known literature, but we also caught it fabricating lines that only sounded like a given poet. In response, I told faculty they could use this result to caution students about relying too readily on the technology. In retrospect, however, I do not think my response was satisfactory because, at that moment, I was not maintaining a learner’s stance.

As Tarabochia (2017) put it, “[M]aintaining a learner’s stance is a vital part of engaging in pedagogical activity because it promotes knowledge production and transformation within individual and collaborative meaning-making frameworks” (p. 148–149). To that end, I could have asked the English faculty to design activities that would utilize the problematic ChatGPT response to deepen students’ learning of literary analysis. Perhaps students could use ChatGPT to fabricate a poem by a particular poet and then compare it to an authentic poem to identify matters of style, tone, and theme. Had I maintained a learner’s stance, I could have refocused the conversation on disciplinary knowledge, thus inviting everyone in the room to consider a more nuanced understanding of the pedagogical potential of generative AI as an object of inquiry and advance our collective knowledge of what the technology could and could not do.

### *Pedagogical Performance*

Tarabochia’s (2017) final ethical principle, pedagogical performance, means recognizing “teacher behaviors not as the natural consequence of identity, style, or institutional structure, but as performance genres that can be strategically manipulated, juxtaposed, employed, etc., for particular pedagogical effects” (p. 151). In other words, teaching is always a performance that involves using the body, space, technologies, discourse, and instructional techniques to achieve various pedagogical goals.

In late spring 2023, I had my first opportunity to self-consciously engage in a pedagogical performance regarding generative AI that differed from what I might have done otherwise. Previously, I had positioned myself as a co-inquirer and co-critic. However, I had to perform a different stance when the Chair of the University Senate invited me to speak to Senators but asked me to remain neutral toward generative AI, neither embracing it nor rejecting it. Despite my conviction that collectively, faculty must use AI to understand it, but that they

ought to do so with an appropriately skeptical, even critical, mindset, I had to leave room for colleagues to sidestep it or forbid it outright.

I decided to treat this request as an opportunity to practice a relational ethic. In her study, Tarabochia (2017) found, “Writing specialists ... created opportunities for active learning, reflection, and cross-disciplinary connection-making *by temporarily withholding advice*,” resulting in transformative learning when faculty came to new or refined understandings of writing pedagogy for themselves (p. 146; emphasis mine). My aim was similar: even as I withheld any specific recommendation regarding responses to generative AI, I wanted faculty to see that their pedagogy could account for or even draw on the technology to enhance learning.

To help faculty make informed decisions that centered on learning, I developed four modes of pedagogical response to generative AI:

- Prohibition: requesting that students not use it in any way for any assignment, with the caution to faculty that AI detection services are flawed.
- Permission: allowing students to use it in approved ways, with appropriate attribution.
- Pedagogy: preventing dishonest use of it via practices such as scaffolded activities, peer and instructor feedback, or reflective writing, which can build students’ self-efficacy and empower them to write, with or without generative AI as a tool.
- Engagement: either directly incorporating generative AI into assignments and activities such as critiques or indirectly addressing the technology through discipline-specific questions, such as ethics or environmental impact.

Across my discussion of these modes, I self-consciously performed agnosticism to highlight a more fundamental principle: I wanted listeners (and eventual readers of the document version) to understand that they should teach their disciplinary ways of thinking with writing more transparently, no matter their response to generative AI. Across my description of all four modes of response, I encouraged faculty to communicate with students why they were responding as they were, grounding their reasons in the ways of making and circulating knowledge germane to their disciplines. For example, in prohibiting the use of generative AI, art history professors might explain that they want students to hone their ability to identify and interpret visual details. In contrast, physics faculty might ask students to debate ChatGPT about the merits of Newtonian versus Lagrangian mechanics so they could learn when to use which approach.<sup>3</sup> In leaving these options open, I hoped to seed transformative learning by prompting faculty to understand how conceptual and rhetorical transparency can support students’ learning and engagement, with or without generative AI in the mix.

