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"Will AI steal my glory?": Power relations perceived by college instructors when grappling with Generative AI

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Abstract

This instrumental case study explores college instructors' perceptions of Generative AI as a potential tool for students to learn writing and their teaching practices under the influence of different power centers. Through inductive analysis, this study identifies four centers that have shaped the college instructors' perceptions of Generative AI, including the global impact of AI, the university and department, colleagues, and students. In response to these power dynamics, many instructors have updated their teaching practices to make sure that they still retain their authority in class and promote student accountability for their own learning. These changing practices may range from limiting the possibilities of using Generative AI in assignments to actively integrating it into their lesson planning. Findings of this study can inform instructors' professional development and strategies for responding to the trend of Generative AI in teaching practices.

Introduction

Generative AI (GenAI) is becoming increasingly integrated into everyday digital tools. Microsoft CoPilot, for instance, is now embedded in Microsoft 365, a platform many universities rely on for communication and workflow management. Similarly, ChatGPT has been incorporated into several online Learning Management Systems that are widely used in higher education, such as Canva. As such, many of these tools are marketed as time-saving solutions that simplify tasks and offer instructors access to a broader range of resources and support than they may have had in the past, potentially transforming how they approach teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities (Wyk, 2025).

In higher education, GenAI has been used to assist students in their writing processes (Karimi & Qadir, 2025). For example, AI can provide instant, 24/7 feedback regardless of the location of the student and offer personalized guidance and feedback. However, while GenAI can provide benefits for writers, scholars have also raised crucial questions about the use of GenAI and its implications for higher education. Many of these questions circle around ethical uses, such as authorship (Kostopolus, 2025), academic integrity (Vetter et al., 2024), and GenAI's more long-term impacts on critical thinking and rhetorical knowledge development (Wang & Wang, 2025). Additionally, while GenAI can be helpful in assisting students in revising and learning about grammar, format, and style (Alharbi, 2023; Fitria, 2021), it may have limited ability in engaging with diverse or conflicting perspectives, which is common in many disciplines in social sciences and humanities (Escalante et al., 2023).

While many studies have explored the potential of GenAI in improving teaching and learning of writing in higher education by proposing grand models based on students' and instructors' personal experiences (e.g. Escalante et al., 2023; Kohnke et al., 2023), less empirical research has been conducted to examine the social context of its actual application. Further, existing research on GenAI in higher education has primarily focused on undergraduate students, particularly English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, while much less has analyzed instructors' perceptions and teaching experiences under the influence of GenAI (Crompton & Burke, 2023). However, instructors across disciplines—from natural sciences to social sciences and humanities—may have writing assignments in their courses, and they face challenges with the increasing use of GenAI (Abdelaal & Al Sawi, 2024). More specifically, they need to navigate this new landscape as they determine whether—and how—to integrate GenAI into their course design, pedagogy, and assessment. Furthermore, instructors may feel uncertain about how to integrate GenAI in their teaching practices, even if they acknowledge that it is embedded in the future of education (Villarreal, 2023).

Indeed, because instructors will shape writing instruction at the college level, what they believe about the role of GenAI in writing and how they grapple with it based on such beliefs in their teaching practices deserves more attention. This study explores how college instructors understand GenAI's impact on writing instruction and what factors have shaped the way they teach. By centering faculty voices, this research study deepens understanding of how instructors engage with and reflect on GenAI, offering insights with lasting implications for writing pedagogy, student learning, and the evolving roles of GenAI in higher education. The specific research questions are:

1. What are the instructors' perceptions of using GenAI in college writing?

2. What are the mediating factors of their perceptions and/or use of GenAI in their teaching?

3. How do they respond to the increasing use of GenAI in college writing?

Literature review

Although it is important to understand instructors' perceptions and experiences of teaching under the increasing influence of GenAI, most existing literature focuses on its potential in supporting students' writing and learning (Villarreal, 2023). In addition to providing personalized tutoring and feedback based on students' individual needs, the use of GenAI tends to promote learner agency, interactive dialoguing, and metacognitive skills (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021). Especially in disciplines such as language learning, research has identified potential benefits in using AI-based tools to support EAL students' writing (Ng et al., 2023).

For example, a group of EAL students in a university in China with AI-assisted instruction demonstrated enhanced writing proficiency including organization and coherence compared to the other group under traditional writing instruction (Wang et al., 2024b). These enhancements may have resulted from the instant feedback and personalized guidance on grammar and vocabulary provided by GenAI tools (Marzuki et al., 2023).

However, while existing research has acknowledged the benefits of using GenAI in writing instruction, some faculty have found it challenging to integrate it into their teaching practices (Kutty et al., 2024). There are several factors affecting instructors' attitudes towards GenAI integration in the classroom. Foremost, some believed they did not have the skills needed to use it in teaching. Many of them explicitly stated that they lacked the confidence to integrate GenAI into their teaching or teach students how to use it responsibly (Villarreal, 2023). Another reason is that many universities do not have clear guidelines on what counts as ethical uses of GenAI; thus, faculty were uncertain about instructional rules regarding using it in teaching (Ng et al., 2023). Related to that, faculty may also struggle with ethical concerns regarding GenAI use for both them and their students. For example, in the field of psychology, Hostetter et al. (2024) found that faculty were often unable to distinguish AI-generated writing from a student's personal work. This raises critical questions about transparency, authorship, and academic integrity, which in turn influences whether and how instructors choose to incorporate GenAI into their classrooms. Finally, faculty may have concerns about data privacy and security. In a qualitative study of 12 English instructors, Kohnke et al. (2023) observed that many were hesitant to use GenAI tools because they were not sure how "data will be protected and algorithmic biases minimized" (p. 2). These concerns highlight the uncertainty around incorporating GenAI into classrooms.

While this growing body of research provides valuable insights, most focus on effective methods and challenges of using GenAI in teaching (Wale & Kassahun, 2024), student learning (Wang et al., 2024a), and writing outcomes (Song & Song, 2023). These studies help us understand how GenAI is changing both students' and instructors' approach to writing. However, less attention has been paid to how instructors are making sense of GenAI in teaching despite the challenges they face—particularly across different disciplines and institutional roles (Zhai, 2024). Since teaching is a social practice that can be shaped by the sociocultural context, instructors need to consider the power dynamics involved in their GenAI practices in the specific contexts when making their decisions in teaching. In other words, it is worth exploring and examining their perceptions of GenAI and the social context in which they are working to better understand their GenAI practices and provide support to them. It is important to understand instructors' perceptions and implementation of GenAI tools in the classroom, especially as the field shifts from a technology-centered approach focusing on rapidly evolving tools to a human-centered approach that emphasizes ethical and empowering use (Ouyang & Jiao, 2021).

