

MINUTES

GWAR Committee

1:30 – 3:00

Meeting Number 7

February 5, 2021

In attendance: Joseph Aubele, Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Jason Deutschman, Annel Estrada, Noah Golden, Sarvenaz Hatami, Elizabeth Lindau, Henry O’Lawrence, Benjamin Perlman, Shabnam Sodagari, Alexandra Wilkinson.

Approval of agenda: Aubele moved to approve the agenda, Golden seconded the motion, and the agenda was approved.

Approval of meeting minutes: Golden moved to approve the minutes, Estrata seconded, and the minutes were approved.

GPE Online Pilot for February 12, 2021: Brown reported that piloting an online GPE became essential when a number of graduate students complained about the lack of options for fulfilling their GWAR. The pilot will be administered through BeachBoard. 65 graduate students (mostly international) are registered—close to half the total number of students who were invited to take the pilot. Students are not being charged for the exam this time—in fact, they’re receiving a \$20 Amazon gift card for testing. Because of technical complications, only one reader will score the papers initially. If a paper does not “pass,” it will be downloaded and sent to a second, and perhaps a third reader via secondary means. It will then be adjudicated by the student’s department using a GWAR rubric. While this method is impractical for an exam in which thousands of students test, it can work for this smaller group. If a student does not pass, they can do a writing intensive training program in their department.

Baker brought up a number of questions that Brown addressed.

Q: What should we tell students who do not pass? A: If they are scheduled to graduate this semester, they’ll go through a departmental process. If they’re not scheduled to graduate this semester, they’ll take a portfolio/301 course.

Q: Students typically get 75 minutes to write, and are warned when 10 minutes remain. How should we convert this to BeachBoard’s “grace period”? Brown suggested making the exam time 65 minutes with a 10 minute grace period. (Hatami inquired about what the students will see at the opening of the exam, and Brown assured her of clear communication.)

Q: What should we do with the URLs that typically appear in our prompts’ source citations? A: Retain them, but omit the hyperlink.

Baker described other aspects of the exam. It will begin at 9:00 a.m. Friday rather than the traditional Saturday testing time so that ATS staff will be available for technical issues. The program will not open until exactly 9:00. As soon as students register, they will receive links to set up the Lockdown browser in advance. They should be ready to test as soon as the program goes live. Baker herself will go through the motions with the students so that she can troubleshoot any issues that arise. Students are allowed one sheet of scratch paper for outlining and notes. A variety of identification cards would be accepted to accommodate international students.

While the GWARC was meeting, Cynthia Pastrana and the testing office were doing a workshop on the GPE for students. Baker received questions from participants about whether they would be able to re-take the exam. While we typically offer this for a pilot, Brown answered no, as students will be too far along in their programs for us to accommodate second attempts.

Pilot Survey: Brown explained the survey that is distributed to students after a prompt is piloted. The survey is designed to assess the quality of a prompt, but Brown suggested adding questions about the process for taking the exam online. Golden suggested an open-ended question about the student experience online. Hatami advocated for a more general question about the GPE in addition to this. She also suggested asking students whether they would prefer a discipline-specific question. Lindau suggested the following wording in the chat: “Do you think this exam allowed you to display your true abilities as a writer?” Brown asked for any additional questions to be sent to her by 5:00 p.m. on Monday.

Subcommittees: Brown discussed recent changes affecting GE on campus, and their implications for our subcommittees.

The GPEAC, an official committee processed through Academic Senate, reports to GWAR. That committee helps to write the GPE. Because the exam will need to be retained in some form, new members and a chair are needed for that group. (1-2 current GWARC members are also on GPEAC.)

Brown discussed the work of the new Ad-Hoc Writing Intensive subcommittee. Along with Kerry Johnson, Brown found at a recent Academic Senate meeting that GWAR policy needs to be updated. WI courses are no longer GE capstones, and policy does not reflect this. The Academic Senate had authorized GWARC to form an ad hoc committee to examine the process for creating new WI courses. The subcommittee was also created to make formal recommendations to CEPC and the Ac Senate. (This was approved so that the whole policy didn't need to be re-opened, inviting public comment.) The deadline for new class creation passed before this work could fully commence. However, our authority to continue handling these courses has been renewed. Vice Chair Hatami has been deputized to run these meetings, as Brown is overburdened with committee service. Hatami has graciously agreed to take this on. The subcommittee needs to come up with process for approving WIs and then have recommendations for GWAR by April if they are to be on the docket for CEPC. Full meetings of GWARC can also occasionally be used for discussing ideas.

Brown expressed her wish that the subcommittee represent the campus. Noah Golden, Alexandra Wilkinson, and Ben Perlman volunteered for subcommittee.

Waiver petitions The committee considered three petitions.

20-21-NP's waiver was granted.

Two unusual petitions came before the committee, and sparked more discussion. Both came from current graduate students who do not meet GVAR by policy. If a graduate student earned a degree from university in a country where English is not the primary language, they are required to take the GPE. One petition (20-21-ZH), came from a graduate of a university in India, who presented a letter claiming their instruction had been in English. The other petition (20-21-BU) came from a student who had earned a degree at a university in Japan, but who wrote that he received his K-12 education in the United States and considered English his primary language. (The second petitioner had the support of his department.) The committee decided that to waive GVAR for current students would put the committee in the position of researching the language of instruction at different universities, and potentially fielding more requests like these from current students.

Both waivers denied unanimously. The student will still be able to take the GPE online next week.

The meeting adjourned at 3:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Lindau