



## From Policy to Pedagogy: The Role of Academic Development in Supporting Educators' Ethical Decision-Making About Generative AI

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### Abstract

As generative AI (GenAI) tools increasingly influence higher education, instructors face urgent decisions about how to address these technologies in their teaching, often without institutional policies or clear guidance. This study examines how academic development can support educators in making ethical, pedagogically sound decisions about GenAI integration. Grounded in a practitioner inquiry framework, we analyse data from a workshop, *Communicating about Ethical AI Use with Learners*. Participants engaged in structured reflection, peer discussion, and syllabus policy drafting activities designed to surface values, clarify learning goals, and build confidence in communicating course-level GenAI expectations. Findings from participant-surveys (pre- and posttests) and workshop artifacts reveal that faculty overwhelmingly emphasize academic integrity in discussions of course AI policies, but also express concerns about equity, access, and student learning. Participants reported increased confidence in their ability to create and communicate GenAI policies after engaging in the workshop. We argue that academic development functions as ethical infrastructure, offering not only policy templates but also reflective space to support human-centred and context-sensitive decision-making. This article contributes a practice-informed model of GenAI ethics that can guide faculty developers and instructors in designing responsive learning environments. It offers insights for those seeking to foster ethical awareness, transparency, and pedagogical intentionality in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

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### Practitioner Notes

1. When determining AI policies, attend to values, learning outcomes, discipline, and institutional context.
2. Build guided reflection on AI ethics into course planning each term using prompts that surface values, risks, and trade-offs.
3. Write AI policies in clear, student-centred language and return to them throughout the term, inviting students into ongoing dialog on how they connect to shared values about learning.
4. Invite students into conversation about AI policies and how they relate to values around learning.
5. Share and peer-review draft AI policies with colleagues to improve clarity and build collective confidence around ethical GenAI use. Eaton's Repository of Syllabus Policies and Pepperdine's "Generative AI Syllabus Statement Tool"

### Keywords

artificial intelligence, academic development, policy, ethical decision-making, higher education

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## Introduction

Instructors across higher education are navigating a rapidly shifting technological landscape, where the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools demands an immediate pedagogical response. Yet, institutional policy has not kept pace, leaving faculty to independently determine whether and how to incorporate these tools into their courses. In the absence of clear guidelines, many instructors turn to the syllabus as the primary site for communicating expectations around GenAI use. These policies often mirror traditional academic honesty statements, focused narrowly on preventing plagiarism or cheating. While conversations in the classroom may include deeper ethical motivations such as fairness, accessibility, and support for diverse learners, these values are rarely reflected in the written policy itself. This gap raises questions about how faculty can be supported not only in crafting policies, but in engaging more thoughtfully with the ethical dimensions of technology in teaching.

Although centres for teaching and learning (CTLs) are widely recognized as key sites for supporting instructional change, they typically operate within institutional boundaries. Even within state systems, CTLs rarely coordinate their efforts in a sustained, structured way. As a result, institutions often duplicate work, reinvent resources, and respond to GenAI through ad hoc workshops or compliance-oriented policies rather than through shared inquiry and collective learning. This siloed approach limits the ability of institutions to learn from diverse contexts, pool expertise, and develop scalable, ethical responses to technological disruption. At the same time, it constrains the potential of educational developers to act as leaders who bridge faculty experience, student needs, and institutional priorities.

In response to this challenge, a group of educational developers working across the state of Virginia leveraged an existing cross-institutional CTL network to design a statewide professional learning workshop focused on AI course policy development and communication. The workshop was grounded in insights generated through earlier phases of a collaborative, inquiry-first initiative in which faculty, staff, and graduate students from multiple institutions studied the pedagogical impacts of GenAI. Rather than beginning with policy mandates or standardized trainings, this broader initiative foregrounded educators' questions, local contexts, and ethical concerns, and its findings informed the design of practical resources and professional learning experiences. The workshop examined in this study, *Communicating about Ethical AI Use with Learners*, represents one key translation of that collaborative research into practice: a structured opportunity for instructors to foster ethical awareness and decision-making through collaborative reflection.

This study examines the impacts of this workshop, guided by three interrelated research questions. First, *how, if at all, do instructors' ratings of their understanding of the risks and benefits of AI in education shift after engaging in the workshop?* This question responds to the widespread assumption that professional learning increases educators' conceptual clarity about GenAI, while recognizing that such shifts cannot be taken for granted. Second, *what ethical considerations do instructors feel are most important when developing AI-related course policies?* This question foregrounds the values and dilemmas that shape policy decisions in real instructional contexts, rather than treating ethics as an abstract or uniform construct. Third, *how confident are instructors in their ability to develop and communicate their AI course policy before and after engaging in the workshop?* This question is warranted because instructors are increasingly expected to articulate clear, defensible AI policies to students and colleagues, yet often lack structured support for doing

so. The overarching goal of this research project is to better understand the potential of faculty development programs to support instructors in making informed, ethical, and pedagogically sound decisions about AI in their teaching.