Theoretical framework: Scale and polycentricity

To understand the macro and micro levels of power dynamics, which may shape instructors' perceptions and teaching practices with the increasing use of GenAI tools, we use the theoretical lens of scale and polycentricity to guide our study (Blommaert, 2021). Scale, also known as levels or distributions, is a metaphor that imagines that things are "hierarchically ranked and stratified" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 33). Scales can be understood both vertically and horizontally. The horizontal dimension refers to how social practices are shared or operated across different spaces, whereas the vertical dimensions examine dynamics at local, national, transnational, and global levels, which provides an understanding of how social events and processes move across different levels through "codes, norms and expectations" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 32) in a global context.

Useful for analyzing practices in both horizontal and vertical dimensions, different scales can reveal the social and cultural images of a society in a specific time and space; such knowledge can help understand the "stratified social meaning system" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 34) and allow us to see sociolinguistic phenomena in relation to a stratified and power-laden social structure in a global context. Guided by the lens of scale, we aim to explore how the power of GenAI can impact a layered, power-driven social structure in both local and global context, especially with the sweeping influence of GenAI on higher education.

In such a stratified social structure, the theory of polycentricity acknowledges that multiple centers of authority, power, or normativity coexist and influence social interactions. In this view, society is not organized around a single, dominant center but involves multiple "centers" or "evaluating authorities" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 39) at dif-

-ferent scales. The centers at upper scales develop "norms and perceived appropriateness" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 40) that those at the lower scales refer to. Polycentricity emphasizes that individuals may adapt their languages, behaviors, or communication practices to meet the expectations of these different centers of power. For example, a person might use different forms of language or adhere to different norms when interacting in a formal work setting compared to an informal social gathering. Power dynamics across scales are displayed in job titles, relationships, systems, and policies (Blommaert, 2021). The concept of polycentricity highlights the power relations and inequalities in how different norms and standards are valued and devalued across contexts. In this study, polycentricity helps understand how instructors' teaching practices are influenced by different power centers and why they adjust to them.

The concepts of scale and polycentricity also help explain why instructors' perceptions of AI are not uniform but rather shaped by their orientation to multiple, and sometimes conflicting, centers of normativity. These concepts offer a concrete framework for identifying the mediating factors of instructors' perceptions and use of GenAI in teaching. Therefore, they provide a powerful lens to understand how instructors grapple with the increasing use of GenAI as it has become an integral part of the educational landscape that has been transforming various aspects of teaching and learning. They experience the tensions of compromising their own beliefs of academic integrity with university guidelines (Zuo & He, 2024; Zuo, 2024), balancing GenAI use with human interactions (Wang et al., 2024b), and adapting their teaching approaches to respond to the challenges brought about by GenAI tools (Kohnke et al., 2023).

Methodology: An instrumental case study

This study is an instrumental case study following the exploratory approach (Creswell, 2013). Without setting a predefined hypothesis, this approach allows us to focus on the actual experiences of college instructors and achieve an in-depth understanding of how participants interpret their experiences through capturing their thoughts and perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through analyzing data from multiple sources and reporting in detail on the views of participants, this approach provides insights into complex circumstances of how power dynamics of different centers may shape instructors' teaching practices (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

In this study, we aim to go beyond the case to gain insights into a phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). An instrumental case study uses one or more cases as an instrument to provide insights into an issue or a larger phenomenon and facilitate the understanding of it. The case being studied is the AI practices of the instructor participants at a U.S. university, which can shed light on instructors' perceptions of how GenAI can influence teaching and learning.

Research site

This study took place in Fall 2024 at Palm Tree University (pseudonym), a four-year liberal arts university in the U.S. This university offers both undergraduate and graduate programs across different disciplines including education, business, music, and legal studies. Since 2023, Palm Tree University has developed a Quality Enhancement Plan that focuses on information literacy and formed a University GenAI Task Force that provides support to faculty regarding the increasing use of GenAI tools. They created a Canvas course with resources of teaching materials, such as samples of AI syllabus statements, discipline-specific examples of GenAI use, and guidance on effective prompt design. They also host a yearly colloquium and a monthly book club to invite faculty to participate in discussions on how GenAI can be used to facilitate teaching and learning.

Participants

Following the exploratory approach, we recruited 33 instructor participants who responded to a survey, and 10 focal participants who accepted the interview invitation. They are from different disciplines across campus and have various teaching experiences. Figure 1 and Figure 2 present information regarding the survey respondents' discipline and years of experience in academia; Table 1 provides the demographics of the focal participants.

