Do's, Don'ts and Don't Knows

Responding to AI in assessment in Universities:

A Practical Guide for Lecturers

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
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Contents

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About this guide

We have come together as a group of educational advisors from the University of Cape Town and Stellenbosch University and developed these guidelines using the heuristic of do's, don'ts and don't knows. These guidelines draw on our collective practical experience in working with and supporting teaching staff with assessment design that respond to the prevalence and take-up of generative AI. This guide therefore represents the authors' consolidated view of the state of play regarding assessment practices in Higher Education at this time, and foreground what assessment practitioners need to be aware of and be prepared to enact.

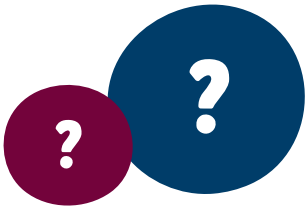
Introduction

This guide is intended for individuals and groups of lecturers who are involved with the assessment of students at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level programmes. AI poses multiple challenges to assessment practice, not least whether our assessment-based decisions about and consequences for students are justified; the reputational issues associated with that; and whether the learning gains from thoughtfully designed assessment still accrue in an AI saturated world. While there are some principles to guide assessment practice that are becoming clearer, there is still much we don't know. There are no ready solutions to the short and long-term challenges that AI poses to assessment, nor clarity about the gains and losses to education and assessment in the short and longer term. No wonder dealing with AI in the context of assessment has been characterised as a wicked problem (Corbin et al., 2025).

Through focussing on a relatively simple heuristic device of presenting guidance in the form of do's, don'ts and don't knows these guidelines aim to respond to these needs and signal that while there are no simple solutions to the challenges of assessment, there are established good practices which if engaged with can assist when considering the impact of AI on assessment.

- What are the "Do's" we feel confident about supporting as good practice?
- What are the "Don'ts" we feel confident should be avoided?
- And what are the "Don't Knows" that we can't take a position on given a lack of experience or evidence or the existence of conflicting experience and evidence?

Before you start – who are you as an assessor?



As we write this guide, we are conscious that people will be engaging with these ideas from different perspectives about and experience with assessment and with AI. We don't assume expertise with either, but invite you to ponder a few things before you dive into what we offer below.
How well versed are you in the principles underlying assessment practice? You can, for example, glance through the Good Practice for Assessment Guide as a way of gleaning a sense of where your experience as an assessor positions you. The Assessment and academic integrity in the age of AI guide addresses some issues related to the collision between AI and assessment. Staff at UCT also have access to Assessment redesign for AI: An interactive guide on the institutional LMS, Amathuba; this is based on the Good Practice for Assessment Guide.

Then, how well versed, comfortable and confident are you with the use of generative AI tools? With the affordances and limitations of AI generally and various specific tools? Many people are neither confident nor comfortable so if that's where you are, you are in good company! But how might this impact your thinking about and use of AI as part of your assessment practice? If you are comfortable and confident – experienced even – then how did you get there? Are there ways you could help your colleagues with the ways they think about AI and assessment?

Either way, what is your tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty? As Corbin et al. (2025) unpack in the paper we referred to earlier, there are unlikely to be unambiguously good solutions to the challenges AI poses to assessment in the many arenas we work in. Rather, there will be better and worse solutions, all of which – unfortunately – will probably be transient, provisional, and contingent on the evolving nature of AI.

Finally, what do you know about your students' perspectives on AI use, their intentions? We've talked to many students, and it's not as open and shut as many people imagine it to be. Students have nuanced understandings of what they can usefully achieve through using AI and are also acutely aware of how AI can undermine their learning. They are also concerned about the reputational risk to the degrees they will earn and aware of the dilemmas of carefully using AI while learning yet also being equipped with work-relevant AI competences.

Background and Method

The impetus for developing this guide has come from a symposium on AI and Assessment co-hosted by Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town in April 2025 and convened by the authors. Titled Assessment in the Age of AI: Principles, Practices and Innovations for the Future of Learning, the symposium brought together students, teachers and academic developers to share and discuss issues related to the challenge of assessment. Based on the abstracts submitted, conversations during the

conference, inputs into the end-of-day workshop and post-conference evaluation forms, it became clear that there is a need for ongoing support and conversation.

