

MINUTES

GWAR Committee

Meeting Number 10

March 18, 2022

1:30 – 3:00

In Attendance: Joseph Aubele, Eve Baker, Lori Brown, Jason Deutschman, Navdeep Dhillon, Noah Golden, Elizabeth Lindau, Henry O'Lawrence, Alexandra Wilkinson, Benjamin Perlman, Sarvenaz Hatami, Cynthia Pastrana, Annel Estrada, Loretta Ramirez, Chris Padron

The agenda was amended to correct the date of the meeting minutes to be approved. Golden moved, and Aubele seconded approval of the agenda. The committee voted unanimously to approve the agenda.

Golden moved, and Wilkinson seconded approval of meeting Minutes for March 4, 2022. The committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

Baker reported that the February GPE scores had been posted on students' records. The next exam scheduled for April 8-9 has more registrants than usual thanks to notifications sent out by Enrollment Services. A first batch of students has been notified that they're on hold until they enroll in Portfolio Course. Students are slowly realizing that the era of waivers has come to an end.

The committee discussed a waiver petition from IN22. The student misconstrued the GPE waiver as a waiver of the entire GWAR. Many students seem to share this student's confusion as evidenced by complaints to academic appeals and to administrators. In addition, IN22 believed incorrectly that ENG 317: Technical Communication, a course required for his major, was a WI, but it is not. (Some committee members wondered if it should be.)

Both Pastrana and Deutschman advised against granting the waiver. Deutschman pointed out that students have always mixed up the GPE and the GWAR. He also showed how a student's record clearly displays green check marks for completed degree requirements and red boxes for incomplete requirements. When students file to graduate, they are also told if they are missing requirements.

Estrada wondered whether students had received communication that waivers were for the exam only. Aubele argued that the committee cannot be responsible for inadequate university communications. We can't wipe away requirements for students. Padron helpfully located and shared the e-mail communication that

explained the implications of the GPE waiver, saying that he found the e-mail to be quite clear.

Goldman expressed sympathy for student, summarizing that existing confusion between GPE and GVAR was amplified by waiver. But the committee was in general agreement that the waiver request should not be granted. The committee moved, seconded, and voted to deny the waiver request.

The waiver request spurred a discussion of how communication to students might be improved. Brown said that many advisors are making requests on behalf of students after the “culture of permissiveness” that developed during remote learning. The committee discussed how GE requirements add to confusion. Deutschman added that there are several different GE patterns. WI is now a standalone graduation requirement. The tools for searching for graduation requirements make it seem that there are no Wis: they’re Category F. Estrada agreed, sharing a recent inquiry from an undeclared student about this very issue! Estrada noted that advisors are attempting to help student graduate without extending their stay or incurring additional cost. She also noted that classes with “communication” and “writing” can be misconstrued as fulfilling writing requirements.

The committee resumed its discussion of possible changes to the current GVAR policy, with the GPE, “GPE+,” and Writing Across the Curriculum.

One suggestion that emerged in the previous meeting involved online modules that would be completed alongside their WI courses. Brown shared the following questions about that proposal:

- “How long will students have to complete the modules successfully?”
Weeks? A semester? Hours? Is it a unit?”
- “How many times can they do it? If they can’t ‘pass’ it, what does that mean for taking the WI course?”
- “What will the module consist of and who will determine that students ‘pass’ it?”
- “Who will grade the modules?”

Wilkinson envisioned module that would work alongside WI course assignment structure, noting, for example, that initial writing assignments are due by week 3.

Golden envisioned modules that could review the writing process, reasons for writing, how to consider audience, and how to find and use library resources. He suggested that modules could help offer quality control in the WI courses—a

scaffold for writing-intensive instructors. He imagined the modules not as assessments or tests, but as a series of supports. Students could also return to them when assigned writing in other courses. Modules could be college- or even discipline-specific.

Brown described her partnership with business school librarian, who helps students with APA style and finding databases. That librarian suggested that these skills would be good for students to develop in advance of the WI course.

Ramirez shared her experiences using PackBack (<https://www.packback.co/>), a form of artificial intelligence that can assess student writing and give it a “curiosity score.” She reported being impressed with its ability to give students choose their language carefully, avoid plagiarism, and generally improve their writing. The program also gamifies the writing and revision process. While Ramirez did not think the program should be part of a WI course, it could be something that precedes it, perhaps as an asynchronous module.

Hatami envisioned a “flipped” model for integrating modules into WI courses. Such solution would answer all of the questions posed by Brown at the beginning of the discussion, as the course instructor would be the one doing the work. Hatami asked about the possibility of adding a unit to WI courses to reflect the increase in instructor workload. (Brown replied that there is no appetite for that at all, and it would be logistically impossible.) Hatami also mentioned the module-based Beach Mentor program as a possible source of inspiration. Cohorts watch and discuss videos of faculty-created content dramatized by professional actors and avatars. The program was funded through an NIH grant, leading Hatami to suggest the possibility of a grant proposal for funding new GVAR modules.

While open to the ideas and impressed by her colleagues’ innovation and creativity, Lindau voiced her general skepticism of online self-paced writing instruction. She expressed concern that the requirement to conform to an institutionally mandated model of writing pedagogy would undermine confident writing teachers. She also wondered whether funds available for improving writing instruction could go to hiring, training, and supporting instructors and giving them reasonably sized classes.

Brown also attempted to play “devil’s advocate.” She wondered whether faculty from “non-writing disciplines,” might be intimidated by modules. She also raised additional questions: What is the university willing to support? We could argue that if the GPE would go away, there are funds for writing across the curriculum that could be used. Do we need a universal license to something like PackBack?

Would the task of designing modules fall to colleges and departments? Will Canvas have the ability to “gamify” writing instruction?

A committee member floated the idea of a series of “badges” that have to be earned to help meet the GVAR. WAC is the ideal, but since it is unlikely to be implemented, we can provide extra experiences, including some face-to-face activities.

Golden concluded by saying that he does not want to completely “outsource” the teaching of writing to AI. He endorsed the idea of badges as long as they’re coupled with WI courses (or one of them is *for* the WI course).

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Lindau