### **A Relational Ethic for Leading Campus Conversations about Generative AI**

In this final section, I elaborate on Tarabochia’s (2017) relational ethic for CCL work, focusing on some additional practices for CCL professionals who lead campus conversations about generative AI. Although these practices are inspired by, and intersect with, Tarabochia’s, I also see them as uniquely suited to address and disrupt the crisis narrative that has followed in the wake of ChatGPT. They are relational, in that, taken together, they remind us to see our colleagues, and ourselves, as whole people who bring a complex mix of values, intellectual commitments, and affective responses to generative AI. Similarly, they are ethical in that they require us to interrupt the impulse to impose our own views of emerging technologies on our

colleagues who work in different curricular, institutional, and disciplinary spaces; instead, they place an ethical premium on transparency to guide change.

### ***Acknowledge Different Values***

Generative AI cuts to the core of many academic and personal values. CCL professionals are committed to a deep, critical understanding of the impact of literacy technologies on reading and writing for individuals and wider educational and social systems. However, even within those same systems, other values circulate. Most obviously, individuals across academia have expressed reservations about generative AI due to concerns about academic dishonesty. Simultaneously, many faculty treasure academic freedom, which may be threatened by institutional policies that prohibit any use of generative AI in student work. Faculty who value their research more than teaching may not feel compelled to commit to ongoing, reflective pedagogical engagement; conversely, they may be more willing to respond to research-supported pedagogies of the sort shared in this volume and elsewhere (e.g., Vee et al., 2023). These examples also intersect with competing values of individualism versus collectivism: many academics operate as independent contractors, focused on their areas of expertise, whereas departments or institutions must work collectively and proactively to respond to generative AI. Faculty also bring values from their family, cultures, faiths, and communities; to help faculty name such values, I often share James Clear’s (n.d.) list of core values and encourage them to identify one or two that they hold dear.

Because of these many values, it behooves CCL professionals to begin conversations about generative AI with reflections on values, so that they may be made more explicit and therefore open to discussion. After all, people rarely change their minds by being told their ideas—and those ideas’ underlying values—are wrong. Instead, we need to open relational spaces where, even amid disagreement, we can understand and speak to one another’s perspectives. The ethical principle at work here is one of negotiation, rather than imposition: if, as CCL professionals, we want to manage conceptual, pedagogical, curricular, and policy change regarding generative AI, then we need to engage others in principled dialogue by ensuring their values have a seat at the table.

### ***Center Intellectual Commitments***

In addition to core values, faculty members and administrators bring intellectual commitments to pedagogical and curricular conversations. The threshold concepts theory has taught us that faculty think and work with intellectual frameworks that have become naturalized (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2019; Meyer & Land, 2005). CCL professionals can engage faculty in intellectually rich conversations about these literacy technologies by considering them through the lens of their disciplinary concepts. One way I have done so is to select data from a published article in a given discipline and invite faculty to compare the published analysis with a ChatGPT-generated analysis. I ask faculty to identify the conceptual and discursive differences between human- and AI-generated writing within their disciplinary territory. I also explain that a similar activity could help them teach their students disciplinary knowledge, including writing, in a low-stakes way, without overhauling a course completely to address generative AI. Such techniques acknowledge faculty expertise and create space for a critically pragmatic approach to the technology.

While this principle certainly intersects with Tarabochia's (2017) principle of negotiating expertise, it also prompts CCL professionals to recognize that faculty can draw on critical theory, problem-solving, the scientific method, or most other intellectual frameworks to build productive responses to generative AI in classrooms and curricula. Ethically speaking, it empowers faculty to make decisions about generative AI using their own ways of thinking and doing.

### ***Recognize Different Levels of Comfort***

Our responses to generative AI are affective as much as they are intellectual and values-driven. When facilitating conversations, we may face audiences who are alternately panicked, excited, or a combination of both. Transparency about our own feelings can create a sense of solidarity and promote engagement at the same time. For example, when Packback, an educational technology company, announced the release of the Writing Lab, which they described as an AI writing tutor, I immediately feared for the future of our writing center. However, in conversations with my team and with the University Writing Committee, we acknowledged the ongoing benefits of human tutors, including an empathetic touch, real readership, and rich contextual awareness, all of which are difficult, if not impossible, for generative AI to mimic. Those discussions provided a sense of solidarity and helped us refine how we talk about writing center work. In other cases, play may be an optimal approach because it can give faculty and other stakeholders permission to learn about the technology without necessarily endorsing its widespread use, thus diffusing fear.

