

Writing, Technology, and Accessibility

Panel Interview with Dr. Jay Dolmage, Professor and Chair, English (Waterloo); Dr. Laila Ferreira, Assistant Teaching Professor, School of Journalism, Writing, and Media (UBC)

Facilitated by Dr. Jason Collins (UVic)

Editorial Note: The audio recording toward the end of this interview was compromised. The affected section has been italicized to indicate possible errors in transcription.

October 23rd, 2024

Interview Questions

- There is a great deal of fear around GenAI at the moment. What kinds of support do you think writing instructors, support staff, and administrators need to provide students a safe and inclusive learning environment?
- How does technology create barriers in academic environments? Let's reverse the question, how can technology provide greater access?
- What does accessibility mean to you in writing classrooms and writing centres?
- How does technology or lack thereof further systemic oppression in writing classrooms?
- After reviewing participant materials on SharePoint, what summative comments do you have to share?

Transcript

Facilitator (Dr. Jason Collins): Welcome Jay and Laila. We'll get started with our first question. So. Yeah, there's a great deal of fear around generative AI at the moment. So, in thinking about AI, maybe technology in general, what kinds support do you think writing instructors, support staff, and administrators could provide to students to create a safe and inclusive learning environment when it comes to technology? If you have thoughts on AI, we'd love to hear those. So, either one of the speakers can... whoever feels like this is... you're itching to answer them.

Dr. Laila Ferreira: Well, I feel like this is a really cold start. Like boom.

Facilitator: I know. Yeah, it is. We're jumping right in there.

Ferreira: I don't know if everybody... I see some familiar people on the list, but not everyone would know who I am. But I just wanted to say thank you. I'm very honored to be asked here today. I wanted to thank Sarah and the whole entire team. I'm unfortunately... was unable to attend other workshops because of, you know, life events. But I'm really

honoured to be here and just thank you for having me. So I'm an assistant professor of teaching at UBC in WRDS: writing, research, and discourse studies within the School of Journalism, Writing and Media. We're like the Little Writing Studies program that could. And we're... [we] just launched a minor in writing and communications. So we're, you know, now we have this school. My pedagogical and research interests are in inclusive and accessible writing curriculum instruction in classrooms. I am currently working in a large teaching and learning enhancement-funded program... um, project on AI in writing. So we're developing resources, piloting them in our classrooms. So I do have a lot to say about what we've learned so far in this area, particularly with AI. So I'll just... I can get started and then we can riff off one another.

I would say we need a lot more resources. It's a very fluid and rapidly changing situation. I'm concerned. And that's part of the project that we're working on, is one of the key concerns. A lot of the people working on this AI and writing project were involved in another TLEF project that I was also a part of on academic integrity, and it really did transform how academic integrity was taught and managed and discussed and dealt with at UBC. And so what we saw happening with GenAI and writing and our students was that deficit mindset was returning and becoming, like, that approach was students [are] cheating, and everybody was going to start cheating, and they were all going to start using AI to write. So this real focus on this, the students as a sort of deficit mindset and model. The issue is that it is scary. It does take a lot of resources. We need to talk through that fear. I think it's providing more opportunities for people to work through all the fears that they're having around AI, and to be given more resources in order to adapt their own teaching of writing in order to learn with the students around what it means for our teaching of writing and what it means for them and ourselves as writers.

So I would say instead of... I would like to see us providing more resources towards our faculty and staff in order to support students better in... they have a lot of questions. I think we assume the students know how to use it, and they don't. And I think we need a lot more attention on how we are going to be speaking to students about it and the ways in which we're going to be teaching students how to use it, as well as learning how to manage that ourselves. So a lot more resources, a lot more attention, a lot more space. Not just, "Here's a policy on privacy. Everybody can do what they want in their classrooms." That's just not going to work. I'll let Jay jump in.

Facilitator: Thank you.

Dr. Jay Dolmage: Thanks so much, Laila. So yeah, my name's Jay Dolmage, and I'm here at the University of Waterloo. You can see my messy office here today. I'm a middle-aged white man. I'm wearing dark glasses. Thinning hair. All of these things are factors in my fall so far this year. It's been a busy one. I'm a chair of my department as well, but my background is in writing studies, and here at Waterloo, we've, sort of taken up... When I first started here, we had an exam for writing. So it was a really outdated model, and it really set up and structured writing as something that was very exterior to the university

and the curriculum. It was kind of a way of streaming certain students away from the university. And what we've created is a universal writing requirement. And so what we have is each faculty, each unit in the university, has different ways of satisfying that requirement. But here in English we teach writing courses for our own majors, we teach them for students in math and computer science, we teach them for engineers, we teach them for science, the Faculty of Science as well. Very large writing program probably about 4,500 to 5,000 students a year come through our program, or our different courses.