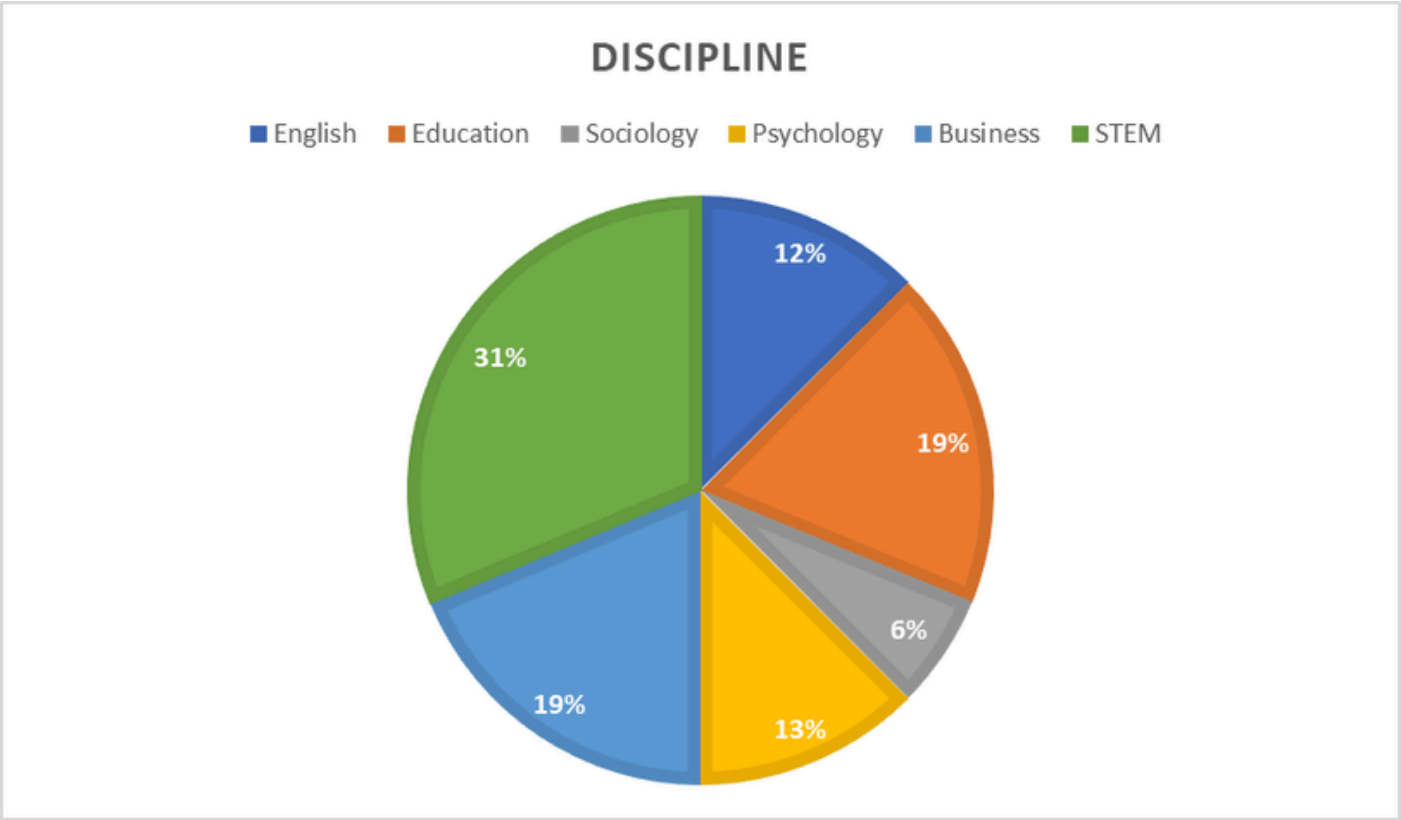

Figure 1 Survey respondents' discipline.

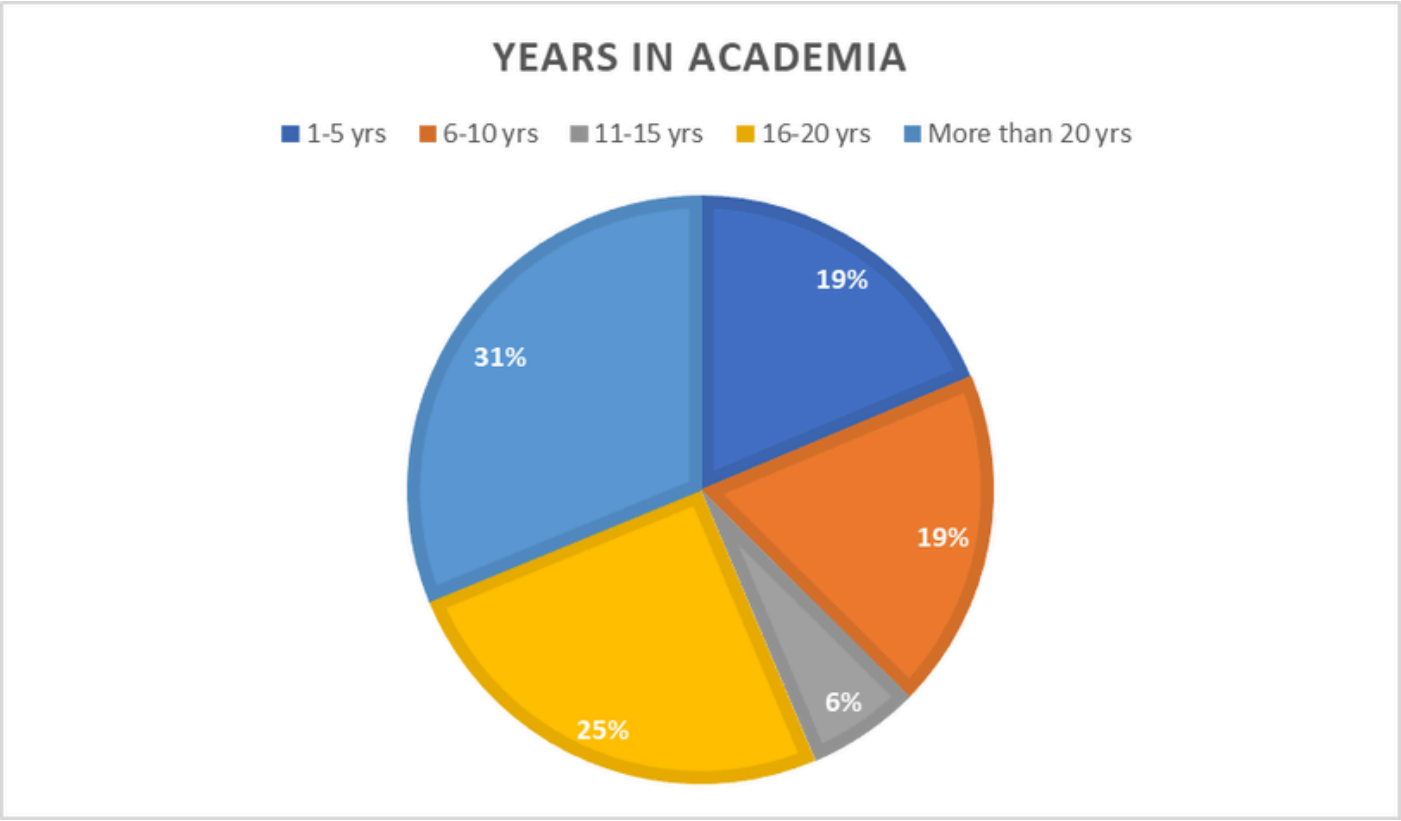

Figure 2 Survey respondents' years of experience in academia.

Table 1. Focal instructor participants' demographics.

