

MINUTES

GWAR Committee

1:30 – 3:00 on Zoom

Meeting Number 3

October 1, 2021

In attendance: Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Jason Deutschman, Annel Estrada, Noah Golden, Meghan Griffith, Sarvenaz Hatami, Eileen Klink, Elizabeth Lindau, Henry O’Lawrence, Chris Padron, Loretta Ramirez, Alexandra Wilkinson

The committee welcomed new Registrar Meghan Griffith from Enrollment Services and Loretta Ramirez, a new representative from CLA. Ramirez specializes in Rhetoric and Composition, and was recently hired as Assistant Professor. (Congratulations, Loretta!) Brown reported that we are still missing representatives from CED and COE but have an otherwise complete roster. Brown encouraged committee members to ensure the roster contains their correct information.

Baker reported on the recent **online and in-person GPE**, in which between 500 and 600 students tested. Of these, roughly 30 online test-takers had computer issues and needed a later make-up exam. The next exam is scheduled for Friday, October 29 and Saturday, October 30. The online exams will be administered on the former date to ensure that tech support is available to students. The registration deadline for this testing date is in mid-October, and Enrollment Services sent 4,000 warning letters to students on the day of the meeting. Brown reported that the GPE’s resumption has precipitated tons of student questions, which Estrada and Cynthia Pastrana are fielding via e-mail.

Lindau moved, and Golden seconded approval of the meeting’s **agenda**. The committee voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

Golden moved, and Wilkinson seconded approval of the **minutes** from September 17. The committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

The committee reconsidered **BMAC’s proposal for GPE proctoring** from the previous meeting, where a quorum was not present. Lindau read the motion that had been approved “to authorize BMAC to use student proctors for the GPE as the center sees fit.” Baker noted that it was important that any student proctors have completed their own GWAR requirement in order to protect the integrity of the exam. In other words, student proctors should not be scheduled to take the GPE themselves. In light of this, Lindau moved to authorize trained student assistants who have completed their GWAR requirement to proctor the GPE for BMAC students at the center’s discretion. Golden and Klink seconded simultaneously. The motion passed unanimously.

At 2:00 p.m. the committee was joined by **Dr. Richard Marcus**, faculty in the International Studies Department and Director of the Global Studies Institute (GSI). The GSI was formed in

2012, and in his capacity as its director, Marcus oversaw three syllabus studies investigating international education on campus. In the academic years 2012-13 and 2016-17, the studies looked for global or international learning outcomes. In each study, all of the syllabuses on campus (roughly 7,000 per academic year) were read against a “Global Learning Value Rubric.” Marcus trained research assistants to help read the syllabuses, and occasionally conducted follow-up interviews with faculty.

Of particular interest to the GVAR committee was Marcus’s 2018-2019 study, which included a survey of on-campus writing. (These data were not pursued in 2020 because of the pandemic.) He looked at every syllabus on campus and reviewed it for writing assignments. The study specifically looked for student learning outcomes (SLOs) related to writing; writing assignments given during the first three weeks of class; and a total of 5,000 words or more of writing. The results of this survey were disappointing, to put it gently. Only 20% of courses had writing SLOs, only 3% required 5,000 words or more, only 10% had writing instructional activities, and only 10% required writing in the first three weeks of the semester. More disturbingly, the courses designated “Writing Intensive” did not fare well by Marcus’s standards. Of WI courses, only 21% required 5,000 words or more, only 56% included writing instructional activities, and only 69% had writing SLOs. Marcus also discovered discrepancies between SCOs and syllabuses. In short, classes seem to change after they are approved as WI.

O’Lawrence asked whether findings could be shared with College Deans so that they could spearhead amendments. Marcus replied that he had shared the Global data only. He suggested that data on only one year is insufficient, and that a new study is needed to see what changes. Following that, it might become a “college conversation.”

Several colleagues asked whether the study’s design might fail to capture what actually happens in individual courses. Lindau asked about how the study determined whether the 5,000-word count was reached in a given semester of a course. Marcus replied that the syllabus readers tried to be as charitable as possible, but that the amount of writing assigned in CSULB courses still looks low. Hatami said that syllabuses often don’t tell us what’s happening in the course, and suggested asking for assignment rubrics. She also raised the perennial question of whether assignments teach disciplinary content or writing quality. Both Hatami and Wilkinson were shocked to learn that there are WI courses with no writing learning outcomes. In answer to Wilkinson’s query, “who polices this?” Brown replied that it’s our committee now.

Klink offered several insights. She discussed the difference between word counts and writing instruction. She pointed out that many faculty do not feel competent teaching writing. (Brown later elaborated that this is particularly true in disciplines related to technology, where faculty feel that writing is not their forte.) She noted that Assembly Bills 927 and 928 are moving through the legislature, and will alter General Education and make it based on the University of California model and California teaching credential. These changes will address reading and writing. The UCs require a full year of first-year composition. Here we have only one semester without a placement test mechanism. Klink also noted that the nature of what we define as writing is in flux in the age of “digital rhetoric.” Finally, Klink noted that teaching writing is time-consuming, and that composition instructors are overworked with the number and size of sections they teach.

In response to a question from Brown, Marcus shared that he had not compared his data to other campuses.

After Marcus's departure, Brown summarized the assessment of our campus based on this data as "excoriating." She said that there has been too much of a "wait-and-see" attitude, and that we have awaited decrees from on high rather than taking action. On the bright side, our revival of the WI application is a step in the right direction. These course offerings are likely to be strengthened rather than diminished.

Golden respectfully disagreed with Marcus's emphasis on a second set of data on campus writing. He likened this approach to "measuring the deck chairs on the Titanic." He made a convincing case that we should not wait for more research to try to improve writing instruction on campus. He urged the committee to work to "create a rich ecology of writing practices," and to shine a spotlight on best practices.

To that end, several committee members began discussing the possibility of workshops and trainings for WI courses in the Zoom chat window. Lindau suggested a simple forum in which successful and experienced writing teachers share a few of their best practices. Lindau expressed a desire for more inspiring discussions of pedagogy on campus. Brown expressed apprehension about trainings, saying that support for such activities no longer existed, and that she was concerned about overworking the committee. Hatami suggested online modules might be a solution. While there would be significant effort up front to create them, they would be a lasting resource.

Klink praised the current GVAR committee and encouraged them to ask for resources. She noted that other campuses have well-funded writing across the curriculum programs rather than a single overworked person organizing workshops. GVARC can't take on everything, and we need guidance from the Chancellor's office as well as stipends and allocations.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Ann Lindau