We begin with a literature review that synthesizes research on academic development, institutional culture, cross-institutional collaboration, and ethical dimensions of GenAI in higher education. We then describe the design and implementation of our workshop, situating it within our research methods. Next, we present findings from workshop pre/post surveys and in-session polls. We conclude with a discussion organized around Practical Implications, Theoretical Implications, and Future Research and Limitations. Overall, the article makes three key contributions. Conceptually, it reframes academic development as ethical infrastructure for navigating technological disruption, positioning CTLs as stewards of collective reasoning rather than merely providers of professional development. Empirically, it provides evidence of the efficacy of a workshop designed to facilitate ethical awareness and decision-making in relation to the development of course AI policies. Practically, it offers a replicable, transferable model for practitioners seeking to offer similar programming.

## **Literature**

### **Role of Academic Development**

Academic development has long been defined as a set of practices that strengthen teaching effectiveness and enhance student learning outcomes (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Wright et al., 2018). The field has emphasized two main priorities: helping individual faculty develop effective teaching strategies and advancing institutional or disciplinary approaches to pedagogy through collaborative planning and inquiry (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012). In technology-rich contexts, these aims are strengthened when faculty development creates opportunities for reflective dialogue, peer exchange, and collaborative sensemaking rather than relying solely on top-down training or technical demonstration (Sullivan et al., 2019). These dual aims of supporting the individual and shaping institutional culture remain crucial as higher education grapples with the pedagogical change brought about by GenAI. Recent scholarship argues that AI research and practice in higher education must be pedagogically grounded, ethically aware, and theoretically informed rather than driven primarily by tool-centred or techno-solutionist agendas (Fitzgerald et al., 2025)

Academic development contributes directly to student success by improving both faculty practice and institutional cultures of teaching (Condon et al., 2016; Hativa & Goodyear, 2002; Kuh et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Importantly, effective development is responsive to faculty needs (Behar-Horenstein et al., 2014; Cook & Meizlish, 2011; Sorcinelli et al., 2005). In the context of GenAI, responsiveness means engaging instructors' concerns about academic integrity, bias, student learning, and disciplinary norms, and then equipping them with strategies to help students navigate these same challenges. Development that centres faculty and student decision-making therefore extends beyond improving teaching practice; it prepares educators to model ethical reasoning in rapidly changing digital environments.

### **Principles and Context**

Key principles of academic development, such as focusing on student learning, providing sustained and collaborative opportunities, and grounding development in inquiry, are especially

relevant when institutions grapple with AI ethics. These principles are especially important because educators do not approach GenAI from a single shared stance; rather, their responses often range from resistance to cautious experimentation to strategic adoption, with many holding ambivalent or mixed positions shaped by context and perceived risks to learning (James et al., 2025). This variation further underscores the need for development that is dialogic and responsive rather than prescriptive.

At the same time, context shapes what is possible, and heavy teaching loads, research expectations, or limited institutional support for contingent faculty can undermine faculty bandwidth to engage in teaching-focused professional development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hutchings et al., 2011; Kuh, 2008), even when the topic is highly relevant. Research shows that high-performing institutions succeed by aligning policy and culture with a shared commitment to student success (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). In the GenAI context, this means coupling institutional policies on data privacy, academic integrity, and equity with faculty development that helps instructors translate policies into ethical classroom practices.

Development around AI ethics benefits from opportunities that span from informal peer exchanges where instructors surface concerns to group workshops that test policy ideas, and formal programming that anchors ethical use in institutional priorities. Technology-enhanced faculty development can also expand access to timely, scalable, and collaborative professional learning, particularly when institutions are responding to emerging pedagogical disruptions (Yilmaz et al., 2020). Academic developers are uniquely positioned to create learning environments in which faculty can critically examine GenAI, model ethical reasoning for students, and build institutional cultures that treat responsible GenAI use as central to teaching and learning. These responsibilities become particularly complex in the context of generative AI, where questions about pedagogy, academic integrity, equity, and technological change intersect.

## **Ethics and AI**

The rapid expansion of generative AI in education has surfaced a constellation of ethical considerations, including academic integrity, equity and bias, privacy and data security, transparency, accessibility, and over-reliance or loss of student agency (Holmes et al., 2022; Luckin et al., 2022; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). Integrity has dominated early policy responses, with studies showing that most institutional guidance centres on authorship, disclosure, and redesigning assessments to prevent misuse (Kofinas et al., 2025; Luo, 2024). Recent work on academic integrity similarly argues that the ethical significance of AI use does not lie in the mere presence of the tool, but in whether its use is transparent, policy-aligned, and pedagogically appropriate in context (Perkins, 2023). Systematic reviews confirm that integrity concerns remain at the forefront, though detection-based solutions are widely critiqued as ineffective or inequitable (Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025; Perkins, 2023). At the same time, equity and bias issues are increasingly visible. Scholars have documented how bias in AI systems can reproduce structural inequalities in higher education, raising concerns about fairness across different student groups and disciplines (Barnes & Hutson, 2024; García-López & Trujillo-Liñán, 2025). Rather than discrete technical problems, these concerns represent overlapping value tensions embedded in teaching practice: trust and accountability, efficiency and equity, innovation and responsibility, and automation and student agency (Dollinger & Nieminen, 2026; Rudolph et al., 2024).