Pseudonym	Discipline	Gender	Years of Teaching in Higher Education
Emily	Health Science	F	24 years
Sophia	Education	F	7 years
Alex	Business	M	27 years
Luke	Psychology	M	26 years
Jack	English	M	8 years
Olivia	Education	F	3 years
Grace	Biology	F	5 years
Lucy	English	F	22 years
Henry	Psychology	M	12 years
Ava	Education	F	6 years

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from multiple sources including a questionnaire, interviews, and course-related documents such as syllabi and assignment descriptions. We sent out a questionnaire reaching out to 265 faculty members across colleges and schools and 33 responded. The questionnaire gathered information about the participants' demographics, perceptions of GenAI tools, and how they have been navigating GenAI in their teaching. Then we interviewed 10 focal participants from different disciplines to better understand the individual experiences of each participant. We asked them about their GenAI policies in their courses, the impact of GenAI on college writing, and challenges or concerns they might face in teaching with GenAI.

We used inductive analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Saldaña, 2021) to examine questionnaires, interviews, and course-related documents. This approach allows research findings to emerge from the significant themes inducted from data (Thomas, 2006). The specific process of data analysis involved three rounds of coding, a process during which we interact with data through reiterative reading, asking questions, making comparisons, and interpreting codes to make sense of data and identify themes or categories (Saldaña, 2021). We started by organizing the qualitative data by individual participant, first making a detailed description of each case and then going through the inductive process to arrive at identifying themes within the case. Next, we conducted a thematic analysis across the cases to tease out the major themes emerging from the data (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, we further categorize and theorize the themes identified, based on which we built the major findings of our research.

In addition, we triangulated the themes with multiple data sources and did member checking with our preliminary findings to enhance validity (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021; Creswell, 2013). For example, interviews r-

-evealed that participants felt pressure to learn how to use GenAI tools to teach AI literacy, while survey responses reflected concerns about their ability to keep pace with rapidly changing technology. We also conducted member checking with the instructors on the preliminary findings. The data triangulation and member checking enabled us to revise our analyses. After we finished all data analysis, we reported findings again to the participants and invited them to comment on them and revise if necessary (Creswell, 2013).

Results

Just as teachers have various perceptions and understanding of digital teaching tools, such as Padlet, Canvas, and Google Classroom, the participating instructors showed different levels of acceptance and engagement with GenAI in their teaching. Based on an analysis of the survey data, about 62.5% of the respondents indicated that they would allow students to use GenAI in their writing assignments; the top three reasons for such a choice include GenAI's potential in helping students work through writer's block (78.3%) and brainstorm ideas for writing (76.2%) and GenAI's prevalence in students' real-life experiences (61.5%). Meanwhile, 20.4% of the respondents noted that they had not approved the use of GenAI in their course, largely because they felt they were not knowledgeable enough to tell if/how students had used GenAI (40.3%) or they believed "teaching students to write by themselves is the key" (32.5%). In addition, 17.1% of the respondents entered "Maybe" when asked if they would allow use of GenAI in their class, which means they were willing to keep the door open but had not figured out how it could be integrated into the curriculum and assignments to enhance students' learning experience.

An examination of the interview with the 10 focal participants reveals more details regarding these instructors' choices. More specifically, guided by the theory of scale and polycentricity (Blommaert, 2021), instructors' perceptions of and practices with GenAI are shaped by the power of four centers including the global impact of GenAI, university/department, colleagues, and students. They tend to adjust their teaching based on their perceptions and understanding of the rapid spread and development of GenAI, the university/department's attitudes towards GenAI, and how their colleagues and students have been using GenAI in their teaching and learning. In the following, we explore the four centers that exercise power to shape instructors' perceptions of integrating GenAI into their classrooms and the ways these instructors orient themselves to the centers through their teaching practices.

Center one: The global trend of Generative AI

As shown in the existing literature, GenAI has raised heated discussions in terms of its impact on all aspects of teaching and learning in higher education since 2022 (Chan & Colloton, 2024). Influenced by the power of the global trend of GenAI, many instructors have tried to delve into the transformation of teaching and assessment methods by incorporating the tool into their curriculum design (Bok & Cho, 2023; Pokkakillath & Suleri, 2023). The 10 participating instructors noted that "AI is the reality," which "seems inevitable" and is "never going away." For instance, one of them said:

> It's not going to go away. I'm hearing the same arguments and language that were offered when the internet became popular. I don't see it going away. I do see businesses using it instead of hiring writers, and then expecting employees to "spice up" or "fix" the writing. (Lucy)

In other words, this instructor, like the rest of the participants, believes that GenAI is a trend that they cannot avoid or ignore. Therefore, they need to adjust their teaching practices in response.

However, while all instructors have recognized the inescapable reality of generative AI, they have different perceptions of the tool, which can affect their potential responses to this global trend of GenAI based on their own situation. Six of the 10 instructors acknowledge the potential of GenAI in facilitating the writing process as it can provide various support at the different stages of writing. First, they think that it can promote thinking, such as generating and organizing ideas. For instance, all ten instructors noted they had used GenAI to help their students brainstorm in class to come up with topics or reflect on their writing.

In addition, four of the ten instructors believe GenAI can help with the actual writing process, from creating an o-

-utline to polishing a draft. Especially, they believe GenAI can provide timely, contingent support to language learners and students with learning disabilities by summarizing readings and research findings when they are overloaded, offering quick grammar check, and asking clarification questions. Importantly, it can be an alternative to expensive prep schools that benefit students of low socioeconomic status. Also, since it can give quick, standardized feedback to students before they submit their assignments, it can also save instructors plenty of time for grading and evaluation of students (Seo et al., 2021; Usher, 2025).

Therefore, because of the above-noted affordances of GenAI, most instructors believe teachers should take accountability to keep up with this trend by learning about and practicing using it in their teaching. At the same time, however, some instructors tend to take a more conservative attitude as they are concerned about the limitations of GenAI and the ethical issues associated with its use. For example, one instructor was frustrated by GenAI because of "how capable it is." She described an incident in which she at first believed that she came up with a good idea for a major writing assignment for her course, but then realized that ChatGPT could generate a paper that meets all the criteria. Therefore, she felt her teaching and instruction might not be as appealing and useful to her students as she thought, which made her heartbroken, as she said:

> The final project is the one that made me realize how amazing ChatGPT is. It was this project that literally broke my heart. I was like, this is the best assignment…And then I typed it in to ChatGPT, and it brought up the most beautiful [response to the prompt of the assignment], like, if one of my students turned it in, I'd be like…it's amazing. So that one broke my heart, because I thought it was like the most brilliant assignment. And clearly, ChatGPT also thinks it's brilliant, and just wants to steal my glory on this one. (Sophia)

However, although concerned about the increasing role of GenAI in higher education, these instructors agree that such a trend is inevitable. Hence, they still want to learn more about it and how it can be integrated into their courses and classrooms to regain their control and "stay a step ahead of" their students.