So, that situates us in an interesting and complicated place. Because we are... We have these courses that we've been teaching for 20-25 years and these approaches. We have the research expertise that we have in our unit, especially around things like digital media, around accessibility – my own background is in disability studies, obviously. But we also are working with stakeholders across the university who can sometimes have very different attitudes than we do. And we're also working with support units across campus and academic and pedagogical units across campus who can have different mandates too, so. All of that goes to say that that here at Waterloo, I think it's a confusing... there has been a confusing approach, and I think I'm echoing Dr. Ferreira when I say that there are many different messages that students get about AI for example and intellectual honesty and integrity, intellectual property, all of these things. So. We also then work with the Faculty Association we work with a not too high but a reasonable number of sessional faculty who don't have the same protections that that tenure stream and teaching stream faculty have here.

This is not really answer, this is all just kind of context. But I I'm saying it out loud because I think it speaks to some of the complexity of other folks probably who are here. And so the answers that I might have, the approaches that I might have in my own individual classroom – and I only teach these introductory writing classes. I love teaching them. But I feel a level of confidence with how I want to approach these things in that context, and I feel... sometimes powerless, sometimes pulled in many different directions, sometimes just as confused as other people when I have to navigate this from a kind of programmatic level or look at what the picture is campus wide. I would say Waterloo has a lot of resources and information, but not much guidance. And we currently, coming out of the pandemic, don't have much of a campus community. So that when there are, kind of, opportunities to take part in discussion, to involve students and get their input and feedback, they're not very well attended, and so the information doesn't get shared very well. That's probably enough from me for now. I'm thinking we're probably just beginning to dig into this.

Facilitator: Yeah. Thank you so much. You know, before we get into the next question, I just wanted to open up space, Laila, for you to talk a little bit about the AI project. If you're interested. I thought maybe that might help give us an example of one of the things that's happening in writing studies around this topic.

Ferreira: Okay. Sure. Well, the people involved in the project are, you know, people who work primarily, you know, teaching, writing, same. I'm the same. I teach primarily first-Year writing courses here at UBC, and we teach one of the key, main courses that are required by students across the faculties of Arts and Sciences for their writing requirement. But we have different diverse people working on this project, and it really is about creating resources. And we're willing to get stuck in and do the work to try out these different learning strategies, approaches, ways of redesigning our courses in order to take into account the changes that AI are creating in terms of how our students are engaging in our courses and with writing.

It... What I think we've been finding is that it is very complicated. Like Doctor Dolmage was saying, it can change, and also you might have something that works in your classroom that doesn't work for someone else. So, creating resources that are going to be taken up more broadly is challenging.

I think the time it takes to develop, to read, to redesign some of our activities and to develop teaching materials in AI takes a lot of time. So there's... If you're looking at resources that are needed, it's time. And you're already teaching students. You have 13 weeks typically, and also only a certain amount of time that you have as well to design your course. Particularly if we're talking about people who are contingent. So it's very challenging.

And also that the AI is changing. So you might spend all that time designing something and then two days later when you go to do it in your classroom, it's changed. So I've had that exact experience. Within two days, it's all different. So how do we... How are we going to be supported in doing that work? So part of that is developing these resources, strategies, and also coordinating with other units on campus – so computer science is also engaged in a project to do with GenAI and writing code and what they're doing there. So coming together with other units across campus and really sharing more information because it can get siloed as we know, yeah. So that's really... So it's really a very cross-disciplinary cross-campus approach.

Facilitator: Thank you. Yeah, yeah. I agree. I think it's great the way you put that. When we're thinking about AI and whether or not we're working with it in the classroom or providing resources, to keep in mind that this is a fluid thing. It's very much in flux. Yeah.

Okay. So our next question is about technology and barriers. We're curious: does technology create barriers in academic environments? But also, like, how can technology provide greater access? So, you know, what kinds of barriers might be thrown up in the implementation of certain technologies, but also like how can technologies make writing classrooms or writing centres more inclusive or more accessible?

Dolmage: Maybe I'll take this one first and we can take turns that way. I mean, there's sort of a variety of ways. I think maybe we should say... There were, you know... For disabled students before the pandemic, there were certain types of adjustments and ways that they

were asking to be included and for their bodies and minds to be understood in higher education. They wanted more flexibility around attendance and participation, for example, and were told that that was impossible. And then all of a sudden, we had a pandemic and students were told that wasn't allowed, that in person attendance and participation was allowed, and we had to find other ways to do it, right? And so we... A lot of the kind of accommodations... If students had created a map or a repertoire, and there are a couple of studies that showed this and I'd glad to share that research with folks, but, the kinds of things they were asking for were things that we get out of what we would have called asynchronous learning, right? Which obviously predated the pandemic and will continue after and during. But it's... More students had a sense that learning could happen in something more than 50-minute races within 12-week races. That there were really interesting and powerful ways for them to engage with courses materials outside of the class, ways for them to engage with one another and reflect and ways for them to engage with their writing, right, and one another's writing.