Decisions about whether, how, and under what conditions to integrate GenAI tools require instructors to interpret ambiguous institutional guidance, weigh disciplinary norms, and anticipate consequences for diverse student populations (Perkins et al., 2024; Selwyn et al., 2020). Practical frameworks such as the AI Assessment Scale likewise emphasize that AI-related decisions should be calibrated to learning outcomes and assessment purposes rather than reduced to blanket permission or prohibition (Perkins et al., 2024). Ethical dilemmas emerge not only from student use but also from institutional tool adoption, vendor influence, and broader systems of knowledge production shaped by commercial and geopolitical forces (Nguyen & Perkins, 2026; Rudolph et al., 2024). Questions of authorship, attribution, and responsibility further complicate the landscape, as GenAI destabilises familiar cues used to infer human contribution and scholarly accountability and shifts emphasis from detection toward transparency, disclosure, and legible responsibility (Crawford et al., 2026). In this context, ethical practice becomes less about compliance and more about context-sensitive professional judgment.

If AI ethics is fundamentally a matter of professional judgment, then institutions require more than policy templates; they require structures that cultivate reflective, values-informed decision-making. Faculty must deliberate competing goals, articulate pedagogical commitments, and translate institutional expectations into coherent course-level policies (Perkins et al., 2024). Academic development, therefore, can be understood as ethical infrastructure: relational and pedagogical structures that enable collective inquiry, structured reflection, and iterative policy experimentation in response to emerging technologies. These tensions highlight the need for structured approaches that support educators in navigating ethical uncertainty in practice.

### **Ethical Decision-Making and the Role of Academic Developers**

Academic developers are uniquely positioned to support faculty in navigating the ethical complexities of integrating AI into teaching. While Centres for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) may not claim technical expertise in AI itself, they bring expertise in facilitating reflection, asking critical questions, and guiding inquiry-based professional learning (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Wright et al., 2018). This positioning allows CTLs to respond quickly to emerging technologies by creating spaces where faculty can collaboratively interrogate ethical dilemmas rather than waiting for definitive answers. This need is especially pressing given that recent reviews of large language models in education identify intertwined practical and ethical challenges—including bias, over-reliance, transparency, fairness, and uncertainty about appropriate pedagogical use—that cannot be resolved through technical guidance alone (Yan et al., 2024). Faculty must weigh these issues in their own disciplinary and institutional contexts, develop policies that reflect their judgments, and clearly communicate those policies to students (Selwyn et al., 2020). This decision-making is complicated by instructors' dual role as professionals with workforce and discipline expectations and norms, teachers with individual teaching philosophies, and institutional actors accountable to departmental norms, institutional policies, and accreditation requirements (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Steinert et al., 2016). As a result, faculty often face competing obligations and must interpret ambiguous guidance from both their institutions and the broader higher education landscape. Academic developers help faculty surface these tensions, consider their implications, and articulate policies that balance professional autonomy with institutional responsibility (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Sorcinelli et al., 2017).

While prior research highlights how academic developers enhance teaching effectiveness and support technology integration, less attention has been paid to how they can scaffold instructors' and students' ethical decision-making as they interpret and translate emerging technologies such as generative AI into course-level policy and practice. This gap matters because meaningful AI work in higher education must move beyond short-term functionality and efficiency narratives to engage questions of power, trust, sustainability, educator agency, and long-term pedagogical consequence (Fitzgerald et al., 2025). To address this gap, we structured our professional development activities around inquiry, dialogue, and policy exploration, positioning faculty as both learners and co-creators of ethical guidelines for GenAI use.

To guide this inquiry into ethical decision-making, we drew on Mitchell and Yordy's (2010) COVER model, which provides a structured framework for considering Codes, Outcomes, Values, External perceptions, and Rules. Originally developed for use in organizational and leadership contexts, the model highlights the importance of weighing both internal commitments (such as professional codes of conduct and personal values) and external factors (such as anticipated outcomes and how actions will be perceived by others). In educational settings, COVER offers a practical heuristic for guiding decision-making when individuals face complex or ambiguous circumstances. The model's emphasis on balancing professional standards, ethical values, and external perceptions informed the design of our activities, which sought to move faculty from reactive policy writing toward reflective, values-based decision-making. As we developed the workshop and accompanying research activities, we sought to address how instructors make decisions—and how they would guide students in making decisions—about GenAI in their courses.

