

## Committee on Academic Policy

### Meeting Minutes

Monday, 02-15-2021, 1:00 – 1:50 pm

### Meeting #12

Meeting held over Zoom due COVID 19 restrictions.

In Attendance: J. Dudle (Chair), A. Heinricher (Provost's office), A. Hall-Phillips, J. Rulfs, S. Zhou, J. deWinter (Secretary), O. Pavlov, Ryan Candy MA '21, Sam Levitan '24, A. Palumbo (visitor)

- Approved Minutes for meeting #11.
- Guest Andy Palumbo has brought forward a motion to adopt a test-blind undergraduate admissions policy for a five-year pilot period.
  - WPI has a long history with test-optional admissions. More institutions, because of Covid-19, have adopted test-optional or test-blind admissions policies. These tests are gameable, and it disadvantages those of lower income families, first generation college students, BIPOC, and so forth. Testing is not part of the larger conversation of admissions when considering students. WPI has a lot of data about successful admissions policies without tests. The movement toward test-optional and test-blind admissions is accelerating nationwide. We have the opportunity to pilot test-blind admissions to further our admissions assessment processes, attend to inequalities in the testing systems, and further WPI's innovation.
  - CAP asked for more information on the admission processes: A. Palumbo provided the following information: The process starts with reaching out to departments to understand the requirements. In the past, admissions largely used test scores to sort students; however, this was a lazy sort which places people on the plot. The problem with these tests: they attempt to trick people and don't account for the approximation of knowledge. At WPI, we are already sorting students without test scores. WPI is trying to reduce cognitive bias while diversifying admissions. Based on an analysis with expert, admissions flipped the process, trying to understand the person. Then after looking at the student, looking at transcripts. It's not a perfect process but has been thoughtful. WPI can handle the current volume by giving each student application at least two reads and committee discussion if needed.
  - CAP expressed a potential concern of increased applicants. A. Palumbo explained that they will likely not see this increase because that increase tends to happen when a college transitions to test-optional admissions. At WPI, there are 3 primary aspects to admissions: academic rigor (grades rather than GPA), HS profile (what the students took within a curriculum), personal index (fitness for WPI). The admissions office has already accounted for the time required to review applications in this manner because the test score doesn't go into the matrix.
  - Sam Levitan expressed from his first-year student perspective that one of the first things that he and his peers did was look for a score criteria at different locations. The test-blind policy sounded unrealistic and future work needs to reassure

students who are applying. A. Palumbo explained that this is part of why we are moving to test-blind rather than optional, so that we can completely reassure students that those scores do not matter as much.

- J. Rulfs noted that a test-blind policy takes away an option for applicants to submit test scores that the applicant may feel demonstrates their aptitude. A. Palumbo noted that test scores are not currently used as an academic credential, because it is only 4 hours of taking a test on a weekend morning. Test results are also linked to power and privilege. Admissions policies are a choice about ways that we, as an institution, think about how to ethically admit students.
- CAP inquired as to why don't we interview people? A. Palumbo explained that we held optional interviews for about 600 students this year. These are informative and not evaluative. The question about who has access and barriers to interview opportunities would shut the door on so many students who want to arrive.
- It appears, based on first year student performance analysis, that non-submitters of test scores have greater academic challenges (6.2% of submitters struggle in the first year versus 12.2% of non-submitters struggle). Yet at graduation, they are succeeding and graduating at approximately the same rate. Thus, it is important to support students through appropriate resource management.. A change in the admissions policy would be intended to attract those students who don't think to apply because they think that they are not good enough.
- A. Hall-Philips: The proposal notes that CAP would evaluate the 5 year pilot – how would this be done? A. Palumbo turned to CAP to ask what we would need to order to evaluate this. A. Heinricher argued that CAP should be involved in the design as well as the assessment (along with IR and Admissions). What data can we collect or has been collected about test optional that can inform how we think about this pilot test method. Some of the early data looked at “who” was choosing not to submit scores, with the goal of diversifying students. When we went test optional, we had two groups that we could compare. With test-blind, we do not have two groups that we can compare. We can ask students, after admission, to share their test scores for research only (after the WPI and Student decisions).
- J. deWinter: happy that we are moving in this direction—testing is part of a testing industrial complex and have been shown to be classist and racist. Question about how data would be collected and how the research questions would be formed. If this was not successful, then how would we revert? This is a 5-year test to see what the retention and graduation rates are. A. Heinricher suggested an 8-year study with regular reports, with a 6-year graduation rate as an important metric.
- CAP noted that starting a new admissions policy in a Covid-19 year may not be ideal. A. Palumbo explained that we have already identified an inequity, so why wait for ideal contexts to deal with a problem that we already know.
- CAP will consider the proposal and pose questions with a vote to follow.

- Meeting adjourned at 1:51pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer deWinter