For me, and for a lot of other instructors, I think that allowed us to really enrich what we see and think of the classroom as, right? There are lots of people who were doing that before, you know. But I think in a much more widespread way, people came to understand that you're going to get more involvement, there's more ways for more people to be involved, there are ways for folks to engage with creating access and accessibility for one another through, you know, technological tools, whether those are, you know, things like shared notes, whether those are simply, you know, transcribing and sharing transcripts from class, right? Captioning video, right? Creating text interpretations of data, right? Like there's a wide variety of ways to engage with this. And we had to do those things when we moved on.

Like, it's an interesting point, and maybe I'll just like, hold on this point for a second. But like, when things happen asynchronously and online, all of a sudden they are governed in new ways by things like the AODA in Ontario, for example, right? By accessibility law, right? You cannot just throw a video up. That's interesting because you can just throw a lecture up. And people do it all the time, and they don't necessarily think about whether or how they could make it more accessible. So maybe that's like a point I'll just hold on because I think it's an important and powerful one. There's a little bit of an irony there that that maybe through some of the teaching we do that's mediated by technology, we are actually forced to think about accessibility more than we do in the classroom. And that's an irony that's worth holding. I also do think that there's an irony there in that things that disabled students have been asking for a very long time became kind of a matter of course. And that should highlight the fact that we can change and make teaching more accessible, but also that that has never been... that we've never properly listened to disabled students. They've never been the drivers of that, even though they can and should be.

Facilitator: Thank you so much, Jay.

Farreira: Mhmm. Yeah absolutely. I agree with all of that. I would say one of the issues, then, still, is that some of those possibilities are being taken away at this point with an emphasis – reemphasis – on in person. And so, I see that with... happening with colleagues, disabled colleagues, and also with disabled students. The opportunities for them to learn online or to have access to accessible learning materials is, although it's been strengthened in many ways to the pandemic, it's starting to be taken away or attention has been moving on from that. I think that's a real concern that we need to really remind ourselves and our colleagues and administrators that this is really key and fundamental to our work in, in teaching, writing and across the university.

Yes, the technology has increased accessibility in many ways. As has already been laid out. But I would say that the... So sometimes the incorporation of technology adds cognitive load. It requires, if you're incorporating into your classrooms, it requires teaching students how to use it. It involves teaching problem solving and how to attend to complications that necessarily arise when we're learning... we're using learning technology. A lot of students are already stressed and anxious. That's what I've been finding in piloting different technologies in my classroom that I'm using to increase accessibility. Students are already stressed and anxious and really struggle to process when things don't work out really well. So that takes a lot of time. And so sometimes, like right now, we're halfway through the term or almost more than halfway through the term, and some students are still struggling to, you know, figure out certain technologies. So I think we need to consider that as well: that we are teaching how to use them and we're not just applying them in our classrooms. And that requires time on our part as well to understand how to use them. How to apply them and implement them in ways that are going to be inclusive and accessible.

And then, of course, you know, as you find out, you know, as you find out, if you're teaching with technology, not all students have access to the resources needed to use that technology. And so sometimes, you know, some technologies we might actually, just stop using because not all students can access those resources or have the tools they need to access that technology. I think it's really important for us to keep that in mind: the technology can create complications and not always create the most accessible situation for all students.

Facilitator: Yeah. Thank you so much. To both of you. So, with our next question, we're interested in what does accessibility mean to you? Maybe what does it look like? How do you practice it? How do you think about accessibility, whether it's in the writing classroom, in writing centres.. But also we've had quite a few librarians with us over the workshop, so maybe in the library. But yeah, we're interested in general. What is this? What does accessibility mean to you? What does it look like?

Dolmage: I can give it a go here. I mean, I'm trained as a rhetorician and accessibility is one of those terms that's had a lot of its meaning vacuumed out. I think there would be a wide range of ways to answer this question. To me, I think, like, accessibility on its own

doesn't really mean very much because it can mean most of the time something very minimal. And I use examples of this all the time, but, you know, walk around your campus and notice how many of the accessibility, sort of, measures and even we might think of them as investments, don't match up. So how many times there's a push button door that leads to another door that doesn't have a push button. You know, that's the kind of thing that happens over and over again, right? So and it's... So, disability plus accessibility means something to me, right? But increasingly, that's meant something that is focused on disability rights rather than disability justice: it's focused on a legalistic model of disability, right? Where we need to... That is minimal. That has a ceiling. But also that has a series of costs.