The authors developed this guide through an iterative and collaborative process. First, each author suggested Do's, Don'ts and Don't Knows based on their own experience and expertise, populating a shared document. The authors then met to discuss and debate the suggestions, before considering how best to group the content. The resulting guide is structured in three sections. In teams of two, each of the authors developed a single section of the guide, meeting regularly to share progress with the broader team and request any feedback. Included in each section are some references to articles that we thought would be useful to highlight for practitioners. Each section of the guide was reviewed by all the authors before being finalised.

Here is what to expect from each section

- **Assessment design & practice**: This section focuses on how to design and implement assessments that remain valid, intentional and pedagogically meaningful in the presence of AI. It highlights considerations around alignment, authenticity, process focused design, communication with students and colleagues, and the trade-offs inherent in all design decisions.

- **Student support & literacies:** This section considers how to support students in developing the critical, ethical and effective use of AI tools, including communication strategies, guidance on expectations, and the development of AI related and multimodal literacies.

- **Factors guiding policies & decisions:** This section discusses how lecturers, course teams and programmes can develop coherent positions on AI use, attend to equity and justice implications, remain responsive to institutional guidance and regulatory expectations, and navigate uncertainties about the longer term consequences of AI in assessment.

The goal is to design with intentionality – ensuring every decision serves a clear educational purpose.

Assessment Design & Practice

This section outlines practical considerations for designing assessments in an AI enabled environment. The emphasis is on intentionality, clarity of purpose, and a realistic understanding of the trade-offs involved in all design decisions.

Designing with clarity of purpose means acknowledging these trade-offs openly and explaining why certain values or priorities have been chosen over others.

Do's

1 Purpose and alignment

When embarking on assessment redesign, it is important to begin with a clear sense of purpose. Start by clarifying what the task is intended to achieve and how it aligns with the intended learning outcome. Assessment (re)design should not begin with rules about whether AI should be allowed or banned, but with a clear understanding of what students need to learn and demonstrate (Perkins et al., 2025). From that foundation, determine which skills and knowledge need to be demonstrated independently and which can be meaningfully supported through the use of AI (Digital Education Council, 2025). The goal is to design with intentionality – ensuring every decision serves a clear educational purpose. The Start with Outcomes guide (Cilliers et al., 2026) that you can access (available soon on the CILT website) outlines an intentional approach that you can follow. Make sure to communicate your approach and any guidelines which have been given to students and to your external examiner as well.

AI and assessment is a wicked problem with no perfect solution, only better or worse responses (Corbin et al., 2025). Given this, it should be accepted that every design decision likely involves trade-offs. Assessment security may come at the expense of authenticity, while authenticity may come at the expense of feasibility. Designing with clarity of purpose means acknowledging these trade-offs openly and explaining why certain values or priorities have been chosen over others.

2 Design for authentic and process-focused learning

Assessments should reflect the realities of contemporary practice, where students are expected to engage critically and responsibly with AI tools (Lodge et al., 2025). Designing with authenticity in mind includes creating tasks that mirror real-world contexts, where AI is likely to be part of the workflow. From this perspective, consider which assessment tasks can be redesigned to deliberately build students' AI literacy

and competencies. If you incorporate AI into the assessment process, do not assume that students (particularly junior students) will be able to appraise AI outputs critically. Such appraisal requires both sufficient knowledge about the topic to start with (knowledge the learning opportunity seeks to develop) and advanced cognitive skills. As Furze (2024) says, "you don't know what you don't know". Given this, it is important to create structured opportunities for practice and critique for students to develop evaluative judgement. This kind of activity could be completed as part of an assessment (see, for example, Huang et al., 2024) or done in class.

Overgeneralising student behaviour risks eroding trust and overlooking diverse experiences.

For summative assessments where stakes are higher, if AI is integral to performing the assessment task, it is important to ensure that all students either have equal access to the same versions of the tools or differences between tools do not influence students' ability to produce equivalent responses.