## Method

This study is informed by the practitioner inquiry framework developed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2015), which conceptualizes educational research as a form of systematic and intentional inquiry conducted by practitioners within their own professional contexts. Rather than viewing knowledge as external to teaching practice, practitioner inquiry positions educators as knowledge generators who investigate questions arising from their own work to improve practice, contribute to the knowledge base, and support organizational learning. This approach blurs the boundaries between research and practice, emphasizing iterative cycles of reflection, data collection, analysis, and action. Practitioner inquiry also foregrounds the role of context, identity, and power in shaping both the inquiry process and its outcomes, aligning with traditions of critical and democratic education.

### Context: Statewide Collaboration

The workshop examined in this study emerged from a broader cross-institutional initiative *Communicating about Ethical AI Use with Learners*, launched in Summer 2023 in response to the rapid uptake of generative AI in higher education. The initiative convened faculty, staff, graduate students, and educational developers from multiple institutions to investigate how GenAI was reshaping teaching, learning, and assessment. Organized around collaborative research teams focused on issues such as accessibility, student onboarding, assessment, and feedback, the *AI in Teaching and Learning* project prioritized an inquiry-first approach that generated empirical insights and openly shared resources for educators statewide.

As this work unfolded, instructors across institutions consistently reported uncertainty about how to craft clear, ethical, and pedagogically sound AI course policies. In response, three educational developers who served as co-principal investigators for the *AI in Teaching and Learning* project designed a statewide professional learning workshop to translate the project's research into practice. The workshop was grounded in findings from the research teams, ongoing faculty consultations, and the developers' prior scholarship on feedback, assessment, and academic integrity.

### **Intervention Design: The Workshop**

Session activities encouraged participants to consider multiple layers of influence on their AI-related decisions, including their institutional context, policies, and level of administrative guidance; their disciplinary norms and course-specific expectations; their individual views of and comfort with GenAI tools; and their goals for student learning. This reflective process allowed participants to acknowledge tensions between ethical commitments and institutional ambiguity and craft GenAI policies aligned with their values and context. The facilitators drew upon their expertise as academic developers to scaffold this process. They offered sample policy statements to illustrate a range of approaches; tips for transparent communication, helping instructors articulate their policies in student-centred language; and strategies to promote adherence, such as aligning policies with classroom norms, using discussion-based introductions, and revisiting expectations throughout the term.

### **Participants**

The workshop was offered twice in Spring 2025, each in online synchronous format. The first offering was a 3-hour pre-conference workshop for the *Conference on Higher Education Pedagogy*, a regional conference attracting instructors from Virginia and neighbouring states. The second offering was a 75-minute webinar advertised across Virginia. The intended population was higher education instructors across a range of disciplines and professional roles, and with varying experience with GenAI, identified through convenience sampling. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, no pre-determined sample size was identified.

### **Data Sources**

An anonymous pre and post workshop survey was administered via Qualtrics. In the presurvey, participants provided basic demographic information, indicated whether they currently had an AI policy, indicated their experience using GenAI in their teaching, rated their understanding of the risks and benefits of GenAI in education, and ranked the importance of various ethical considerations when developing an AI policy. After ranking the ethical considerations, they were asked to indicate how confident they were in (a) addressing these ethical considerations, (b) developing an AI policy for their courses, and (c) explaining the policy to their students. The postsurvey replicated this presurvey, but the question about whether the respondent had an AI policy was changed to ask whether the respondent had developed an AI policy as a result of the workshop. The poll questions asked during the workshop and some of the items on the survey were developed by the workshop presenters based on the intended outcomes and content developed for the workshop and from Ruediger et al., (2024), where relevant. Additional pre and posttest survey questions were also developed by the researchers due to the lack of available

reliable and valid instruments. The list of ethical concerns was developed by the researchers after consulting various published opinion pieces looking for common themes. Workshop Artifacts

During the first offering of the workshop, Poll Everywhere was used to collect participant responses to a variety of session-relevant questions. Five questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all knowledgeable, 5 = Extremely knowledgeable) to ask about their knowledge of AI literacy, AI pedagogy, AI policy, AI ethics, and AI tools. We also asked respondents if they had an AI syllabus policy statement (yes or no) and how confident they were with their AI policy (1 = Not at all confident, 5 = Extremely confident). Participants also engaged in breakout room discussions of a poorly written policy and a case study with a communication issue related to AI policies. Notes were taken during these activities. During the second offering of the workshop, we used Poll Everywhere to ask respondents an open-ended question about what they wished their students understood about generative AI regarding learning in their course. Due to the number of participants in the second workshop, discussion took place within the chat. Chat logs were saved for review. In both workshops, participants were invited to draft their own AI policy and share it anonymously on a spreadsheet. Some participants provided an already developed policy, and others added a newly developed policy to the spreadsheet during or after the workshop. As a result, the policies themselves were not analysed for inclusion in this study as they were not consistently impacted by the information provided in the workshop.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive analyses are provided for all variables including a description of the participants who attended the workshops. For variables collected only at one time point (i.e., before, during, or after the workshop), the appropriate descriptive analysis was used based on the type of data. For data collected at two time points (i.e., before/during the workshop and during/after the workshop) univariate data is presented along with t-tests to compare mean changes over time.