So I think of accessibility as a commitment to the ongoing examination of what we do as teachers and learners. But it doesn't very often manifest as that. So it's not actually a term that I use that much. So, you know, even just like, why do we say Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)? You know, access means a lot more. It's also one of those terms on university campuses that has been co-opted by accessibility services, and I have nothing against... we have to work with accessibility services. We need to do this, but that has again really kind of created a very pretty narrow corridor for what we think about as what we might call like inclusion, right? Or disability justice, or, you know, other terms that are also having their meaning vacuumed out, like belonging. Universities are incredibly efficient at checklistifying things like this and bringing us up to a kind of very minimal approach and sucking out a lot of the history of the terminology and a lot of the activism of the terminology and a lot of the action that we might take now. So I think in my own classroom, I see access as a collective responsibility. And that that we have a role in the classroom to understand the access that we need, but also to create access for others and that's to come to through whatever arrangement we have in the classroom, new understandings of what access means. I can be more tangible about that, but I don't wanna talk too much.

I think my quick answer is, you know it doesn't mean very much. It doesn't have much purchase. To most people, it means one line on your syllabus that refers people actually out of your classroom. And I'll go a step further that referring the student out of your classroom, it reassures folks that they don't have to change anything in fact. It reassures the university that it can continue doing things the ways that it always has done things, and that there will be small, minimal accommodations made for the very few students who even seek those accommodations – and the data on the number of students who actually even seek accessibility the way that we've circumscribed it is really alarming. Like 75% of the students at Waterloo, 75% of disabled students at Waterloo, will never disclose their disability to the university in any way, shape or form, and that holds true pretty much across Canadian universities. I don't wanna rant too much, but at the same time we have this giant industry of accommodation and accessibility. But it's focused on only one thing, and that's extended time on tests and exams.

And that situates us in a tricky spot in the writing classroom too. University of Victoria last year, 18,000 extended time on tests and exams accommodations. 18,000, right? University of Waterloo we're getting ready, in about a month and a half, to have somewhere in the neighborhood of 1300 timed exams happen within 11 days, including exams that go up till Saturday night at 10:00 PM. Right? Giant industry, and it's overwritten disability. If you go and look up disability on Google Scholar, disability plus higher education, it's all articles that are saying our timed test and exam accommodations fair? And there's no good research about anything else, and especially not about the things that we might do in a writing classroom where we don't give, generally, we don't give time tests or exams. The problem there though, is like we imagine that something's being done. And it's... It doesn't apply to our classroom, so we can kind of pat one another on the back and be like, oh, doesn't apply to us, right? Well, then you have to say "what does apply to us?" What would accessibility actually mean for us when we're not part of the, like, massive – and when I say massive, I mean like overwhelmingly massive – discourse around accessibility on our campuses? We can sort of say, like, let that happen over there. We're somehow better teachers than them. But then, what are we actually doing?

Facilitator: Yeah. Thanks for that, Jay.

Ferreira: Yes, I'm 100% on all of that. I would say, yeah, if we... if you're forcing me to say what it means, it means, for me... accessibility is, yes, attending to, you know, the structural material aspects of the learning situation in my classroom, but also it's about teaching in a way, for me, fundamentally from the ground up as the classroom being a social learning space, and that we're all responsible for supporting one another's learning, and that we all are impacting one another's learning by what we bring to that classroom as well. And so, really, it's about attending to all of the differences that I bring, that the students bring to the learning situation in terms of background, lived experience, identity, disability, cultural background, race, etc. and to then, how this classroom space can bring people together in learning. And because my course topic, my writing topic is on disability, we... I explicitly talk about how I've designed the course. So making all those things visible to the course, to the students, and opening the space up for them to also talk about what's accessible or inclusive for them and isn't in the classroom space. And so, not relying on disability or medical accommodations because of all of those, the research that's been done on students not accessing those resources and accommodations – and to be honest, yeah, we don't give tests, so it's a totally different kind of accommodation space that's required. So, applying principles and approaches that do not require students to have to get accommodations, which, you know, creates... It's putting the onus on the instructors. Because the accessibility centres with as much as they try to do, it's not... it's not meeting actually the teaching situations that we're in. So for me it really is about that environment, the learning environment that I'm creating, and the openness around how the course is being taught, and also all of the barriers that students and I experience in creating accessible learning situations for them.

And also addressing... For me, it means addressing absences in the classroom. And those who have been marginalized or excluded from writing classrooms. So. Particularly this term, I'm more intentionally, even more, integrating assignments on writing and power and ethics in order to address all of these barriers the students themselves probably experienced in entering the writing classroom and the anxieties they have about writing and the ways it's being used to assess them and the ways it's being used to monitor their participation at the university and their belonging at the university. So, attending to all of that in my classes as well and opening that space up for them. But that's all I can do in my classroom, right? And advocating as much as possible in terms of making accessibility something that actually meets the needs of students. Well, you can do your best with that, but there's all kinds of administrative and structural issues there.

