

# MINUTES

## GWAR Committee Meeting

1:30 – 3:00

Meeting Number 9

March 5, 2021

**In attendance:** Joseph Aubele, Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Jason Deutschman, Annel Estrada, Noah Golden, Sarvenaz Hatami, Isaac Julian, Eileen Klink, Elizabeth Lindau, Tina Matuchniak, Henry O’Lawrence, Cynthia Pastrana, Benjamin Perlman, Shabnam Sodagari, Alexandra Wilkinson

**Approval of agenda:** Lindau moved and Aubele seconded to approve the agenda. The committee voted unanimously for approval.

Brown explained the recent [Chancellor’s Office recent Memo regarding GWAR](#). It discusses the “suspension” of single examinations that fulfill the GWAR. This language clearly applies to campuses with high-stakes tests, but it is unclear how the memo applies to CSULB’s blend of a placement exam and courses. While Brown does not think our examination is high-stakes, there may be reasons to discontinue it. The Chancellor seems to want to move away from examinations entirely. A vote on the fate of the Fall GPE may need to happen at our next meeting.

Brown added that data analyst Lizzet Rojas wants to present alternatives to the GPE based on other precursors (e.g., grades in high school, grades in other courses) and how they correlate with GPE performance.

Discussions of the CO Memo ensued. Estrada questioned the contention that the GPE is not “high-stakes.” Golden discussed this nomenclature from a K-12 perspective, explaining the differences between formative and summative assessments. He argued that the GPE is formative because it is for the purpose of placement. Hatami shared her expertise from ESL teaching, where the TOEFEL exam is considered high-stakes, as is anything that could impact students’ future opportunities. Hatami argued that the GPE is somewhat high-stakes because it has consequences for students. It is different than a midterm or a final. Klink compared these to math assessments, and reminded the committee that students are entering now without SAT or ACT scores. She

fears that the Chancellor will come up with assessments based on classwork. Finally, Matuchniak argued that the GVAR requirement is the thing that is high-stakes, and looked forward to Rojas's analysis.

The committee discussed **alternatives to the GPE** system for meeting the GVAR in the event that we are not able to administer an exam. Brown expressed concern about placement measures that depended on high school or early college performance, and about changing the rules for students who are already partly through their degree programs. Klink argued that any course-based means for meeting the GVAR will place this committee in charge of quality control.

Conversation turned to **enrollment caps in writing courses**. The courses are taught predominantly by lecturers who have as many as five sections. The committee seems to agree that this is too many students for one instructor to teach effectively. Aubele called the 35-person cap on WI courses "absurd," and urged the committee to advocate pedagogically correct policy. Klink replied that departments would protest against lowering the caps because it creates staffing problems. Wilkinson shared her experiences teaching for Family and Consumer Sciences. Her current courses are capped at 25, but she has been accepting additional to meet demand. She added that many these students need a lot of help. Brown explained that part of the current WI demand comes from students trying to take the courses at different times. Overall, GVAR standards are becoming degraded because of the GPE waiver.

Brown shared what she learned after the **recent meeting between the AVP and the Chancellor**. It seems that the Chancellor's Office would like to see the end of all mass testing. They're also open to the possibility of ending GVAR or transforming it into something else. Beginning in Fall 2021, GVAR will be an important topic of discussion across the CSU system. The dialogue will involve many stakeholders, and could take one semester or one year.

The discussion turned once more to the format and administration of the GPE. The perennial topic of cameras vs. no cameras came up first. Our campus is against the use of cameras in any form for testing. Klink inquired whether the bar exam uses facial recognition or cameras.

Brown explained two concerns about the GPE raised by Chancellor's office. One is bias in the prompts and scoring. Another is the \$25 charge to students. On the issue of bias in the testing process, Aubele advocated recruiting a more

diverse group of readers. Klink added that in the days of the WPE, readers came from every department on campus, and included community college faculty and high school teachers. We may have to eliminate this fee to satisfy the Chancellor's office. Aubele asked what this money is used for, and whether testing "breaks even." Baker replied that it pays for administrators, supplies, prompts, proctors, photocopy paper, readers, scanning, and programmers. She replied that the fund that pays for all of this continually cycles. Sometimes there is a surplus when students pay, but do not show up for the test. Brown suggested creating an option for students who can demonstrate need to receive help paying this fee. Klink added that 61% of our students receive financial aid.

Lindau pointed out that we have discussed many of the same issues regarding the online GPE for a full year, and issues with the format or very existence of the test for much longer. She asked when it would be possible to begin considering possible alternatives. Brown explained that the committee could propose new GWAR policy, but it will not be opened during the 2020-2021 academic year. We must await the outcome of the systemwide dialogue discussed above. Right now, our only options are to waive the GPE or change its format. Lindau suggested that radically re-thinking the exam format could simultaneously address some of the problems with exam integrity in the online environment, and it could minimize the potential for bias in the prompts. She suggested giving testers a choice between two prompts, building the potential for responsible internet research into the prompts, or giving the students documents to read, summarize, and implement. These things are easier to do with an online exam. Hatami and Klink agreed with these proposals. In addition to reading documents and responding, Hatami suggested that students could even watch a brief video. Klink thought a documents-based approach might also bring the pass rate down.

Brown reiterated that our next vote will be on whether or not to waive the exam.

Hatami reported on the work completed by the **Ad-Hoc Writing Intensive Course Committee**. She shared a form for WI course certification modeled on a similar form used for GE courses. Per Brown's instructions, the language about GE will need to be removed from the form. In response to a question from Klink, the committee discussed whether the courses should be lower- or upper-division. Brown advocated eliminating the LD option, and Deutschman

quoted the Chancellors' EO 665 confirming this. Hatami also shared a checklist for GVAR committee to use in reviewing courses submitted for WI. The committee unanimously approved the course document. Everyone was impressed with the ad hoc committee's work. They single-handedly restored Klink's faith in the university by creating such clear and reasonable forms.

Following up on previous waiver requests, Brown reported that more graduate students are asking to waive the GPE, increasingly with advisor support based on "special circumstances."

The meeting adjourned at 3:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Ann Lindau