Regardless of whether AI use is permitted in the assessment or not, students will likely use AI tools to support their assessments and learning activities. It is important to acknowledge this and work with this in mind in the assessment design. Generative AI can easily generate polished products. For this reason, redesigning assessments that capture how students think, create and develop work, not what they produce at the end, can make the learning visible and strengthen assessment validity (Corbin, Dawson, & Liu, 2025). This has resource implications, obviously, the more so for large classes, if artefacts of process are to be appraised. This is one area where tradeoffs between two desirable things need to be considered. Does validity outweigh feasibility? If not, are there other assessments where validity is the prime consideration? Or does the totality of evidence across all assessments offer adequate evidence to support the validity of – justify – assessment-based decisions and any attendant consequences, whether positive or negative.

Be clear about the purpose and conditions under which you would require or ban AI use, understanding that you may have to put those conditions in place. For example, if you choose to ban AI, this could mean setting up invigilated venues to ensure a lack of access to AI. Either way, be open to having conversations with students about the rationale for the approach that is being adopted.

3 Test, iterate and collaborate

As AI and assessment is a wicked problem with no one-size-fits-all solutions (Corbin et al., 2025), redesigning assessments for this context requires experimentation and collaborations. Begin by familiarising yourself with AI tools. Test your existing assessments with the tools to identify potential weakness or opportunities for improvement. Consider testing out any adaptations or redesign with colleagues or small groups of students

before rolling out more widely. You may also be able to engage with tools in your environment to help you with your assessments, for example, for rubric generation or MCQ development. Increasingly, there are opportunities to work with experienced teams to develop bespoke AI tools for your needs. There are various assessment projects underway at UCT being funded by an **AI Teaching Innovation grant.**

4 Explore the utility of AI tools to assist your practice

There are now many ways in which AI tools – both general-purpose tools and bespoke tools built into learning management systems or designed for specific assessment needs – can support the assessment process. These uses range from generating large numbers of draft multiple-choice questions for lecturers to edit, to producing initial versions of rubrics that can be refined, to offering simple or more complex feedback that is then reviewed and moderated by humans. As with any use of AI in assessment, the same principle applies: test these tools, iterate, and refine based on what you learn.

Dont's

1 Avoid making assumptions about students and AI use

Assumptions about students' motives or capacities can lead to inequitable or misaligned assessment design. Don't assume students only use AI tools to cheat or offload their thinking. Many use them as legitimate aids for understanding, drafting, or feedback. Equally, don't assume that students will not use AI if your assessment instructions state they should not (Corbin, Dawson, & Liu, 2025) – students are humans who make decisions based on myriad and in-the-moment factors. Overgeneralising student behaviour risks eroding trust and overlooking diverse experiences. Assessment design should be grounded in transparency and empathy, recognising that students need clear, consistent guidance rather than assumptions about intent or capability.

2 Don't rely on AI detection tools or punitive approaches to ensure academic integrity

Detection-based or punitive approaches to AI use are not sustainable or educationally productive. Exclusively punitive approaches inhibit dialogue and do not foster ethical reasoning or integrity. AI detection tools are unreliable (Weber-Wulff et al., 2023), often generating false positives and false negatives and disproportionately affecting certain student groups (Giray, 2024). Designing assessments that rely on "catching" misconduct diverts focus from learning and can damage trust between students and educators. Instead of depending on technological policing, lecturers should design for integrity through a balance of secure assessments, authentic tasks, open discussion, and transparency about expectations. Promoting a culture of learning is a more effective safeguard against misconduct than technological surveillance.

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3 Don't assume that in-person invigilated tests or surveillance-based solutions are the only ways to maintain academic integrity

While in-person, invigilated assessments can have a place within a balanced assessment strategy, relying on them as the primary or sole safeguard of academic integrity limits pedagogical flexibility and innovation. Surveillance-heavy approaches risk fostering a culture of mistrust and reframe student-teacher relations around suspicion rather than learning (Ross & Macleod, 2018).

Such approaches can also disproportionately disadvantage some students, particularly those who experience test anxiety barriers (Kurt, Balci, & Kose, 2014). Instead of defaulting to controlled environments, lecturers should explore a range of assessment formats that integrate integrity through authenticity, transparency, and process. As mentioned above, programmatic approaches to assessment where validity and reliability accrue from the collated totality of evidence rather than only one or two assessments, are likely to offer a practical alternative to invigilation heavy approaches.