## **Results**

### **Sample**

The workshop attracted 19 participants from the regional conference and approximately 200 participants in the webinar. They represented a wide variety of institutions, with most coming from public 4-year, private 4-year, or public 2-year institutions of higher education. A few participants were from K-12 school districts or other. Most participants were from institutions within the state of Virginia. Participants represented a wide range of disciplines (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Disciplines Represented*

	Workshop 1 ( <i>n</i> )	Workshop 2 ( <i>n</i> )
Arts & Humanities	2	17
Social Sciences	4	9
Natural Sciences	1	11
Mathematics & Computer Science	1	8
Engineering	-	2
Business	1	5
Education	1	7
Health Sciences	1	7
Other	1	2
No response	1	8

Participants held a range of professional roles and status (see Table 2) with over half of participants holding rank of Assistant/Associate/Full professor (53.7% at pretest) and less than a fifth (14.6%) holding the rank of lecturer or instructor. Over a third of participants (34.4%) reported they were in a non-tenure track role, and a fifth (20.8%) were tenured, with very few participants in a tenure-track, not yet tenured role (3.6%).

**Table 2***Participant Professional Roles*

	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)
Assistant/Associate/Full professor	53.7	61.9
Lecturer/Instructor	14.6	24.7
Staff/Administrator	15.1	6.5
Graduate Student/Post-doc	3.2	1.3
Non-tenure track	34.4	44.2
Tenure Track	3.6	6.5
Tenured	20.8	18.2

<sup>a</sup> Pretest *n* = 161; posttest *n* = 68

**Instructor Understanding of the Risks and Benefits of AI in Education**

Of the 161 participants who shared their experience with AI tools ahead of the workshop, just 13% (*n* = 21) indicated that they had not tried any AI tools in their teaching. Most (73%; *n* = 117) had some experience, and few considered AI tools part of their regular workflow (14%; *n* = 23). When polled during the first offering of the workshop about their knowledge of AI tools, AI pedagogy, and AI literacy, 55% (*n* = 10) indicated they were *moderately* or *very knowledgeable* about AI tools; half (*n* = 9) indicated they were *moderately* or *very knowledgeable* about AI pedagogy; and 72% (*n* = 13) indicated they were *moderately* or *very knowledgeable* about AI literacy. At pretest, half (52%; *n* = 83) of participants rated their understanding of the potential benefits and risks of using AI in education as *good* or *very good*. At posttest, this increased to 75% (see Table 3). When the data were converted to means, there was a significant ( $p < .01$ ) increase in understanding of benefits between pre ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) and posttest ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ).

**Table 3***Participant Understanding of the Potential Benefits and Risks of AI in Education*

	Pretest ( <i>n</i> = 161) % ( <i>n</i> )	Posttest ( <i>n</i> = 68) % ( <i>n</i> )
Poor	4 (6)	0 (0)
Not good	13 (21)	9 (6)
I am not sure	32 (51)	16 (11)
Good	41 (66)	62 (42)
Very good	10 (17)	13 (9)

**Important Ethical Considerations when Developing Course Policies**

When polled during the first offering of the workshop, the majority of participants (72%; *n* = 13) rated themselves as *moderately* or *very knowledgeable* about AI ethics. Both before and after both workshop offerings, participants rated academic integrity as the most important ethical consideration when developing an AI policy (see Table 4). At posttest, equitable student access to AI tools and accessibility for students with disabilities seemed to increase slightly in importance, though these differences were not significant. This suggests that even after engaging in ethical reflection, faculty tended to default to concerns historically tied to academic misconduct. However, modest increases in attention to access and accessibility suggest a growing awareness of structural considerations.

**Table 4***Participant Ratings of the Importance Ethical Considerations When Developing an AI Policy*

	Pretest ( <i>n</i> = 159) M (SD)	Posttest ( <i>n</i> = 67) M (SD)
Student Privacy	3.98 (1.13)	3.79 (1.14)
Academic Integrity	4.72 (0.67)	4.73 (0.62)
Bias and Fairness in AI Algorithms	4.02 (0.88)	4.07 (0.96)
Equitable Student Access to AI Tools	3.87 (1.05)	4.07 (1.11)
Accessibility for Students with Disabilities	4.04 (1.02)	4.18 (1.04)
Environmental Impact	3.43 (1.28)	3.49 (1.42)

Likert scale: Least important (1) to Most important (5)