To conclude, under the influence of the global trend of GenAI, the highest level of the polycentric power dynamics scale, participating instructors all recognize the fact that the use of GenAI has gradually become a common practice in higher education and consider such a trend unavoidable. Hence, although they tend to hold different opinions due to their various beliefs about its effectiveness in enhancing learning and teaching and concerns about ethical issues related to it, many still see value in learning more about it to keep pace with current expectations for teachers and to maintain greater control over their teaching.

Center two: University and department

The participating instructors' AI teaching practices are also influenced by the power of the university and department, the second center in the polycentric power scales. As the 10 participants are from different departments, including English, Psychology, Education, Management, Biology, and Medicine, they reported varying policies or expectations regarding the use of GenAI in their department. In the following, we first introduce the AI policies reported by the participating instructors and then discuss their mixed attitudes towards having such policies.

First, instructors mentioned they needed to follow the AI policy set by their department and/or the university. Four of the 10 instructors noted that their department had a general AI policy, which aimed to ensure that each professor had a clear AI statement in their syllabus but allowed instructors to design their own specific policies and decide how they would like to use GenAI in their course. According to this requirement, these instructors allowed their students to use GenAI to help them write but not write for them, including brainstorming ideas for writing, reflecting on and improving their argument, and polishing their language. Based on this general requirement, however, they had slightly different opinions about the extent students can use GenAI to facilitate writing. While some thought it was acceptable as long as their students do the actual writing by themselves and honestly report where and how they use GenAI in their writing, a professor from the Department of Psychology wanted his students to use the tool more scrupulously, as he explained:

> There's kind of a general expectation that student papers should be the product of the student. In the default is that students shouldn't use GenAI unless specifically assignment says that they can use GenAI in the field. (Luke)

Meanwhile, some instructors reported that there was no AI policy in their department, which was "kind of an aside conversation" as the faculty tend to "take it for granted." When talking about the varying situations regarding GenAI use in different departments, two of these instructors noted that it may be an issue of disciplinary differences depending on the paradigms and practices of teachers and researchers in their field. For instance, a professor in the English Department said: "I feel like liberal arts university in general are more open to what's going on right now" (Lucy). Meanwhile, the instructors in social sciences reported that according to their observations, people in their department tend to hold mixed attitudes towards GenAI:

> My impression is in the Business School, most people are embracing the technology, not all, or at least they're aware of it enough to think we need to have our students ready for the workforce. (Alex)

In other words, because the Business School seems to be open to students' use of GenAI, instructors are willing to discuss it and prepare their students for using it.

In contrast, another professor in Psychology noted that his department was less interested in exploring GenAI and left the responsibility for creating AI policies to the instructors:

> (Psychology) I don't see much coming up in terms of conversation around it in the department……we haven't really talked that much about it, but professors are free to decide their own policy and class. (Henry)

On the one hand, instructors' views vary in terms of whether an official AI policy is needed in their department and at the university level. Some instructors explicitly noted that they believed at some point the university will have to give "formal guidance to everybody" to ensure consistency in their course development and teaching practices. For instance, as one of them said:

> There's a huge gap or is going to be what the professors are comfortable with, like if we all were on the same page on Canvas. I assume everybody needs to know how to use Canvas, obviously, like we don't all use it exactly the same way. (Olivia)

In other words, Olivia believed that the university should provide instructors with resources that could help them learn about GenAI and open discussions on how it should be used in teaching to keep everyone informed and updated. She believed once instructors had sufficient knowledge about its potentials and limitations, they could make better decisions with more confidence.

However, some instructors tended to hold mixed attitudes towards having a unified policy in their department, which may potentially have restrictive effects on their choices in teaching. For instance, one of them suggested that he wanted to have the freedom whether to use GenAI but was concerned that without an official policy he may not be "on the same page" with other professors. More specifically, he said:

> Currently there's no clear guidelines from the university and department. I want to be flexible but also want to make sure that every professor is on the same page. (Olivia)

Furthermore, two of the instructors reported their concern as contingent faculty who have limited discourse power in their department and autonomy in curriculum development and thus tended to be prudent when considering using GenAI:

> As an adjunct I don't have like free rein over the course. I felt I didn't have as much freedom, and I was just kind of trying to stick to the outline that the professor who has designed the course. (Olivia)

In other words, these instructors felt constrained when considering modifying or adding AI elements to the existing course because of their lack of freedom as adjunct faculty members.

To conclude, at the time of the interviews, the university in this study had not implemented a unified policy on AI practices. Instructors have shown different levels of interest in the use of GenAI in higher education and are at different stages of understanding it. These policies and expectations of the university and departments have potentially shaped how the instructors chose to engage with GenAI in their curriculum development and teaching. Indeed, even scholars working in the same discipline and department may have different perceptions and understanding of the effects of GenAI on the teaching of writing. Hence, in the next section we discuss how the instructors orient themselves to the third center: their colleagues, that is, how their AI practices are affected by the other scholars in their field/department.

Center three: Colleagues

The participating instructors' perceptions of GenAI are also to some extent shaped by their colleagues' AI practices. According to these instructors, there is "absolutely the whole spectrum" in higher education regarding professors' knowledge and practices of GenAI, as one of them noted:

> In my experience, administrators that are older and kind of like old school are scared of it. I even saw an administrator told middle school they could not use it. And then you have the innovative, kind of like the nerdy but groundbreaking ones. They just want to know all the latest programs and they're telling their students use this. (Olivia)

In other words, they noticed that on one hand, some of their colleagues, especially the senior instructors, tend to hold back as they feel they do not have sufficient knowledge of the potentials and limitations of GenAI and do not feel motivated to change their teaching practices after working for more than 10 years in the field.