? Don't know

1 The consequences of automating marking

While automating marking may offer efficiencies, it remains unclear what long-term impacts this may have on teaching expertise and academic labour. What deskilling may occur if marking is automated and humans mark less? Marking requires understanding and application, decision-making based on disciplinary knowledge, norms, values. It contributes to developing evaluative judgement in pre- or early career academics. Marking also serves as a vital source of insight into students' learning processes. Reducing or removing this point of contact risks creating distance between educators and students, diminishing insights that can be gained through direct engagement with students' work.

2 How AI in assessment can meaningfully support student learning

In what ways could AI use in assessment advance student learning, perhaps offer personalised learning pathways based on adaptive assessment? In what ways will AI use in assessment impact equity, fairness and justice for better or worse? What will be the unintended consequences of the assessment decisions we make in support of one assessment principle e.g., validity of decisions? We are yet to understand the full impact of AI in this regard.

3 Integrity beyond detection

What suite of measures will best assure integrity in different assessment contexts in the absence of reliable detection tools and in the face of ever-evolving AI tools? We are learning what this might entail as we go, and it is likely this will be an ongoing process for some time. Sharing practice and experiences with colleagues near and far can help inform what we do. Will we need to seek solutions like programmatic assessment that transcend traditional course-based assessment to accommodate the demands of these new practices? While such practices are more readily adopted where class sizes are smaller, how do we scale up alternative approaches to assessment that can contribute to integrity but are more labour intensive e.g., oral exams in large classes or verification of AI-use logs submitted with assignments?

Student Support & Literacies

Structural investment in the development of student literacies to use AI tools remains a priority (Chiu, 2025). This section outlines ways you can support students in developing ethical, effective and aligned use of AI tools for learning and assessment. It recognises the diversity of student preparedness and contexts and promotes a multipronged approach.

Do's

1 Adopt a multi-literacies mindset

Consider the broader development of literacy with reference to the development of multi-literacies (see Stolpe & Hallström, 2024; Rapanta et al., 2025). When designing assessment in an AI-enabled environment, a multi-literacies mindset should be adopted where we recognise that students need more than the conventional reading and writing skills – they need to interpret, evaluate and produce across multimodal, digital and AI-enabled contexts. This implies creating opportunities to deliberately work with AI tools, but also to develop the competencies of questioning them and their outputs – designing assessments that foreground critical judgement, the ethical use of the tools, and continuous reflection (Stolpe & Hallström; Rapanta et al., 2025).

2 Offer students guidance

It is important to provide students with clear and concise guidance on AI capabilities and their limitations when developing and working towards digital fluency. A targeted approach guiding students through continuous and clear communication about expectations, rules, regulations, and disciplinary consequences about appropriate and inappropriate AI use in assessments in your context is important. These guidelines should also be regularly evaluated and adapted as necessary. Have conversations with students to familiarise yourself with the spectrum of their concerns and ways of use so that your guidance takes cognizance of where they are. Guiding information can be included in any work involved in preparing students for their assessments or other assessment formats, for example, in your assessment instructions (Lund et al., 2025). Student expectations should also be managed through clear communication about institutional and/or faculty-based support available at their disposal.

3 Promote academic integrity

Academic integrity should be central in all communication with students through regular and transparent communication about appropriate AI use. Work towards a culture of support that acknowledges and embraces the uncertainties associated with AI and provides opportunities for students to engage with these aspects at different

levels in their learning journey. A focus on development and continuous learning should be foregrounded above a purely punitive approach (Lund et al., 2025). Consider holding discussions with your students to explain what generative AI is, including its strengths and limitations, and create space for them to share their own perspectives and experiences. Part of this discussion could also include the consideration of different case studies and examples of acceptable and unacceptable AI use for different assessment types. AI declarations can also be a useful tool to stimulate discussions with students about AI use.

4 Help students navigate support offerings

It is also important to bear in mind that students may be exposed to multiple guidelines and updates which can make for challenging navigation and application. Promoting some degree of consistency in your approach to offering support may be quite helpful for students. For example, you could ensure all assessment instructions include this kind of information or you could store supporting resources in a single repository throughout the duration of your course and offer students multiple reminders about this location. It would also be beneficial to introduce any guidance about the appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI as early as possible to help prepare students, giving them time to think and reducing the likelihood that they feel caught off-guard later in a course.