During the second offering of the workshop, participants were asked what they wished students better understood about GenAI in relation to learning in their course. Participants who shared a response (*n* = 117) overwhelmingly wanted their students to understand that AI is a tool that may help learning, but that these tools should not replace human thinking and reasoning; for example, one participant shared, “I wish they understood that it is a tool, like a bandsaw. That learning to use the tool can be helpful, but that it won’t do the work for you, and that using it is not always appropriate...” Participants also wanted students to know that AI is not always accurate. RQ3: Instructor Confidence in Developing and Communicating Course AI Policies. At pretest, 63% (*n* = 100) of participants were *somewhat* or *very confident* in their ability to address ethical concerns related to AI in their courses (see Table 5). At posttest, this increased to 90% (*n* = 60). Just 10% (*n* = 7) of participants rated themselves as *not at all* or *not very confident* at posttest compared to

over a third (37%;  $n = 59$ ) at pretest. When the data were converted to means, there was a significant ( $p < .001$ ) increase in confidence to address ethical AI concerns between pre ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) and posttest ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ )

**Table 5**

*Participant Confidence in Their Ability to Address Ethical AI Concerns in Their Courses*

	Pretest ( $n = 159$ ) % (n)	Posttest ( $n = 67$ ) % (n)
Not at all confident	11 (17)	1 (1)
Not very confident	26 (42)	9 (6)
Somewhat confident	47 (74)	66 (44)
Very confident	16 (26)	24 (16)

At pretest, 65% ( $n = 103$ ) of participants were *somewhat* or *very confident* in their ability to develop an AI policy for their course (see Table 6). At posttest, this increased to 94% ( $n = 63$ ). Very few participants rated themselves as *not at all* or *not very confident* at posttest (6%;  $n = 4$ ) compared to over a third (35%;  $n = 56$ ) at pretest. When the data were converted to means, there was a significant ( $p < .001$ ) increase in confidence to develop an AI policy between pre ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) and posttest ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ).

**Table 6**

*Participant Confidence in Their Ability to Develop an AI Policy for Their Course(s)*

	Pretest ( $n = 159$ ) % (n)	Posttest ( $n = 67$ ) % (n)
Not at all confident	9 (15)	1 (1)
Not very confident	26 (41)	4 (3)
Somewhat confident	42 (67)	63 (42)
Very confident	23 (36)	31 (21)

Participants were also asked whether they developed their AI policy as a result of the workshop, and while 65% reported they already had an AI syllabus statement before beginning the workshop, nearly half (47%) indicated they developed their policy as a result of the workshop. This could have happened during the workshop when participants were provided time to develop a policy and share it with other participants or after the workshop, as the posttest could have been completed at a later date. After engaging in the policy development activities during the workshop, participants were asked, "How confident are you with your AI policy *at this time*?" and 62% indicated they were *moderately* or *very confident* in their policy.

Across both workshop offerings, participants reported increased confidence in their ability to communicate AI-related policies to students. At pretest, 75% ( $n = 119$ ) of participants were somewhat or very confident in their ability to communicate their AI policy to students (see Table 7). At posttest this increased to 93% ( $n = 62$ ). When the data were converted to means, there was a significant ( $p < .05$ ) increase in confidence to communicate their policies between pre ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) and posttest ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = .63$ ). Additionally, 73% ( $n = 49$ ) indicated they developed a plan to communicate their AI policy to their students as a result of the workshop. This

demonstrates that the workshop not only increased participant confidence but also prompted concrete instructional planning.

**Table 7**

*Participant Confidence in Their Ability to Communicate Their AI Policy to Students*

	Pretest (n = 159) % (n)	Posttest (n = 67) % (n)
Not at all confident	7 (12)	1 (1)
Not very confident	18 (28)	6 (4)
Somewhat confident	43 (68)	60 (40)
Very confident	32 (51)	33 (22)

These findings suggest that when given time and structure to reflect, instructors can move beyond abstract concerns and take intentional steps toward implementing ethical, student-centred, and pedagogically aligned AI policies. Participants left the workshop with stronger tools and clearer messaging strategies, reinforcing the value of dedicated faculty development spaces that prioritize both policy creation and communication.

## Discussion

The overarching goal of this research project was to examine how faculty development programs can support instructors in making informed, ethical, and pedagogically-sound decisions about GenAI in their teaching. Our findings suggest that even when many faculty participants entered our workshop with moderate familiarity and experience with GenAI tools, they still benefitted from increased confidence and a broader awareness of the ethical dimensions of AI policy creation and communication.

Although participants' prioritization of academic integrity as an ethical consideration when developing an AI policy remained stable, their increased awareness of issues such as equitable student access to tools and the accessibility of those tools suggests that structured development opportunities can expand instructors' ethical lens. Notably, participants' self-reported confidence increased across all domains measured, from identifying ethical concerns to developing and communicating policy to students. These outcomes affirm the value of reflective, values-based faculty development, even in time-limited formats such as workshops and webinars.