Whereas intellectual labor is part and parcel of academia, and values also figure in our work, emotions are too often ignored in academic spaces. By recognizing them, we can round out a relational ethic toward generative AI.

### **Conclusion**

In his contribution to a special section of *Composition Studies* on generative AI, Johnson (2023) urged the field to remember what we already know about teaching writing with and through technologies: “[W]hile this iteration of AI technology is new and needs to be addressed on its own terms,” he wrote, “our general approach to AI and writing should follow core tenets set out and cited in decades of scholarship and pedagogy” in the field (p. 169).

For instance, literacy technologies are not neutral tools for reading and composing. Rather, they influence our rhetorical, epistemological, and ideological choices (e.g., Baron, 2009; Johnson, 2023; Jones & Hirsu, 2019; New London Group, 1996; Sheridan et al., 2012). To take one example, the introduction of the pencil with eraser enabled revision to play a stronger role in writing processes, and for that reason “was initially greeted with suspicion ... because critics charged that erasers would adversely affect the quality of writing” (Baron, 2009, p. 43). Today, revision is part and parcel of writing pedagogy, regularly viewed as essential to quality writing.

Similar changes are underway with generative AI. When leading campus conversations about this technology, I have tried to remain mindful of decades of WAC scholarship that recommends ethical means of engaging with faculty when seeking pedagogical and curricular change. I have had to be aware of my own instincts to assert my disciplinary perspectives on generative AI unthinkingly, lest I colonize the disciplines with my ways of knowing and

teaching (Farris, 1992). When faculty express opinions that I find short-sighted or dismissive of students, I have tried to practice deep listening so I can better understand their underlying motivations (Mullin, 2008), and then respond. Through these reflective practices, I have also sought to empower faculty to consider for themselves what it means to teach writing in the disciplines (Flash, 2016; Flash, 2021; Glotfelter et al. 2020; Wardle, 2019). And I have found them to be “practices” in a deep sense: I have to attend to them mindfully, habitually, and recognize both when I succeed and when I fail to act on the theoretical and ethical commitments they represent.

After all, these ideas have served us through many literacy crises, from the beginning of the WAC movement through an earlier generation of technological changes (e.g., new media, web 2.0, social media) that produced similar panics (see, e.g., Trimbur, 2015). Still, to echo Johnson (2023), I have also seen that this latest crisis deserves to be addressed not only through the strategies that have long served CCL professionals but also in its own right, given the range of responses faculty hold and the depth of the challenge generative AI poses for higher education. It touches on so many aspects of our being, not just as writers and communicators, but as thinkers and teachers, as embodied people living in the world. By adding concerted attention to values, intellectual commitments, and affect to our pedagogical ethics, we can respond humanely and ethically to this emerging technology.

## Notes

- 1 Tarabochia (2017) uses *cross-curricular literacy* (CCL) as a blanket term for literacy-focused programs and projects that do not reside within, or work in the confines of, a singular departmental structure. Principally, CCL includes WAC and its many permutations (writing in the disciplines, communication across the curriculum, writing enriched curriculum) and writing centers. It may also include community literacy, communication across the curriculum, and even quantitative literacy programs.
- 2 Change in faculty perspectives can be difficult to identify because such changes may happen tacitly or over long periods of time (see Walvoord et al., 1997), although reflective narratives may provide one means of gauging shifts in conceptions of writing pedagogy (Basgier & Simpson, 2019, 2020). Still, multi-part professional development experiences centered on discipline-specific concepts have been shown to contribute to changes in writing pedagogy (Glotfelter et al., 2020).
- 3 This activity was suggested by my colleague Luca Guazzotto, Professor of Physics at Auburn University.

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