Facilitator: Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. I agree with everything both of you have said. I tend to approach accessibility more broadly. So, access or barriers to access can look like many different things, right? It's not... I think you're right, Jay, it gets... The focus tends to be on like timed tests or making sure you have captions for videos, and if you do that, you're accessible. When in reality, barriers... there are many other kinds of barriers that you may need to address. And I just had a follow up, because I... You mentioned Laila, like, we have to maybe do this kind of work thinking about what are the barriers and how can we address those barriers for our students. I'm curious if either of you have thoughts on the kinds of support that we can provide to instructors to make access a part of... a stronger part of the course, the focus of the course, anything that you've done or are in the process of doing to provide that kind of support?

Dolmage: I think it's so... It's super big picture. So like, I think there's so much we can do. Maybe the most, maybe the most useful thing I can say is that we actually have to be willing to rethink everything. Like we have to be willing to rethink what we think writing is. The two biggest things for me, and they're maybe not that big, but they are things that we just don't think about very much. The first is that I've completely rethought what attendance and participation mean. And that's following from people like Melanie Yurgo and Margaret Price and others. But it took me a really long time to let go of what I thought attendance and participation meant and their value. And some of it is ego stuff, right? Because we do have smaller classes. Our classes in general, I think I'm not overly generalizing when I say this, but at Canadian institutions, our writing classes are smaller – maybe they should be smaller still, but they're some of the smallest classes the student will take. We're very likely... We'll know all of our students' names. They'll all know one another's names and that will be unique for them, especially in their first year of university. And again, we do some patting on the back with that, even though that does make the job of connection much clearer for us. And some of the things we can do in terms of individualizing our instruction a lot easier.

But the other biggest piece for me is like actually assessing way less. I really fear that we... Again, like when you really look at the research, there's way too much research on assessment. And that's not what I want to be. It's not what I want to. I actually like to loop

all the way back to some concerns people might have with AI. We would have way, way less concern with AI if we hadn't constructed our identity way, way too much around assessment. Because assessment comes along with a bunch of other things that I didn't sign on for, nor do I have as values. Right? Around like fairness and you know those sorts of... I'm not saying I don't want to be fair. I'm just not obsessed with that. Like, and I don't actually even want to think about it too much in the classroom. An assessment forces me to be thinking about that all the time.

So like just as an example, you know we have these ideas that students have to do a certain amount of writing. And I think they're really misguided. I think students should have less assignments – that we assess much less than we do, right? And that would actually give them time to engage in things like revision in substantive ways – and they don't have that time because they're... in a 12-week term they're submitting sometimes 3 or 4 essays.

So I think like two big pieces for me are around assigning less work that needs to be assessed. And I'm not... Let's not joke about that. Like assigning one less major essay that frees up like 45 hours of my life, right? And that allows me to engage with the other things that I wanna do. We have an academic culture where we're asked to do more and more and more. And I think one of the best things we can do, if we're going to add some more things, like hearing more about accessibility or teaching students more about technology, like Dr. Ferreira was saying, we can only really do that if we take some things out. And I think there are big things we can take. It sounds trite, but my thinking is assess less so that I can connect with students more. And that for me has been taking out major assignments, taking out major assessments, and really rethinking what I mean by participation and attendance.

Facilitator: Thank you. That's wonderful

Ferreira: Yeah, I would build off of that to talk about, you know, what we mean by engagement as well. What is it to be engaged and to reassess that for ourselves? And I think it does come down to a bit of ego too and needing some kind of particular way of engaging that maybe we engaged in students or whatever we're expecting, is to really rethink that and offer other opportunities for students to engage, to show their engagement and material.

I know in our program we scaffold the assignments and so... One thing I would like to say, one, I think we need to be... across the university there needs to be more focus on teaching of writing in all units. Because we can do this work in our writing classroom, but then they go on to their third-year course in engineering and the engineering instructors are like, well, why don't they know how to paraphrase in engineering, right? And it's like, well, actually there needs to be more of a mindset around we're all teaching students how to write within our field. So I think that is one key to making writing more accessible to students.

I can't remember what the original question was, but I'm just going on with what I was going to say. Yes. And then we scaffold assignments. So they do regular writing practice, but it's that each assignment is leading into the next assignment. So, for them, it makes sense that they're doing this assignment – this like say annotated bibliography – that is going to go towards this next iteration of the annotated bibliography with the proposal that then goes towards... right? So, it's all building on one another, so that allows more time and space for feedback, for peer review, for reflection on the writing. So it's even just... For us, like in terms of our curriculum, that's how we've designed it, so that creates a situation where students are able to be developing strategies on how to learn and how to write, and it feels meaningful because these are assignments that are building towards a final project. So that's one way in which we have sort of, just from our program, developed these strategies for students to make the writing more accessible.

And also they don't... The thing is that I think people assume students should know how to do certain things in terms of writing. And I don't think... I think that's... We should not be doing that, and that we should assume we need to teach students, how to engage in writing at university in meaningful ways, because they're not familiar with this different context that we're in. And so we need to be teaching them, and I think that needs to be integrated more fully across the university, to be honest, to make it fully accessible. And if we're talking about accessibility to students in all of their programs. And it should just be relying on the first-year writing course to do that.

