

**Minutes of the GWAR Committee Meeting October 21, 2011**

**Number 4**

**1:30 – 3:00 PM USU-311**

In attendance: Rebekha Abbuhl, Leslie Andersen, Yu Ding, Gary Griswold, Nathen Jensen, Lucy Nguyen, Susan Platt, Bron Pellissier, Linda Sarbo, Sharlene Sayegh, Rick Tuveson, Mark Wiley

- 1. Approval of today's agenda (MSP)**
- 2. Approval of minutes of October 7, 2011 (MSP with amendments)**
- 3. Announcements**

- a. Welcome to new member Leslie Andersen, from the Library
- b. On November 18<sup>th</sup>, morning (exact time to be determined), rhetoric and composition scholar Nancy Sommers will hold a half-day workshop on responding to student writing. More information will be sent to the GWAR committee.
- c. Tom Enders informed Donna Green that the GWAR committee had a proposal to change the GWAR Committee membership so as to not include Enrollment Services. However, as it has not yet been brought to the Academic Senate, Tom will continue to agree to allow the Center for International Education to take Enrollment Service's seat on the committee. Lisa Vollendorf informed the GWAR committee that we can send the charge ahead to the Academic Senate even if we have not yet finished the policy. After discussion, the GWAR Committee decided that it would like to wait before sending anything forward to the Academic Senate.

**4. Subcommittee meeting with Dr. Lynn Mahoney**

- a. A subcommittee of the GWAR committee met with Lynn Mahoney on October 14<sup>th</sup> and discussed various policy alternatives. The alternatives are as follows:
  - i. Placement test to determine pathways, version 1: low scorers would take 301 A, a portfolio course, and then a GE capstone course certified as writing intensive (WI); mid-scorers would complete the GWAR portfolio course and the GE WI course, and high scorers would complete the GE WI course.
  - ii. Placement test to determine pathways, version 2: Same as version 1, except that we would not designate a particular GE capstone course as being writing intensive. Rather, we would work to enforce current GE language regarding writing in the "T" capstone courses.

- iii. Placement test to determine pathways, version 3: Low scores would complete ENGL 301 plus a GWAR portfolio course; mid scorers would complete a GWAR portfolio course; high scorers would be done. All mention of the GE capstone courses would be removed from the GWAR policy.
  - iv. No placement test: All students would be required to take a GWAR portfolio course. A variation of this approach would be to offer different tiers of portfolio courses (struggling writers, for example, could choose a portfolio course that is more geared towards language acquisition).
- b. Lynn provided helpful feedback concerning our proposals:
- i. She stated that it would be beneficial to keep some kind of placement examination, as it would help identify struggling students in need of extra assistance. A diagnostic is also useful for standardizing the pathways that students take. It was noted that there could be some mechanism to allow exemptions to the diagnostic.
  - ii. She noted that requiring all students to take portfolio courses would involve the oversight of a lot of courses. In particular, approximately 7000 students a year would require portfolio courses. Departments would have to develop these courses, which might be problematic given the current resources, and there is also the quality control issue.
  - iii. Lynn's ultimate recommendation was that we should do the following:

Diagnostic (GPE) to determine placement into pathways  
 Low scorers: 301A, portfolio course, GE "I" course  
 Mid scorers: portfolio course, GE "I" course  
 High scorers: GE "I" course

The majority of GE courses are considered "I" courses (the other two, Advanced Skills and Service Learning are still very few in number). This approach would entail enforcing GE language that these courses be held to a cap of 35 students. She noted that only a small percentage of these courses have very large enrollments. About 20% have 51 students or more. We could give departments some time to bring their enrollments down to be in line with E policy.

- c. After the subcommittee meeting, a few additional points were made:
  - i. The GE policy does not treat "I" courses any differently from the other GE capstones (they are held to the same cap of 35 students

and the same word count). So, we can't specify that students take an "I" course, as any capstone course (theoretically) would meet the criteria.

- ii. Another issue that was raised is that the university requires a D or better in the capstones, so enforcing a C or better in each capstone (which is what we are proposing) might be difficult.
- iii. Lynn's recommended approach would entail putting a system of prerequisites into place. Lynn said that it would be possible to do.

## 5. Policy draft

- a. The committee was given another draft of the policy. Discussion ensued on the following points:

- i. *When students should be required to take the placement examination.* The current draft stated between 30 and 50 units for native students and the summer before enrollment for transfer students. The committee decided to revise the information for the native students to read: no earlier than 30 units and no later than 60 units. We could also set testing holds at the semester at which students achieve 50 units if they have not taken the placement exam (this would be an administrative manner and would not be in the policy itself).
- ii. *Whether we should seek to enforce the GE capstone enrollment caps of 35 students.* David Dowell has stated that the enrollment caps would cost the university \$ 500K (as additional courses would need to be created). This led to a discussion of whether we should continue to pursue our goal of enforcing the caps, whether we should create a subset of GE capstone courses that would be certified as WI (and thus would be held to the cap), or whether we should just state that students should pass all three capstones with a C or better (with the understanding that some of the capstone courses would not actually be writing intensive given current practices at the university). Lynn suggested that it is not the GWAR committee's responsibility to enforce caps in these courses.
  - 1. A suggestion was made to: (1) strengthen the diagnostic; (2) keep the same pathways in place that are mentioned in the current draft; (3) drop any mention of "writing intensive" capstones or enrollment caps for those courses; and (4) state that students pass with a C or better in these courses.
  - 2. It was noted that this approach does not have the "overlay" problem identified earlier. However, it was also noted that this approach may do little to change the current system (i.e., huge capstone courses that require very little writing).

- iii. *How a new diagnostic would impact course demand.* A question was raised as to how a new diagnostic would impact the number of portfolio courses needed, as a new “more rigorous” diagnostic could potentially alter the current passing rates (which are currently in the upper 90s). It was noted that some native speakers that would pass the WPE may not pass the new assessment, but at the same time, some non-native speakers that would not pass under the WPE may pass the new assessment (due to the greater emphasis on content and organization). Overall, it was noted that the passing rates may not change dramatically. However, we need more data on this. Susan will bring in pass/fail information on the CLA, while Rebekha will look into the pass/fail rates at universities using more rigorous writing assessments than the WPE.
- iv. *Whether we should require that students pass all GE capstones with a C or better (instead of the current D).* The GWAR committee is making a commitment to writing instruction at this university, and since the GE capstones (in theory) are writing intensive, we could require students to pass with a C. We also need more data on this: What percentage of students currently receive Ds in capstone courses? How many capstones do students on average take? Rebekha will contact Van Novack to get this information.

## **6. GWAR Coordinator’s Report**

- a. Lynn Mahoney asked Tom Enders to work on programming prerequisites for portfolio courses, as advisors now have to do this manually. The program cannot handle a “C” grade in a particular prerequisite course; it can only say that a student took a course or not. Linda will have to do the grade check manually.
- b. There was another inquiry from College for Health and Human Services concerning their interest in creating a GWAR course (Family Stress and Coping, 319 i). Linda sent James Koval information on GWAR portfolio course criteria. The GWAR committee will need to talk about online GWAR courses, as this course has the option of being online.
- c. A Waiver was presented to the committee and was passed.

## **7. Adjournment**

Respectfully submitted,

Rebekha Abbuhl

(These minutes were approved on 11/4/11.)