

MINUTES

GWAR Committee

ZOOM Conference

1:30 – 3:00

Meeting Number 3

October 2, 2020

In attendance: Joseph Aubele, Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Annel Estrada, Noah Golden, Sarvenaz Hatami, Isaac Julian, Elizabeth Lindau, Tina Matuchniak, Shabnam Sodagari

The meeting was called to order at 1:46 p.m. A few members were late due to an issue with the e-mail announcement.

The committee motioned, seconded, and approved the meeting agenda and the minutes from the September 18, 2020 meeting.

Announcements: Brown announced that Lizette Rojas, an analyst employed in Kerry Johnson's office will join next week's meeting. She analyzed statistics from past GPEs looking at demographic information, and has just given the report to the Provost.

Sub-committee updates: The Writing Intensive sub-committee met once and worked on a pathway for designating WI courses. The approval process and documents thus far are based on those of GE. The committee is creating a rubric to help adjudicate whether a course is ready to be designated as writing intensive. The sub-committee hopes to have a report by the next full committee meeting.

No one is on the GPEAC yet, but a small roster of people have been nominated to serve.

GWAR Coordinator's report: Since COVID-19 cases shut down what little on-campus activity was happening, we may need to reconsider alternatives to the on-camera requirement for the online GPE. Things could change too rapidly for us to accommodate students who cannot or will not be on camera.

Brown asked whether we should waive or simply eliminate the GPE due to continued disruptions. Committee members offered a variety of suggestions and perspectives:

Golden inquired about the percentage of students who pass the WI courses after placing in them through the GPE. This question was echoed by other committee members later in the discussion. Lindau asked whether there was a way to see how this number changes with no GPE this year.

In the event that we waive the GPE, Matuchniak suggested that we offer other forms of writing support, and promote the opportunity for the portfolio courses.

Julian advocated waiving the exam to alleviate student stress.

Estrada brought up student perceptions of the GPE, and how timed writing in a test situation may not be the best indicator of writing ability. She also agreed that waivers were a good option, but reminded the committee what an administrative difficulty it has been to grant them. They created unintended consequences for advising and enrollment services. Brown replied that it may be possible to extend the waiver another semester, probably including summer. Matuchniak said that since the waiver is COVID-related, we should consider it separately from GEAR policy.

In response to questions from Lindau, Aubele explained how the GPE is evaluated. Readers are asked to look for “first draft” quality. They look for a combination of structure, mechanics, and argument. Aubele raised the issue of 7% of students who do not “pass” the GPE, and need additional writing instruction.

Brown expressed concern that waiving the exam again will make it difficult to reinstate. Aubele and Golden agreed with this. Waivers will mean that there will be a full year of students who have never had requirement.

Golden reiterated that decisions should be data-driven, and that the situation gives us an opportunity to see how things work without the placement exam and consider alternative models.

The committee also discussed the distinction between “writing instruction” and “writing assessment,” and the quality of instruction and assistance that happens in current WI courses.

Brown cautioned against putting too much pressure on the WI courses—they should not be students’ sole source of writing instruction.

Hatami and Golden suggested some quality control or guidance for WI courses and their instructors.

Brown said that many WI courses are required of the major, meaning that students could be passing on course content, but not necessarily on writing. Also, faculty in a student’s own department might be willing to pass student so as not to hold up graduation.

Matuchniak spoke eloquently about her experiences writing as a chemist, and how she developed skills through practice rather than testing. Her comments led to a conversation about a writing-across-the-curriculum approach, and a vision for meaningful, integrated writing for students, not just a one-and-done class.

The meeting adjourned at 2:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Ann Lindau