Facilitator: Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, I agree. I hear from students, often, that things aren't articulated in their upper-level courses when it comes to like what the expectations around writing are until they receive that grade and that feedback that oh, you didn't do this thing that you should have known that you were supposed to do in this very specific way. Yes, great. Good things to think about. Thank you.

Okay. So our last question, I think we've kind of talked about some of this already. So please feel free to speak to it, but also add you know any other thoughts you have around these topics of technology and access. But the question is does technology or a lack of technology further systemic oppression in writing classrooms? Yeah, I'll just leave it there and get your thoughts on that.

Dolmage: I mean no and yes. For sure. Both. There's another... Like I know I already isolated a couple of ironies, but there's another irony for me that gets all the way back to the AI thing – and this was already said by Doctor Ferreira – but a lot of... So there's a particular kind of rhetorical pattern that we see happens, and it is an anti-student pattern. When there's a new technology, it gets used to construct students in a very ungenerous way. And I just see that overlapping with the ways that disabled students have always been constructed through a series of different discourses, right? The combinations process, which they've had no hand in shaping really, has at the same time overwritten disabled students all as potential cheaters. All as potentially faking it, right? And it's terrible. But I also see this happening with AI, right? And that's not to say I don't also understand a lot of

the other under the water iceberg issues with AI. But just on the surface, I'm already seeing a mythology created that all students are cheating, right? And we know... We see individual faculty do this. We see the media do this, right, and in the ways that they talk about university students. But our colleagues, some of them, the general public is very quick to want to construct university students as getting something they don't deserve or manipulating a system. And AI... With technology that happens and around issues of disability that happens. And I'm just putting my thumb on that similarity. At least we can get together in knowing how to navigate or being frustrated at continually having to navigate that dynamic.

But on the other hand, I see, particularly, students, staff and faculty with disabilities, introducing new technological tools that I use in my teaching all the time, that absolutely do increase access, and they probably increase access for all students. You know, that's the electronic curb-cut effect. And it's real. You know, I can think of real, tangible examples of individual students who have helped do this and more generally, over time, practices that now are just very common to how we teach, that originally might have been kind of constructed as ways to increase access for disabled students. Yeah, that's my "no" and my "yes," I guess? I... yeah. Those are just my initial thoughts about that, but I could probably go "no" a whole... I could probably "yes," a whole lane. You know, a few different pathways through either one.

Facilitator: Thank you.

Ferreira: Yes, maybe I'll go into some of the weeds a little bit in terms of how technology itself is designed. So something like AI, we really need to be engaging with it. We just can't avoid it. But the AI is designed itself to perpetuate systemic oppression. So that's something you have to attend to for a long time, try to figure out as you're using it, as your teaching with it, as you're helping students to learn how to use it in ways that are ethical, and adhere to copyright and adhere to university privacy policies. And the technology itself, the design is... perpetuates systemic oppression. So I think you need... we need to think about the kinds of technology we're bringing into our classrooms, and we need... and to continuously talk about with our students as well who are going to grow up to be future designers and working in these areas about how we need more diversity in terms of who is designing these technologies, who is advising on these technologies, who is... who are included in... from the ground up in terms of creating these technologies? And so my concern is the systemic oppressions that are perpetuated through the technology itself and the way it's designed. And I think many of us have probably come across ways in which when we're incorporating technology into our classrooms to ensure accessibility, we come up against design features and we can tell the person who's designing this either is not a teacher or is somebody who is not disabled or is not somebody who needs that technology. And so I think we need to be really careful about that when we're incorporating these technologies.

Facilitator: Thank you so much. So with that, we do... We have a few minutes if either of our speakers would like to say anything around this topic that you didn't get a chance to talk to through these questions or any last words you might have. There's space for that. Oh, and I see Sarah's hand.

Dr. Sara Humphreys (Principal Investigator): Yeah. It's me. I just wanted to first of all say amazing discussion, but also maybe Jason, were you thinking of opening up maybe a few questions if Leila and Jay have a little bit of time? I think there's a lot of really great comments in the chat where we could expand a bit. And the reason I'm saying this is, I'm greedy for data. So all of this is going to be synthesized and put into – and shared – and put into a 40-page report that goes to SSHRC, the Human Genome Project – those are our funders – and then also shared widely across Canada. So, I just think anything else you want to say and then if anybody else has any questions, would that be okay with our, with our wonderful, wonderful interviewees? And thanks, Jason. Thanks for the additions. Thank you so much.