Further, some instructors were interested in promoting their beliefs in their department. For instance, six participants reported that they had colleagues who were interested in integrating GenAI into their teaching and believed that it was the responsibility of everyone in the department to keep learning and keep themselves updated. For instance, one of these supporters of GenAI said:

> In order for any of us to get comfortable with it, we have to keep using it. There has to be some accountability in the process where professors are saying like, yeah, I use it three times this semester. I had it in my syllabus. My class used it three times, and that could be documentable. You could check to make sure that was happening, like, I'm just thinking about how I am observed as an adjunct that can easily be checked off and part of the observation that's being held being held on me. (Olivia)

As a result, the participating instructors all felt peer pressure, to varying extents, to learn more about what GenAI can do for teachers and students because they saw more and more teachers had started to experiment with it, including some of their colleagues, who wanted to encourage or even push the others to it.

In addition to learning more about GenAI and integrating it into teaching, two of the instructors also talked about how their colleagues adjust the types of assignments they gave and their evaluations methods in response to the increasing use of GenAI identified among their students. One of them noted:

> I have heard some of them talk about how they have changed the types of assignments: they give either like more presentations because that helps you know that the student has actually learned it – you can't just have it spit something out for you, you know, you have to be able to get that information back to someone. (Grace)

In addition to the increasing use of GenAI overall, these instructors also observed that their colleagues have their own preferences for GenAI tools, which may affect how they engage with GenAI in their teaching, as one of them noted:

> I think people are using different ones, like a tutor in the Writing Center, she loved Bard, and now Gemini. Also, I never use ChatGPT. I think people have preferences, depending on what they're used to, and what they like. (Alex)

Hence, in this instructor's case, although she felt peer pressure, her decision about whether and how to use GenAI may still be rooted in her own expectations and evaluations of the quality of writing produced by different GenAI tools. Similarly, the instructors in humanities, such as English and History, suggested that the type of writing in their field is culturally and contextually sensitive and thus requires the writer to pay greater attention towards potential biases and be critical about the existing knowledge. In their opinion, although GenAI tends to advance the dominant views and values online, they may not be able to well address such aspects. Some of the professors in STEM, however, noted that the writing required in their field is relatively more structural and it is the data, instead of the style and quality of writing, that matters more. Hence, they believed that GenAI, if used appropriately, could be useful in increasing the efficiency of their students' writing.

To conclude, the participating instructors noted that they had observed a "whole spectrum" (Olivia) of attitudes to and practices of GenAI among their colleagues. Also, because more teachers have started to engage with GenAI or promote the use of it, they felt pressured, to a varying extent, to engage with it as well.

Center four: Students

All the participating instructors noted that one of the major factors that motivated them to learn about GenAI is the practices of their students, the fourth center in the power scales and the direct stakeholders in their teaching. More specifically, all 10 instructors noticed that their students were using GenAI to help them write. While some instructors identified traces of GenAI in the writing of several students in their class, the others suggested that over 80% to 90% of their students reported use of GenAI. Hence, they all believe that faculty need to "be on top of AI literacy" (Alex) to understand what their students are doing and take control of their course, including teaching and grading, as two of them commented:

> Because it's here, and students will use it, so I am obligated to teach them acceptable and potentially innovative ways to proceed. (Emily)

> We have to do something about it because students are using it. (Alex, emphasis added)

HIn short, these instructors felt pressured to take action because their students had already brought AI into their course, no matter whether they liked it or not.

In addition, many of the instructors were concerned that their students were more adept at using GenAI than faculty members, which placed them in a passive position in teaching and grading. For instance, four instructors noted that it became more difficult for them to evaluate students' real writing proficiency as they could not tell whether they used GenAI or not in their assignments. More specifically, two of them said:

> I hadn't played enough with it yet to figure out how we can use it and honestly, I would have to ask the students because I don't know what they know. (Lucy)

> I have been quite blunt if they just cut and paste the ideas. I will never know. (Sophia)

However, relying on students' self-report may not be an effective way to get accurate information about their GenAI practices because students were hesitant to acknowledge that they turned to GenAI for help. Also, instructors noticed that some students used GenAI because of "laziness," that is, they overly relied on it to have it finish the writing assignments for them instead of making use of the resources available to them to learn and improve their writing. For instance, one instructor commented:

> But it's laziness. In the rubrics, I have, you know, grammatical correctness, so they'll lose points for that. Because it's there on the rubric. It's black and white. I refer them to the writing center or the student support. Yeah, that's an offer because we offer so many great things for them. They just aren't making the time for it. (Olivia)

In other words, some students chose to use GenAI to correct their grammar instead of taking advantage of the resources provided by the university. They use GenAI as a shortcut instead of investing the time and efforts required to learn and grow.

In addition to unethical use of GenAI, some instructors noted that GenAI might also affect the way that they address educational equity. For instance, two of them were concerned that GenAI might enhance the existing digital divide because of students' unequal access to digital devices, as two of them explained:

> I think around equity, there's obviously all the issues like, who has access to the internet and, these programs - many of them are free, which is great, but there's also better ones that are not free, which is an equity issue in and of itself. (Sophia)

> ChatGPT is free, but there are some generators that are more accurate in terms of balancing off controversial topics, avoiding things like the false citations, you know, and all that sort of stuff. (Luke)

In short, they suggested that students with more economic capital could better use and benefit from GenAI as they have access to the advanced tools or versions. Such an enlarging digital divide, as they perceived, may limit the extent to which they can integrate it into their own courses to help all their students meet the learning goals.

Furthermore, some instructors worried that if GenAI was permitted to complete assignments, then what skills were actually being evaluated – writing or digital literacy. Considering that students may be prepared to varying degrees in terms of using GenAI in their learning and writing, they suggested that some students might need extra support to catch up with their peers. As one of them noted:

> If all our students could have equal opportunity to all levels of training, so maybe if there is a tool that the students take as a freshman that determines where they're at, like a proficiency level on GenAI, that would be helpful. And we then added GenAI to that, saying Okay, this student needs foundational level knowledge on what GenAI is, and then if the student was already using it, say they come from a private school that gave them instruction on that and had them using it some even for middle school, then they wouldn't need as much of foundational, but they could be more project specific. (Olivia)

In short, the participating instructors have several concerns about students' use of GenAI in their writing: First, many of them felt pressured to learn about it as their students were using it, and some of them noted that it was difficult for them to catch up with the practices of their students, who seemed to be more tech-savvy. In addition, the instructors had mixed feelings about the effects of GenAI on educational equity. On one hand, like many other instructors reported in the literature, they believed it could help English learners correct their grammar and polish their language; on the other hand, they were worried that if students ignored available resources suggested by instructors, it might lead to unethical use of GenAI. Additionally, students' various readiness for using GenAI might enhance the existing digital divide, which could further disadvantage students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Therefore, to address these concerns, many of these instructors exercised agency to update their teaching practices by using various strategies to ensure that they still have control of their courses as the authority in the class and the learning goals are still met, including shifting from author-based to editor-based pedagogy, adjusting the assignments, changing their grading criteria, creating AI policies, and having conversations about GenAI with students (see Table 2).