Dont's

1 Don't offer ambiguous guidance

Don't hold unclear positions on AI use when supporting students and developing their literacies. An absence of guidance and ambiguity can create uncertainty which can heighten anxiety and in turn inadvertently promote academic misconduct.

2 Avoid indiscriminate and scattered approaches to support

Don't respond to all AI questions indiscriminately and overlook the nuance they may require. Avoid a scattered approach to offering support which could potentially dilute the specific guidance students need to respond to assessment uncertainties and challenges.

It would also be beneficial to introduce any guidance about the appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI as early as possible to help prepare students, giving them time to think and reducing the likelihood that they feel caught off-guard later in a course.

Don't know

1 Optimising support

Uncertainties remain about the most optimal ways to support the development of student AI literacies and AI competencies (Chiu, 2025). Key tensions relate to issues of equity, inclusion, and access in the use of AI in assessment (Luo, 2024). For example, the preparedness of incoming students to use AI tools is likely influenced by their primary

and secondary schooling experiences, suggesting a need for tailored support to address disparities. As a practical example, it remains unclear if AI chatbots can be used as an effective first line of student support when immediate guidance is needed, bearing in mind issues some students face more than others like limited access to the internet and power outages. It also remains challenging to balance innovative support and potential risks to qualifications.

2 Evaluating AI

Uncertainty remains about the evaluation criteria of AI tools especially given the rapid but uneven advancement of capabilities and consequently how to support students in their own evaluations of AI tools as well.

3 Impact on students

It remains uncertain what the impact of AI-assisted learning will be on learning outcomes, skills development across the different types of assessments, and in a broader sense on disciplinary knowledge too. This includes the longer term impacts of the use of AI tools as cognitive offloads for how and what students learn – both positive (what can now be achieved) as well as negative (what has been lost) (Corbin, Dawson, et al., 2025). There may also be novel learning outcomes and activities now possible with AI that students should achieve and complete, respectively. The conceptualisation and potential impact of student learning opportunities also need further scrutiny - whether it should be offered via existing initiatives, separate workshops, or as a combination.

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Factors Guiding Policies & Decisions

In this section, we consider factors guiding policy, decisions and communication at the level of a course or module, a department and an academic programme; in other words, organisational units below the level of a faculty. While there may be institutional guidance and/or policy guiding your practice, having clarity about guidance and policy at department, course or module and programme level affects staff offering and students taking your courses more directly. Also consider the fact that staff offering and students taking service courses will be affected by potentially differing guidance and policy across faculties. Before taking a stance that you communicate to students, familiarise yourself with such institutional policy, frameworks and guidelines as there might be and know where to go for help or advice. Who is your "phone a friend" for matters AI and assessment?

At UCT you can refer to the UCT AI in Education Framework and join UCT's AI in Education Community of Practice. Current guidance at Stellenbosch includes these draft guidelines and this position statement, with an update expected to be released early in 2026.

Do's

1 Work with colleagues toward coherence

It is unlikely that everybody involved in a course or in a department will hold the same perspectives on AI in assessment (Schoon et al., 2025). Have conversations with colleagues seeking clarity and consensus positions on AI use in assessment to inform what you communicate to students. Adopt a stance of curiosity to the affordances and challenges of AI in assessment and be willing to learn together. Work together to develop your AI literacy and assessment literacy and use that to develop your positions on AI use over time. Find out what tools are supported in your context and what training is available on those tools. This is not a static space! Create opportunities to share practice in different courses in order to learn what works more and less well in your context. Develop and communicate your position on how inappropriate AI use will be addressed.

2 Consider what's happening beyond your course

Familiarise yourself with what (potentially conflicting) expectations students have to contend with in other departments or courses in the academic programme your course is part of. Have conversations with colleagues across courses, departments – faculties even, for service courses – to find out what expectations are beyond your course or module. What might be acceptable in one context may not be in another. Where possible, align messaging across courses and departments. Address differences with students so that

Ensure that any staff use aligns with institutional data protection guidance and that it does not undermine transparency or fairness.

they are clear about what is and is not appropriate in different contexts.
As far as academic integrity is concerned, reflect on how your course team, department or faculty actively engages students in understanding and valuing integrity as a core academic principle. Are there initiatives to underscore why this is a core value at any university? Rather than just punitive approaches to academic misconduct, consider how your course can connect its approach to AI and assessment with broader institutional efforts that promote integrity as something to be cultivated and aspired to. If there aren't any, maybe you could start something!