Ferreira: Can I just jump in quickly? I wanted to respond to Julia's comment about the students being critical of GenAI, and that's what I find as well. They have so many questions. Again, people seem to think that the students, university students, are very wily, and they know all about the technology and they know how to use it, and they know exactly how to get it to do what... And this couldn't be further from the case. The students have so many questions, so many concerns. And in everything that we've been doing in the... in terms of the activities trying it to like, does it help with our reading? Does it foster our, you know, note taking? They have been finding that it creates so much time to do those things, and it doesn't do it very well for what we're asking them to do in our classrooms. And so they're kind of realizing, well, my own thinking is actually better because I am thinking in relation to this particular classroom. And I just think we need to be more open with the students about it and generous with them, and not just assume that they are avid users of this technology because they have lots of concerns and criticisms as well.

Facilitator: Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, I... Recently in writing classes, we begin the semester with a discussion of AI. Like, what is? What is its usefulness? And maybe why wouldn't you want to use it? And I just leave that question there. And students have a lot – when you ask them why might you not want to use AI? – they have a lot to say about that. It's... It can get pretty interesting. I agree. I think they are much more critical of AI than the larger, you know, fear conversation around AI allows for.

Sarah, did you? I haven't been able to keep track of the chat. Was there another question that you saw in there that you thought might...?

Humphreys: Yeah, let's see. There's a whole pile of things. So let's... And if somebody doesn't want to open their mic or anything, they can also pop in the chat. There's some discussion about grad studies – that students don't know how to write theses, and you know how to write the dissertation. That it's all a mystery, and that this idea of... or the idea around writing being... it seems like being gated, or students being sectioned off if they

don't know how then that's a comment somehow on their intelligence, which is weird. And then let me see, discussion about Sara Ahmed's work and thinking about why we're asking people to write in the first place. Like, why are we doing this in the first place? I don't know if anybody wanted to comment on some of these really great and big, big questions?

Facilitator: Yeah, I like that last one. Why are we asking students to write? If you happen...

Ferreira: I'm not going... I mean, I have so many things to say about why we have them, write. But that's one of the things that we are having the student with the AI project is having one of the activities is having students think about why the heck they write, you know. So why do you write? What is writing for? And really taking it back to writing as community building and relationship building. So that seems to be a lot of what it comes back to you so far is, if we're not talking about it with students, it's communicating, sharing information, creating relationships and creating community. And you... AI can't do that, so... You know, kind of thinking about... And they also if you ask them what, yeah, what can you use AI for and what you can't, they have clear ideas around that in terms of what it's doing for the writer and the reader. And the AI cannot do those things. It can perform the function and create this kind of piece of writing. But it's not doing the things that writing actually is doing for us. You know, here, as scholars, but more generally in terms of our writing and communication, more broadly. So those are kind of questions that students come up with.

Dolmage: And I agree with all those things. I think there's probably a lot. I also, you know, I'm not like an expressivist, but I really believe that composing is a heuristic for a certain type of thinking that is really valuable and important. Students are engaged in all kinds of different intellectual labor and they come... they learn how they learn. And they also learn how the accommodations they need to learn and the pathways they need to learn. And they are constantly pushing at those – and writing is one of those ones that's a real pusher, right? It is... It's very... It's even hard work.

During the lockdown, right in that lockdown period, a lot of us, actually for some of the first time like, living in very close proximity. And I think will disavow you, disavow you of your expertise in writing then seeing how other people actually engage and how different it is. Either way, you get the sense for the richness and complexity. And I think the value.

But I think AI is going to... It's going to surface a whole bad kind of teaching. It's going to surface a whole lot of ways. Engage in that way. We need to understand and value the writing that is more difficult, the writing is more student also writing more because. May not be done. I think sometimes we keep on reading. Uh. And that's a big, huge shift.

And then reading how does how does that?

[At this point, the transcription AI could not retrieve approx. 10-12 seconds of audio – in particular, an insight from Dr. Ferreira was lost.]

Humphreys: *Institution. So it becomes really it becomes a factor de. But I think that when hearing here, so it's making me feel seen in the sense....*

Just a discussion [in the chat]. A hot discussion you're reading, but grading is partition and it doesn't help students very much. And Natalie talking about [a pilot] where there was no limit on [submission in] this class, so students would just keep submitting [assignments] until they reached a grade an, A or a B – I'm not sure. The administrator was program because it didn't need. Do so. Requirements for assessment. I'll stop there. Thank you. So much.

Facilitator: Because they get that really lovely grading curve that they demand and think that, like, universities aren't working if we don't have that, right? It's not possible we could become better teachers and that all students could be included... that our courses could be accessible, and yeah. Yeah.