These instructors changed, to varying degrees, the types of assignments given to their students as well as the way they teach and grade them. First, they take actions to prevent students from overly relying on GenAI or using it as a shortcut, such as designing assignments that focus on the processes of thinking and writing instead of the final product and adjust their grading criteria to reflect these aspects. Additionally, realizing that this trend of GenAI is inevitable and many of their students are using it, the instructors decided to show them how to use it ethically and effectively to promote learning. More specifically, one of the instructors believed that it is important for students to see both the affordances and limitations of GenAI and how they can make use of the affordances based on their needs and make up for the limitations. Hence, he switched from an author-based approach of teaching to an editor-based approach, through which students can critically engage with GenAI in their writing process. Moreover, to have a better knowledge of how their students have been using GenAI, some instructors choose to have open conversations about GenAI with their students, based on which they can create an AI policy for their own class to regulate students' GenAI practices, including when and how they can use GenAI tools.

Table 1. Instructors' strategies.

Shifting from author-based to editor-based pedagogy	Having students edit AI-generated writing to help them understand the limitations of GenAI; increasing the number of revisions required	
Adjusting the assignments	Reducing the number of traditional writing assignments	Designing more hands-on activities
		Doing conferences instead
		Asking clarification questions
	Assigning reflections on one's thinking and writing process and/or the instructor's teaching	
Changing the grading criteria	Giving less emphasis on language, especially grammar, and more on clarity of students' narration of the process	
	Increasing the weight of class participation	
	Checking words that signal students' own work such as first-person point of view and personal voice	
	Using AI checker; having students redo the work once caught	
	Allowing students to turn in their variation of the assignment to ease their pressure to get everything right at their first attempt	
Creating AI policies	Having different AI policies in different classes, depending on the content and goals of learning	
	Having a general policy and then also specific, different ones for each assignment	
	Discussing AI with students to gain more knowledge of their AI practices	
Having conversations about AI with students	Showing students how to use it in a sensible and academically acceptable way	
	Bringing in an AI specialist or consultant	
	Having students practice writing questions: diversify and integrate the different methods at some point, knowing different uses for AI in different contexts	

Discussion

The study has identified four centers that shaped the college instructors' perceptions of GenAI, including the global impact of GenAI, the university and department, colleagues, and students. As "evaluating authorities" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 39) at different scales, these centers hold different "norms and perceived appropriateness" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 40) regarding the use of GenAI in college writing, which represent their own understanding of the affordances and limitations of the tool. Coexisting in a stratified structure (Blommaert, 2021), the centers have cumulative effects on the instructors' teaching practices: The ten participants, who came from a range of disciplines and had various levels of experience in higher education, adapted their practices to varying degrees to address the expectations of the four centers of power.

First, similar with their counterparts in many global contexts who have been trying to actively respond to heated discussions of GenAI's impact on higher education, especially classroom teaching and curriculum design (Bok & Cho, 2023; Chan & Colloton, 2024; Pokkakillath & Suleri, 2023), the participating instructors, regardless of their personal attitudes towards GenAI, have all noticed the increasing popularity of GenAI in their discipline, saying that "AI is the reality." Feeling that they were faced with an inescapable situation of using GenAI, most instructors wanted to learn more about how it could help promote the learning of writing and how they could prepare their students for using it in their academic journey and future career. Meanwhile, some instructors tended to take a more conservative attitude than their colleagues, as they were concerned about the limitations of GenAI, such as the lack of authorial voice and critical thinking in AI-generated texts (Ala et al., 2025; Amirjalili et al., 2024), and were less confident about whether and to what extent they could keep up with the change.

Second, the university and department's policies and expectations also have effects on the teaching practices of the ten instructors from seven disciplines. Depending on the conventions of their discipline, the instructors might have different perceptions of whether or to what extent an AI policy is helpful. In this study, instructors in STEM and liberal arts tend to hold a more open attitude to conversations about GenAI, while those in social sciences report that instructors in their fields seem to have mixed attitudes. Since most of the previous research mainly focuses on a single discipline such as English language education (Kohnke et al., 2023; Liao et al., 2023), mathematics instruction (Lee & Yeo, 2022), engineering (Simelane & Kittur, 2025), this study extends the previous research and acknowledges disciplinary differences of how instructors grapple with GenAI tools in classrooms. However, regardless of their disciplines and experiences with GenAI, the instructors all recognize the need to encourage conversations about GenAI in their department to make people aware of how it has been and can be used by both faculty and students.

In addition to the influence of the global trend of GenAI and university and department policies, this study has established two other centers that can potentially shape instructors' perceptions and practices, which have not been well researched in the existing literature. The first one is their colleagues. Feeling pressured to keep up with their colleagues, some of the instructors show interest in learning more about GenAI to update their own teaching practices or are enthusiastic about promoting the use of GenAI in their department, while others tend to hold back as they feel less motivated to change the practices that they had established for over 10 years in their classroom. Another center is students, whose GenAI practices serve as a major factor that motivates these instructors to learn about GenAI.

Indeed, the rapid development and increasing popularity of GenAI in higher education seem to have (re)shaped the power relations within the existing hierarchy. First, GenAI has further complicated power relations in teacher-student relationships. On one hand, it supports students' exploration of new learning experiences and engagement with writing activities that they believe are effective. For some students, using GenAI can be beneficial as the tool can help "remove barriers" (Brookfield et al., 2022, p. 134) in writing for them, such as writers' blocks and language issues. Additionally, using GenAI may demonstrate their pursuit of freedom in taking control of their own learning by writing in the way that they are interested in, which may potentially revert the rules or expectations set by the instructor. Hence, "will AI steal my glory," a question raised by one of the participating instructors, can be a valid concern.

On the other hand, because of the increasing number of identified GenAI usage in their students' writing, some instructors seem to have levelled up their surveillance to ensure students are following their policies and meetin-

-g the learning goals, often through the use of AI checkers and modifying or replacing the writing assignments they used to give. Such practices may intensify the "self-censorship and self-surveillance" of students when using GenAI in their writing (Brookfield, 2005, p. 37). As a result, the students' AI practices and instructors' responses may lead to an elevated power battle.