The room notes from the discussions of an ineffective policy may shed some light on how the workshop increased confidence in faculty developing their own policies. For example, participants mentioned policies should have "concrete examples of allowable or not allowable uses and tools for AI use" and information about "why the policies exist related to the course objectives and student outcomes." Additionally, participants stated that instructors should clearly articulate "what constitutes academic misconduct and the consequences of misusing AI". They also discussed that communication should extend beyond the initial communication of the policy to include an invitation for students to "ask the instructor for clarification or if there is a proposed use for AI in the class that is not discussed in the policy"

## **Faculty Learning: Beyond Policy Compliance**

The findings reinforce the distinction Kreber (2013) draws between surface-level policy compliance and deeper forms of ethical reflection in teaching and illuminate how ethical awareness is not synonymous with ethical action. While participants consistently identified academic integrity as a top concern, it was through structured inquiry and peer discussion that they developed greater confidence in acting on these concerns through the articulation of an AI policy. This outcome aligns with Yan et al.'s (2024) argument that AI-related faculty development must centre pedagogical agency and human judgment, not simply technical knowledge or risk mitigation, and with Sullivan et al.'s (2019) observation that online communities and reflective dialogue can enhance faculty agency in navigating instructional technology integration. Our experience facilitating these workshops suggests that instructors are not simply waiting for institutional directives but are actively seeking meaningful ways to engage with ethical challenges, especially when provided with space, tools, and facilitation to do so. Faculty development can create structured opportunities for instructors to engage explicitly with the multiple dimensions of ethical decision-making articulated in the COVER framework (Mitchell & Yordy, 2010). Rather than defaulting primarily to Codes (C) and Rules (R) alone, participants in these workshops were prompted to surface Values (V), anticipate Outcomes (O), and consider External Perceptions (E), resulting in more context-sensitive policy articulation. Several elements of the workshop design appear to have supported this reflective process. Structured prompts encouraged participants to articulate their pedagogical values, peer discussions surfaced disciplinary and contextual differences in AI use, and the policy drafting activity required instructors to translate abstract ethical concerns into concrete course-level decisions.

These findings contribute to broader conversations about ethical, human-centred responses to technological change in higher education. By integrating insights from faculty workshop participation with established models of responsive academic development (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Steinert et al., 2016), our work aligns with calls for practitioner inquiry that positions educators as co-constructors of ethical, equitable teaching environments (Kreber, 2013; Rudolph et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2024). Our study suggests that ethical awareness can be cultivated and that confidence can serve as a bridge between awareness and action. As Yan et al. (2024) emphasize in their systematic review, instructors face not only practical but also ethical uncertainty when integrating large language models into learning environments. Our findings echo this concern: participants expressed a desire to support student learning while navigating fairness, bias, and access—concerns that cannot be addressed through compliance-focused policy alone.

As Hess et al. (2024) argue, sustained engagement in learning communities over time helps faculty shift from rule-based thinking toward values-based ethical reasoning. While our workshop was brief, it demonstrated that even short-term interventions can spark critical reflection, uncover assumptions, and catalyse change when designed intentionally. While participants' policy drafts provided insight into how instructors began translating ethical concerns into course-level policies, systematic qualitative analysis of these artefacts was beyond the scope of this study. Future research could explore longitudinal outcomes of such workshops, examine changes in policy clarity or inclusiveness, and investigate how institutional context influences the uptake and enactment of GenAI policy decisions.

## **Practical Implications**

Our work supports recent findings from Hess et al. (2024), who argue that sustained engagement in professional learning communities enables faculty to expand their ethical reasoning beyond compliance and risk-aversion. While our intervention was brief, it functioned as a catalytic moment, activating the kind of reflective dialogue that longer-term learning communities may seek to sustain.

The workshop's impact points to a model of faculty development that functions not only as technical support or policy dissemination, but as ethical infrastructure, a set of relational and pedagogical conditions that allow educators to collectively interpret emerging technologies and translate ethical commitments into classroom policy and practice. In practice, this model combines structured reflection that helps instructors surface their values and teaching goals with flexible tools for framing policy boundaries and communicating expectations to students. It also integrates scaffolded opportunities to translate ethical concerns into concrete, course-level policy decisions while embedding peer learning through facilitated dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. By designing workshops that attend to both ethical frameworks and pedagogical goals, academic developers can equip instructors to move from compliance-focused policy writing to confident, student-centred decision-making.

## **Theoretical Limitations**

While this study advances a conceptual framing of academic development as ethical infrastructure, several theoretical limitations should be considered. First our interpretation of workshop outcomes is grounded in a practitioner inquiry frame framework (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2015) which privileges educators' reflexive accounts and self-reported growth. This stance foregrounds professional judgment and contextual reasoning but does not directly assess whether shifts in confidence translate into sustained changes in classroom practice or student experience. Confidence, while important, is not equivalent to ethical enactment. Future research should therefore examine how workshop-generated policies are implemented over time and how students interpret or respond to them in practice.