Ferreira: I guess I wanted to just say one more thing. I did see about the teaching them to read. I just would clarify, for me, it's about fostering students' understanding and awareness of their own reading and how... their own practices of reading, right? And how they can mobilize them in order to engage in a writing classroom. And sometimes they need some guidance and support and strategies to do that. But in terms of grading, I mean, yeah, *I would just love to get a grade.*² There's just no way that's going to happen right for us. But what we have been doing, a lot of people in our unit are using, is [...] integrated more fully. In my own writing classroom. Students so far are really taking it up. It seemed to be. There are challenges with it for sure. But you know, building on Asao Inoue's work and also colleagues Lou Maraj, Alexis McGee, and Stephen Dadugblor, who have been working in this area in our unit. And that way the focus is more on my giving them feedback instead of on did they meet these particular standards of writing that perpetuate, you know, white supremacist, colonialist approaches. I do still... I've integrated it... I've adopted it a little bit, so I do still have a sort of quality assessment component that I haven't been able to fully get rid of for my own course. But, it... Engaging in those kinds of approaches to assessment have helped to release, for the students, to alleviate the pressures in terms of what an A paper means in terms of their intelligence and their ability to adhere to norms of language. Because so many students come into my classrooms and say they don't know how to write. So it helps to alleviate those kinds of anxieties and pressures on the students. And yes, Lou was... participated in, I think, one of the workshops for this project.

Dolmage: Yeah. And I think I would just add, I think we can take a kind of harm reduction approach to grading, right? I think we can grade less, we can assess differently, right. We can remove some of the high stakes around grading. We can think carefully around, like, what is the labour that's involved in the credit hour? And I just don't think we think about that at all. And I think there's actually been a huge amount of inflation in what a credit hour is, right? But also, that we're adding stakes onto grading that we don't need to. We don't even think very carefully around like the timing of assessment. Most of the assessment that happens on a university campus happens two times a term. Right? And so, we're

loading all of the stress – and we have a mental health crisis on our campuses – we're loading all those, all that stress into, you know, two very small windows. Like I said, we're about to do however many... 1200 exams within 11 days, right? Up to Saturday nights at 10:00 PM. So, we actually, like... There's certain things we don't... we know we don't have flexibility around, but then there are certain things we do have flexibility around and yet we don't use it. And so, to me like, it's you know... Cate Denial talks about like "plus one thinking." Like do one thing, a term, right? And let those things compound and experiment with them. But I also think like subtract one thing. Like, take out one assessment, right? Or convert... you know, we did this in one giant class here at Waterloo, but like, we just started giving full marks for anybody who fully engaged in peer review instead of any marks at all for the essay itself, for one, assignment. Right? And like, why not right? We value peer review, right? But students were doing the kind of dramaturgy of peer review instead of engaging with it. Because they knew the real deal was going to come later when they were going to be assessed by their teacher. So anyway... Just it's little things like. It doesn't have to be a revolution, but we can have a kind of harm reduction approach and a term by term add one, subtract one thinking.

Ferreira: Can I just say one more thing, Jason?

Facilitator: Yeah, absolutely.

Ferreira: I just was to call attention to the work that's required on the part of faculty. I also want to call attention to contingent faculty, contract faculty, and the specific challenges and the limitations that are placed on them in terms of the ways that people want to do this work and they... their contracts are only for a certain amount of time, or they're overloaded with teaching and they do not have time for professional development. I really want to call attention to that. I'm speaking for myself. I was for a long time a contingent faculty. Contract faculty. Now I am assistant professor of teaching, and I have way more resources to do this work. And I think we have to acknowledge that this is happening, and we can talk about this all we want, but until the universities are hiring in ways that are accessible for our faculty, the people teaching the students, this work cannot get done in the way that it needs to be done.

Facilitator: Yeah, I agree. So our last workshop actually focused on this quite a bit: working conditions and contingent working conditions. And here at UVic, our contingent faculty, curricular development is not something they're paid to do. So not only do they likely you know... they might be overloaded, but like that's not even part of their job. Which means that it falls onto, like, the course coordinator to ensure that everyone is able to... has the resources is able to engage in accessible learning, and all of these different kinds of assessment and instruction practices we've been talking about. Which you know, that's the course coordinator's job, but... Yeah. There's still there's a tension there that we need to engage in these courses in increasingly, and we use word complex but *fluid* ways. And for some contingent faculty like that's.... there's definitely a tension there.

Alright. So I think we're getting close to time. So if either of you have like a last word. Great. But there's no pressure to, like, have that last word.

Dolmage: I'm good. I think people are me talk enough.

Ferreira: The only thing I didn't locate myself and I just wanted to acknowledge that I'm here attending this meeting on the territory's ancestral and unseeded of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples.

Humphreys: I just before we... Sorry before we close the recording, I just wanted to let our interviewees know something. I'm going to jump in and interrupt Jason and be rude. But your interviews will be... You know we've recorded them. We will be providing the audio and a transcript, and depending on the permissions given, these will be going up on our Open Access site, which will be available in January for everyone to learn from. But we will be taking from these interviews and the chat and the upcoming discussion, and this will add to that 40-page report which we will share with you a draft of, so that you can have a chance to take a look what we've said and add anything else or take away, or let us know if we've done something to misrepresent you in any way. Just thank you so much. Okay. Jason, over to you.

Facilitator: Thanks, Sara. And thank you so much to both of our speakers today.