However, the ultimate, genuine concern of these participating instructors, including the instructor who wondered if GenAI could steal their glory, is whether their students can still learn how to write when using GenAI as they do. As some of them pointed out, the development of GenAI is an unavoidable trend, and it is likely that students may need to master AI skills to thrive academically or professionally in their future journey. Also, it is of equal importance to support instructors to make them feel confident and comfortable in their class to ensure the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Hence, instead of dodging the topic or completely banning the use of GenAI in their courses, it may be better for instructors to learn to "exercise their power in a supportive, ethical and responsible way" to encourage active participation on the side of students and promote meaningful learning (Brookfield et al., 2022, p. 134). For example, instructors should consider the interests and needs of their students to integrate GenAI in their writing when (re)designing their course or writing assignments. In other words, they should stay open to possibilities, including various types of tools and different forms of teaching. Just as learning, teaching is a social practice in nature, which means the instructor's decisions are made based on considerations of multiple social factors, such as the context of teaching, the needs, interests, and learning profile of the students, and the objectives of teaching. As a result, teaching can never be set in stone but involves life-long learning and evolving practice.

In addition to instructor-student power relations, GenAI may have also shaped the power dynamics between some senior instructors and junior instructors. For instance, while some senior scholars participating in this study expressed concerns about the lack of knowledge of GenAI or difficulties in keeping up with their students' GenAI practices, their junior counterparts seemed to feel more comfortable with integrating GenAI into their class and are more adept at it. In such a situation, it is important for the university to support both senior and junior instructors' self-development and experimental teaching practices, providing a safe and encouraging environment for them to try something new that they believe could be important and helpful.

In short, instructors' perceptions and practices of GenAI, including whether and how to use it, are shaped by their understanding of the polycentric power exerted by the four centers noted above and to what extent they want and can negotiate their internal interests and the external demands under such power relations. Depending on their perceived importance of each center and "appropriateness" of the rules related to each center, the instructors make decisions about their teaching based on their own interests and needs in their context.

Conclusion and future directions

This study explores college instructors' perceptions and teaching practices under the influence of GenAI. Although it yields robust findings, there are several limitations. First, since this study was conducted in a private liberal arts university, the findings may not be generalizable to broader contexts, such as public institutions or universities with different student populations and technological resources. Future research should extend this inquiry by examining GenAI teaching practices across a wider range of institutional contexts, including public universities and community colleges, to capture greater diversity in instructor experiences and institutional resources. Comparative studies across disciplines could also provide valuable insights into how subject-specific pedagogical needs shape the integration of GenAI in teaching.

In addition, the study captures a snapshot in time and given the rapid pace of GenAI development in education, instructors' practices and attitudes may evolve quickly, limiting the study's long-term relevance. Finally, the relatively small sample size restricts the breadth of perspectives included, which may leave out important variations in how GenAI is integrated into teaching. Longitudinal research would be beneficial for tracking how instructors' practices and attitudes evolve as GenAI technologies continue to develop and as institutional policies and student expectations shift.

The findings of this study suggest directions for professional development needed by college instructors in the era of AI. As noted, lack of knowledge in GenAI, especially how it can be used effectively in teaching and evaluation of writing, is a major concern among the participating instructors who felt hesitant, to varying extent, to allow students to use GenAI in their writing. Hence, professional development provided by the institution or other organizations on GenAI can be helpful. In addition, open discussions on the potentials and risks of GenAI as well as its application in the department or field can also help instructors themselves updated and develop a more comprehensive and critical understanding of GenAI, which allows them to make better decisions in teaching.

In addition, this study offers pedagogical implications for college instructors. The participating instructors' changing teaching practices in response to the development and prevalence of GenAI in higher education can inspire teachers in similar contexts. For instance, seeing GenAI as an inevitable and irreversible trend, some of the instructors chose to have open conversations about GenAI with students and guide them to experiment with it to learn about its limitations in writing. Regardless of whether the institution or department has an AI policy, it is important for instructors to clarify how GenAI can be used in their class, so that students understand both the learning expectations and how their work will be evaluated. Also, several instructors adjusted the form or nature of the writing assignments to encourage students to be more accountable for their own learning. Emphasizing the writing process instead of the final product, such as assigning students reflections on their own thinking, writing, and learning, increasing the number of instructor-student conferences, and requiring multiple revisions, is one of the most common strategies adopted by these instructors.

Finally, this study has theoretical implications. The notions of scale and polycentricity, which have rarely been used in GenAI research, provide a powerful lens to explore how the power relations display in instructors' teaching experiences under the influence of GenAI. These concepts have been used in the studies of academic literacy to analyze power relations in writing practice. For example, in academic writing and publishing, multilayered norms at different scales are involved and authors' textual trajectory is often intervened by coauthors, local colleagues, professional reviewers, and editors as polycentric powers that authors need to refer to (Hynninen, 2021). However, to our knowledge, these two notions have rarely been used to analyze the contesting power relations involved in the instructors' AI pedagogical approach. As instructors' perceptions and teaching practices regarding the use of GenAI are woven into complicated power relations, the two notions can guide the understanding of how these power relations can come into play in the instructors' teaching practice regarding the use of GenAI.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

1.What course(s) are you teaching this semester? Can you describe them such as primary goals, course assignments, etc.?

2.Have you considered using GenAI tools or actually used them in your own writing? If you have used it, could you talk about your experience briefly? If you haven't, could you explain why?

3.Do you have AI policy in your course? Could you please share your course policy related to GenAI such as ChatGPT? If you don’t have a policy related to GenAI, do you plan to have one?

4.Does your GenAI course policy apply to all course assignments? If not, could you please share these assignment-specific AI policies/guidelines?

5.In what ways may GenAI affect teaching of college writing? Have you ever changed your assignments due to concerns about GenAI? If so, how and why?

6.What challenges do you think students have in writing? How do you think GenAI may or may not help with the challenges?

7.Do you think GenAI can play a role in educational equity? What impact it may have on students with different socioeconomic/cultural/linguistic background? In what ways may GenAI affect student writers?

8.In what ways do you think GenAI tools can be incorporated into college writing courses and instructors’ teaching?

9.What challenges and difficulties, if any, have you encountered when using GenAI in writing and teaching?