

Redefining Writing Centers in the Age of AI: Embracing Their Role as ‘Sponsors of Future Skills’ at Universities

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The advent of AI tools like ChatGPT has fundamentally shaken writing centers worldwide. Contrary to perceptions of AI as a potential cause of demise for writing centers, this technological shift presents a great opportunity for writing centers to redefine their role at universities. This keynote proposes that writing centers can, and indeed should, become pivotal agents for fostering the development of AI literacy and other essential future skills, also called 21st century skills (Ehlers, 2020).

The current discussion about whether writing centers should embrace AI echoes past discussions about whether writing centers should function as ‘sponsors of multiliteracy’ (Sheridan & Inman, 2010; Trimbur, 2010). However, the implications of current technological changes are more extensive and crucial. Therefore, the required reorientation goes beyond merely expanding current tasks; it involves a holistic transformation toward nurturing a broader spectrum of future skills during a period of rapid and disruptive change. Central to this argument is the conviction that the fundamental values of academic writing, such as metacognition and critical thinking (Bean & Melzer, 2021), retain their importance, despite the profound changes AI brings to academic writing. Therefore, the keynote promotes the idea of writing centers transforming into holistic ‘sponsors of future skills’. Not only should they play a leading role in the cultivation of AI literacy but also of other future skills such as self-management, lifelong learning, and higher-order thinking skills (Kotsiou et al., 2022).

The presentation serves as a call to action, urging writing centers to venture beyond conventional writing support and tutoring, embracing AI competencies and a broader range of future skills. This strategic shift in identity requires the establishment of a new, sustainable and forward-thinking ‘grand narrative’ for writing centers, ensuring that they continue to be crucial hubs for skill development in the future.

References

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