

MINUTES

GWAR Committee

Meeting Number 12

May 6, 2022

1:30 – 3:00

In attendance: Joseph Aubele, Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Jason Deutschman, Navdeep Dhillon, Annel Estrada, Noah Golden, Christina Goldpaint, Sarvenaz Hatami, Kerry Johnson, Eileen Klink, Elizabeth Lindau, Cynthia Pastrana, Loretta Ramirez, Alexandra Wilkinson

Lacking a quorum at 1:30, the committee delayed approving the agenda and minutes from the April 15, 2022 meeting. *A note from the recording secretary: the minutes from April 15 were not taken up before the end of this meeting, and will need to be approved in Fall 2022.*

The committee was joined by Christina Goldpaint and AVP Kerry Johnson. Johnson reminded the committee of the new policy stating that GVAR cannot be fulfilled with a high-stakes exam. Although the GPE is a placement exam, Johnson wanted to “get ahead” of a potential future ban on all testing as part of GVAR. Thus, she asked Goldpaint to examine the cohort of students who went into WI courses without taking the GPE to see how they fared. The committee heard a presentation from Goldpaint, who ran analyses on students from Fall 2021, comparing grade data in WI courses this semester versus previous semesters (from the Fall 2016 AY to the present). Goldpaint found that the DFW rate among all students increased from Spring 2020 on. She noted that 44,500 students have taken WI courses in the time period studied, and that there was exponential growth in enrollment during the period. The DFW rate had been on a downward trend prior to its Spring 2020 increase. Goldpaint found these other major trends:

- Transfer students have a higher DFW rate.
- Female students have a lower DFW rate.
- Non-minority students have a higher DFW rate than minority students. However, there was an “inequitable rise” in the DFW rate among minority students in the 2020-2021 AY.
- First-generation college students also saw an uptick in DFW rates.
- CLA and COTA both saw a huge jump in DFW in Fall 2021.

Goldpaint noted that many variables may have contributed to the increased DFW rate, including the switch to AMI, discrepancies in grading, and a rise of personal issues.

Several committee members posed questions about the data and its trends. Estrada asked about differences between students earning Ds or Fs and students who withdrew from the WI courses. Hatami requested a regression analysis to see variables. Deutschman asked about an apparent “spike” in F, D, and NC grades in Fall 2021 after we reinstated the GPE, which seemed like the opposite of the expected outcome. Goldpaint disputed the phrase “spike,” characterizing it as a “small uptick.” Aubele asked Goldpaint what she thought our committee should take away from the data. Goldpaint replied that it’s difficult to draw distinct conclusions

from the data set. Future semesters should paint a clearer picture of how students are faring. She also emphasized that we don't have true control and experimental groups. For that, we would need years of students "failing" the GPE and then going directly into WI courses.

The discussion turned to the fate of the GPE, as Johnson invited Brown to discuss what she learned from the Academic Senate and the "clarification memo" on the new policy. The new rules struck down graduate students being governed by GEAR, meaning that we have to re-open policy to remove the graduate student pathway. CEPC and GEARC will join to craft new policy. The Senate EC did not take a stand on the GPE, but CEPC may. Brown suspects that the Provost favors elimination of GPE as part of a broader trend toward eliminating the SAT and other standardized admissions tests.

Johnson urged the committee to revise the policy in time for it to take effect by Fall 2023. CEPC will have to act very quickly in Fall 2022, so Johnson encouraged the group to have an alternative proposal by October. She also encouraged the committee to clearly think through any innovative ideas like online modules. Brown added that the CEPC is not required to take our recommendations seriously, but they are likely to. We should use our influence. Once the policy gets to the Academic Senate floor, it can be slowed down by amendments.

Klink shared questions being asked at the English council about class size and online instruction. She encouraged the committee to put forth ideas about best practices.

Klink also brought up AB 928, which aims to streamline the transfer process for California students in part by unifying UC and CSU GE pathways. Brown replied that we can't wait for changes in GE to write a recommendation. We need to ensure that faculty and staff who are invested in writing and have experience facilitating it influence the policy. We will retain our WI courses. We can specify the maximum number of people in the courses, write specifications for online iterations of courses, and make other recommendations. Brown also reiterated that our WI offerings put us in much better shape than campuses who fulfill GEAR only through tests.

Klink praised Brown's leadership and encouraged creativity in developing new policy.

While acknowledging that the GPE is a flawed, perhaps easy test, Brown asked what will happen to the roughly 700 students in need of help that it regularly "catches." She noted in hindsight that it should have been called a "writing sample" rather than a "test" when it was created in 2012.) Lindau asked whether students might simply submit a writing sample from a class instead of generating it in the GPE testing situation. We would have to create some way of verifying that it is the student's work. Ramirez responded that writing instructors might help students create a portfolio of, say, two sample writings with early drafts and a cover letter. These could be submitted for holistic review by three readers who would decide whether to advance students. Ramirez agreed that some students need the extra help of a portfolio course. Johnson and Hatami suggested early diagnostic exams or assessments of writing skill in courses.

Baker asked whether testing would continue in AY 2022-23, and Johnson replied that it would until we have a replacement policy.

The committee considered an unconventional waiver request from 21-22-QK. The student took the GPE in November and earned a 9. A score of 11 is required to move into a WI course. QK22 asked for re-check of reader's scores, which still did not yield a high enough score. She then complained about how the exam was proctored, saying she had been given insufficient space to write. She asked to see her exam, but that is against practice in the interest of anonymity and equitability. She then claimed that she was mis-identified, but Estrada confirmed ID was correct. A fourth scorer still did not pass her exam. She complained to Student Affairs and gained an audience with Vice Provost regarding this issue. 21-22-QK is an honors student, and submitted a number of writing samples to prove her ability. Johnson explained that the student is requesting an exception to the policy, and that it would not set a precedent. The proposed resolution was to allow her to submit her GRE score. If she earned a 4, the committee would agree to waive passing the GPE.

Aubele asked why the student should not be asked to re-take the GPE. Pastrana added that the next test is June 2, and that the student could retake it and have results soon. Johnson replied that according to GEAR policy, students cannot retake the GPE, but they can substitute an alternate test.

Many committee members found the student's attempts to circumvent GEAR policy distasteful. Estrada summed up the sentiments well in the chat: "i don't think it's fair to give in to [the student's] demands just because she's complaining hard enough. giving her a 2nd chance at the GPE is extremely kind. had she enrolled in the portfolio class this spring instead of summoning an audience, i'm sure she'd be on track for the fall."

Lindau moved to deny 21-22-QK's request for the following exception to the GEAR policy: to substitute a GRE writing assessment score of 4 or above for a passing GPE score. The motion passed unanimously with Brown and Hatami abstaining.

Brown reviewed other waiver request cases.

Klink bade Pastrana farewell and happy retirement. The committee thanked her for years of service and expertise. She will continue her work for testing, doing online workshops and readings.

Meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Update from Brown via e-mail, May 13: Several additional waiver requests needed to be considered before the semester's conclusion. On BeachBoard, members voted to approved the waiver requests of 21-22-VP, 21-22-OV, and 21-22-HS.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Lindau