Second, our analysis assumes that ethical reasoning can be scaffolded through short-term professional development interventions. Although our findings suggest that even brief workshops can increase awareness and confidence, ethical development is likely iterative and relational, unfolding over time within communities of practice (Hess et al., 2024). A single intervention may spark reflection but cannot substitute for sustained institutional cultures that normalize ethical dialogue around technology integration.

Finally, the ethical framework embedded in our workshop activities, drawing in part on the COVER model (Mitchell & Yordy, 2010), centres individual professional judgment in weighing values, outcomes, and rules. While this model is useful for navigating ambiguity, it may not fully capture collective, culturally situated, or justice-oriented ethical traditions. Alternative ethical paradigms (e.g., care ethics, critical pedagogy, decolonial approaches) may surface different concerns or lead to different policy articulations. Future theoretical work could explore how diverse ethical frameworks shape AI policy making across disciplines and institutional contexts.

Although the workshops described in this study were implemented within a particular institutional context, the approach is adaptable to a range of faculty development environments. Similar

activities could be incorporated into faculty learning communities, departmental retreats, or asynchronous professional development programs. The central elements of structured ethical reflection, collaborative dialogue, and scaffolded policy development are transferable across institutions seeking to support instructors navigating emerging technologies

### **Future Research and Limitations**

One key limitation of these workshops is the anonymity of the data collected. While we chose to collect data anonymously to encourage audience participation and comfort with engagement, the result is that we were not able to, for example, connect pre- and posttest results for specific participants, nor were we able to connect participants' AI policies to their pre and posttests or other data collected. While this does limit our ability to make comparisons between data points for specific participants, and it is possible that changes in survey responses over time were impacted by self-selection to participate, we have been careful to not make claims about the generalizability of our findings or about connections between various data points.

As the purpose of the study was to help instructors consider ethics in developing AI policies for their courses, we provided space for them to self-reflect on various ethical concerns when drafting their policies. However, we did not directly engage participants in a discussion about ethics, nor ask them to directly map their ethical considerations to their policies.

A final concern is the mode of delivery for these workshops, and therefore the mode of data collection. Both workshops were delivered in an online synchronous format, via Zoom, and while instructors are certainly very used to receiving professional development in this modality, there are persistent concerns about the appropriateness of online faculty development for generating discussion, particularly around nuanced and often sensitive topics. While this is a consideration that we will continue to reflect upon as we prepare for future workshops, the increased accessibility offered by online workshops cannot be discounted. As Yilmaz et al. (2020) argue, future-ready faculty development must leverage technology not only as a subject of learning but also as a mechanism for delivery and community building. Our workshop, delivered virtually to a broad audience, exemplifies this shift—demonstrating how online, scalable formats can still support deep ethical reflection and policy design.

Some of the workshop attendees seemed eager to have more in-depth conversations around the ethics of AI use in education. While these conversations were beyond the scope of the workshops as designed, it would be interesting to further understand instructors' perceptions of the ethics of AI use and how their perceptions manifest in their teaching practice. It would also be interesting to study whether and how AI policies map to instructors' ethical decision-making and to see what ethical considerations, if any, are captured within the policies themselves.

### **Conclusions**

As generative AI continues to reshape the landscape of higher education, instructors are being called upon to make complex ethical decisions in the absence of comprehensive institutional policies or precedent. This study demonstrates that academic development can play a vital role in supporting educators not just in crafting AI-related course policies, but in developing the ethical reasoning, pedagogical clarity, and communication skills needed to implement those policies. Our findings support longstanding evidence that faculty development has the potential to improve both teaching and learning (Wright et al., 2018) and suggest that participation in professional

development may also increase ethical awareness and pedagogical intentionality in technology policy contexts.

Our findings highlight the potential of structured, reflective professional development to increase instructors' confidence, expand their awareness of ethical considerations beyond academic integrity, and guide them toward values-driven decision-making. Even brief workshops, when grounded in practitioner inquiry and ethical reflection, can help educators move from uncertainty to intentional action.

As generative AI continues to reshape higher education, institutions will need more than technical guidance or policy templates. Educators require spaces to interpret emerging technologies, deliberate competing values, and translate institutional expectations into pedagogical practice. We argue that faculty development should be positioned as ethical infrastructure for this work, providing not only resources and templates, but also spaces for collaborative inquiry, contextualized decision-making, and pedagogical experimentation. As AI technologies evolve, so too must our approaches to faculty support. Human-centred, practice-informed models of development are essential for building institutional capacity and cultivating learning environments that are not only technologically responsive, but ethically grounded.

As institutions continue to grapple with GenAI, faculty development must evolve to meet instructors' growing need for guidance, collaboration, and ethical grounding. This study affirms that reflective, practice-informed workshops, especially those that integrate collaborative structures and technological access, can help instructors not only keep pace with change but shape it ethically and pedagogically (Sullivan et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2024; Yilmaz et al., 2020).

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