3 Attending to equity, access and justice

As you take positions on AI use, reflect explicitly on how your decisions may advantage or disadvantage particular students. Consider whether students have equitable access to tools. Reflect on whether the use of AI may benefit some students disproportionately while excluding others, and whether your decisions align with commitments to equity and transformation. Consider whether a stance risks placing additional cognitive load on students who are less familiar with AI tools or whose schooling afforded fewer opportunities to engage with digital technologies. Be attentive to the ways in which AI related misconduct procedures may disproportionately affect multilingual students or students from under resourced backgrounds.

4 Consider staff use of AI

AI may be used by staff for feedback, rubric development or administrative tasks. Reflect on when it is appropriate to use AI in your assessment design or marking, how to safeguard student data, and how to communicate to students the extent to which AI tools have shaped feedback or assessment processes. Ensure that any staff use aligns with institutional data protection guidance and that it does not undermine transparency or fairness. Has your department articulated a position about staff use of AI for external examining?

Dont's

1 Avoid delays in decision-making

Don't delay taking a position and making decisions on the assumption that there is a neat solution to your assessment conundrum waiting to be discovered. As noted earlier, the challenge of AI in assessment is a wicked problem (Corbin et al., 2025). Make the best decision you can under the circumstances - remember what things were like during the COVID pandemic? You can't assume that students aren't using AI just because it hasn't been mentioned. As time goes on, more and more students will enter university having used AI for assessment at school.

2 Don't overlook legitimate pedagogical uses of AI

When taking positions on AI use, don't dismiss or overlook legitimate pedagogical uses of AI tools in assessment. Consider what you may be sacrificing in rushing to an obvious solution like summarily changing to invigilated assessments as the norm. There are inarguable challenges posed by AI, but in what ways can AI meaningfully contribute to learning and assessment? That said, don't specify the use of AI without taking steps to

ensure that students are adequately prepared for what you expect. Equally, don't assume nefarious intentions by students as a default and so make punitive approaches aimed at "catching violations" the default position in your department, course or programme. While the claims behind AI detection tools hold allure as a "definitive" solution to unauthorised use of AI, don't fall for these claims. The only thing that is certain is that no tools are good or consistent in detecting AI use and that there will likely be an unending arms race between evolving AI tools and solutions to detect their use.

3 Don't leave students to the vagaries of inconsistent guidance

Don't assume that students can easily navigate inconsistent guidance. Differences should be explained rather than presumed to be self-evident. Having discussions with students about where there are differences and why can alleviate this.

? Don't know

1 Longer-term implications

What are the longer term positive (what can now be achieved) and negative (what do we stand to lose that we value) implications of the use of AI tools in assessment (Corbin, Dawson, et al., 2025)? We do not yet know the long term implications of AI use for learning, integrity, equity or disciplinary knowledge, and educators are still grappling differently with these issues dependent on their disciplines and contexts (Schoon et al., 2025). The consequences of different policy choices may emerge only over time.

2 Expectations of regulators and the workplace

What are the expectations of generic (e.g., HEQC) and profession-specific (e.g., SAICA, ECSA, LPC, HPCSA etc.) regulators about how AI should feature or not in assessment and what AI competences are now expected of graduates? Regulatory processes operate at glacial speed. Some regulators have been more pro-active than others but many have not taken a definitive position. Also, how and to what extent should what is assessed and how be responsive to the emergent expectations of the workplace regarding AI in the context of assessment?

3 Ethical and privacy implications

What are the ethical and privacy implications of staff and students submitting work to institutionally bounded and unbounded AI tools? To what extent can we rely on the oftentimes vague assurances we are offered by the purveyors of these tools?

Conclusion

We hope that this guide has offered useful ideas to support your assessment practice in an AI enabled environment. These guidelines are not intended as a comprehensive manual but as a set of practical considerations for navigating this moment of transition. If you have any thoughts about what we should add, please don't hesitate to share by contacting Soraya Lester

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