

Beyond the Assistant: Rethinking AI's Role in Creative Media Workflows

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Pitch

This round table asks a straightforward question: when students start using AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude as regular parts of their creative process, not as a one-off shortcut, but as something they return to again and again during drafting, editing, and revision, what actually happens to how they learn, who gets credit, and what kind of work is made?

This is not a question about the educational or pedagogical value of AI tools. It is a question about power, labor, and design. When students work with AI tools, the tools are shaping the text. It makes choices about tone, structure, and language and redistributes the work of writing in ways that most classrooms haven't caught up to yet. This round table interrogates that dynamic.

The session draws on two previous classroom projects, one in an introductory studio course (CRE125) and one in an upper-level portfolio course (CRE350), both run in Fall 2025, in which students were asked to use AI tools at multiple stages of their creative work. Crucially, that use was paired with structured reflection, peer discussion, and critical readings (including Neil Postman's *Technopoly*) designed to examine the structural consequences of these tools, not merely their instrumental value. Students were also asked to research and articulate informed positions of critical resistance, examining the environmental costs of AI infrastructures, the labor practices behind training data, and alternative methods that preserve creative agency.

The round table invites participants to examine this together: how does embedding AI in creative workflows change the relationships between students, teachers, institutions, and the tools themselves? How do we design for learning that keeps people, not platforms, in charge? And how do we build assignments that give students the tools to express genuine critical resistance, not just performative skepticism?

Why This Matters Now

Critical pedagogy insists that learning is fundamentally relational, shaped through connections between people, and tools, and between individuals and institutions. This insight, rooted in Paulo Freire's understanding of education as dialogue rather than transmission, becomes urgent when AI tools begin to occupy positions traditionally held by teachers, peers, and mentors. If learning emerges through relationships, then who, or what, is in relationship matters.

Generative AI does not function as a passive tool. It actively participates in the work. When a student asks an AI to critique a draft, revise a paragraph, or suggest a structure, the AI is performing creative labor. That labor remains invisible in most academic settings, it does not appear in citations, it is not assessed, and most institutions lack

frameworks to account for it. The result is a widening gap between students' actual practices and educators' understandings of those practices.

In creative media programs, this gap is especially visible. Students already navigate questions about originality, voice, and authorship that other disciplines may sidestep. Adding AI to that mix doesn't create new problems so much as it sharpens old ones: Where does assistance end and authorship begin? Who is responsible for the quality of the work? What happens to the skills students don't practice because the tool does the work for them?

This round table treats these not as compliance problems, not as "how do we catch cheaters", but as design problems. How do we build learning environments that are honest about what AI does, and that keep students as the primary agents of their own creative development?

Goals

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify concretely how AI tools function as active participants in creative workflows, not passive utilities.
- Examine how AI-assisted writing and editing reshape the dynamic between students, peers, educators, and institutions.
- Articulate what AI can genuinely support in iterative creative work, and where it creates real risks, including deskilling and reduced ownership.
- Foreground the ethical, environmental, and political stakes of AI infrastructures that classroom conversations may ignore.
- Express and articulate critical resistance to extractive AI models, understanding when and why to refuse certain uses, and how to make that refusal informed rather than reflexive.
- Develop assignments that ask students to research ethical and environmental concerns (carbon costs, data labor, surveillance economies) and build informed standpoints of resistance or identify alternative methods.
- Begin developing shared principles for responsible AI use that are grounded in actual practice, not abstract policy.
- Consider what institutions owe educators and students as AI becomes a standard part of creative work, including clearer policies and better support structures.

The emphasis here is on collective inquiry. This session is not designed to produce consensus or hand down guidelines. It's designed to help participants think more precisely and act more intentionally.

Expected Outcome

The main takeaway will be a set of emerging principles, developed collectively by participants, for designing creative learning experiences that include AI without surrendering to it.

They may inform departmental conversations about AI policy, instructional design decisions, or curricular revision. They are not prescriptive guidelines but rather generative starting points for ongoing institutional dialogue.

The objective is clarity and transparency: a shared understanding of how AI operates within creative workflows,

what pedagogical values are at stake, and how educators can exercise deliberate agency rather than responding reactively to technological change that outpaces institutional capacity.

How the Session Will Work

Opening (5–7 minutes) A brief, grounded overview of the classroom projects, what students were asked to do, how AI was integrated, what reflection looked like, and what surprised us (unexpected findings). Prioritizing concrete examples over abstract frameworks.

Small-Group Breakouts (10–12 minutes) Participants discuss in small groups, guided by these questions:

- How does AI show up in your own learning or teaching, and what does it actually change?
- When AI helps revise or critique a piece of work, where is the authorship? Where is the agency?
- What kinds of collaboration does AI make possible, and what kinds does it shut down?
- How do students talk about AI? What are they anxious about? What do they expect?
- How do you help students express critical resistance that's grounded in research rather than vague unease, understanding the environmental costs, labor exploitation, or surveillance built into these tools?
- What assignments have you used (or could you design) that ask students to research and develop an informed critical stance or identify alternative methods?
- How do the norms of your discipline shape what "responsible" AI use even looks like?

Collective Mapping (10 minutes) Groups contribute to a shared visual map built around four categories: **What AI makes possible** · **What AI puts at risk** · **What we still don't know** · **Principles we're starting to see**. This is the session's main generative artifact, something participants can take back and use.

Open Discussion (15–20 minutes) A facilitated conversation connecting what participants surfaced in breakouts to broader questions about ethics, sustainability, institutional responsibility, and what it means to design learning environments that respect both human creativity and the realities of AI.

Closing (5 minutes) A summary of key threads, an invitation to continue the conversation, and shared resources for further inquiry.

Rationale for This Audience

This roundtable addresses a core concern of networked learning scholarship: that learning is relational, distributed, and shaped by the tools and structures it happens within. AI doesn't change that principle, it intensifies it. When a creative workflow now includes an AI tool that drafts, edits, and critiques alongside a human student, the network of relationships that produces learning has fundamentally shifted. This session asks participants to examine and understand this shift well enough to design around it deliberately. This represents the critical, practice-based, collectively developed, sense-making that networked learning research has consistently pursued.