

## **University General Education Committee**

### **Minutes from meeting of November 18, 2022 in James Union Building, Room 100**

**Voting members in attendance:** Keith Gamble (chair), Leon Alligood, Nita Brooks, Janet Colson, Rebecca Fischer, Mark Frame, Virginia Hemby-Grubb (via Zoom), Rachel Kirk (via Zoom), Ann McCullough, Scott McDaniel, Amy Sayward, and Cheyenne Sweeley.

**Voting members absent:** Warner Cribb, Sydney Fischer, Terry Goodin, Yi Gu, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Angie Hooser, Sungyoon Lee, and Keely O'Brien

**Ex Officio:** Christopher Brewer, Jeff Gibson, and Susan Myers-Shirk

**Others in attendance:** Christina Cobb, Christabel Devadoss (via Zoom), Anna Kate Holt (via Zoom), Tammy Melton, Deb Perry, and Kristen West and Elizabeth Wright

#### **Introductory matters**

Keith Gamble, chair of the University General Education Committee (UGEC) welcomed the committee and asked if there were any edits to the minutes from the last meeting. Tammy Melton asked if there was a quorum present. Having ensured that there was, Gamble asked again about the minutes. There being no revisions, the minutes were considered approved. He then focused on the business of this meeting, which was to discuss the assessment reports from the legacy General Education program.

#### **Review of legacy curriculum assessment**

Susan Myers-Shirk, General Education Director, then reminded the committee that under the legacy program, three competencies are measured by three departments. ENGL 1010 had been assessed for ten years, and ENGL 1020 was assessed for a period of time. MATH 1710 and COMM 2200 are the other courses assessed. Each department developed its own process and method: Mathematics uses common questions in an exam, COMM 2200 using a common rubric to grade, and English collects assignments across sections that compensated faculty then evaluate using a rubric. She also mentioned that the California Test of Critical Thinking is used by the university as an assessment, and MTSU scores better than the national average on that test. Mark Frame pointed out that nationally the scores on the California test are going down, but Myers-Shirk states that in 2018-19, MTSU moved above the average after being below it for more than a decade. Those scores have been trending down since then at the same rate as the national average.

Gamble then turned the meeting to the reports provided by the departments. Rachel Kirk states that the reports were detailed and well-organized. Gamble affirmed that these reports have been done well in meeting their purpose under the legacy curriculum.

#### **Discussion of assessment methods for the new curriculum**

Frame asked if students could be compelled to take an exit exam in order to graduate. Chris Brewer (Assistant Vice Provost of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Research) stated that they could not, unless the Board passes it as a graduation requirement. Frame pointed out that other universities do

require it, and that an effective means of evaluating the new General Education curriculum is needed. Myers-Shirk also mentioned several potential incentives, including food vouchers and including the score on the official transcript. Brewer added that even if it were to become an MTSU requirement that the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) has a list of seven criteria (e.g., distance from campus, disability, and taking all on-line courses) excusing students from having to take a required examination as a graduation requirement. Frame suggested assessing an additional graduation fee that could be waived for all students taking the test. Brewer stated that the number of students taking the California test has not bounced back since the pandemic.

Cheyenne Sweeley asked whether the goal was to get more people to take the test, to raise the average of test-takers, or to have students take it seriously. Gamble stated that his understanding was that assessment was especially important to “close the loop”—use assessment results to improve instruction across the new General Education curriculum (which doesn’t happen with the current legacy curriculum). He stressed that this discussion—about how to assess the clear set of outcomes and how our courses will meet these goals—is a wonderful outcome of the development of the new outcomes and model for General Education. He then stated his preference for embedded (in-class) assessment, which draws on students’ desire and incentives to do well in their courses and is therefore more likely to be accurate.

Sayward said that she was sad that the committee and university community had not embraced the idea of an integrative seminar as part of the new General Education curriculum, which would have provided a clear place in the curriculum for embedded assessment. Myers-Shirk said that she had suggested a General Education integrative seminar as a possible Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) for our next cycle of SACSCOC assessment for this reason. Gamble saw this as a natural outgrowth that would follow the launch of the new General Education curriculum and its first round of assessment.

Gamble then asked if there were other thoughts on what we can learn from the new assessment plan and how to close the assessment loop. Frame stated that the California test breaks down scores into inductive and deductive reasoning. He suggested that we might parse out similar categories (which would be distinctly and uniquely measured) in the redesigned General Education curriculum and assessment. This would give UGEC a good starting point for improving courses aiming at that outcome. Myers-Shirk stated that in the first round of assessment, she expected adjustment of the rubrics and then subsequently calibrating some of the outcomes to the California test to understand what our students are learning about critical thinking. Frame stated that advertising that our students test above the national average on critical thinking would make happier employers.

Myers-Shirk returned to the legacy curriculum and highlighted that the reports before the committee did a very good job of closing the loop within what they are doing. They included a section on how they give feedback to faculty and how they will adjust what they are doing in the upcoming year.

Gamble said he was looking forward to all departments participating in this type of assessment. Sayward suggested that the True Blue Center should be able to pull together all of the courses in a category (rather than a single department under the current legacy curriculum assessment) and help faculty and departments figure out what the assessment data means and how to make improvements. Myers-Shirk said that she hoped, additionally, that True Blue Center microgrants could be used to give faculty the opportunity to take a deep dive into their own course and then share the results. Gamble illustrated this by explaining that a faculty member teaching Microeconomics, whose students are

performing really well in achieving the outcomes, would have a lot to share in order to elevate instruction throughout this course. This is something that the current legacy assessment does not promote.

Jeff Gibson stated that the thought that timing (when the assessment data is available to departments and faculty) will be important. The initial plan was to have prior year's data by August so that it can be integrated into course design and faculty syllabi. Frame and Christina Cobb stated that a similar timeframe would be preferable.

Gamble wound up the meeting by appreciating the work of the departments who consistently reported under the legacy General Education curriculum but looking forward to how assessment will improve under the new curriculum model and assessment plan.

Myers-Shirk concluded by updating the assessment plan's development based on the committee's input from the previous meeting. The updated plan has been reorganized by direct and indirect measures and includes a recertification process. There has also been a lot of discussion about sampling that will be shared at a subsequent meeting. Following up on the model suggested by Severn in the previous meeting, the Implementation Team identified that there are now 743 students who have completed 38-41 credit hours of General Education courses. So if the True Blue Center were to pull one assignment from each of their General Education courses, that would equate to 2,100 assignments per semester. The team was also exploring the possible use of incentives and a revised assessment plan draft that will be circulated to the committee, which can then provide comments on-line in a shared document. She hoped to have this available by November 22<sup>nd</sup> and have it open for ten days of UGEC comment. Gamble stated that UGEC members would surely be able to provide this feedback and suggested that this on-line feedback be in place of the December 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting that was on the UGEC schedule. There was general consensus on this proposal, except for Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand (whose discontent with the lack of a meeting at the beginning of finals week was registered through Frame).

### **Review of upcoming UGEC work**

Gamble indicated that in the first spring semester UGEC meeting, he expected updates on the proposal submission process and on the work with department liaisons. He also hoped that UGEC might be prepared to review the first round of proposals, which makes having quality feedback on the assessment plan particularly pressing.

Myers-Shirk explained that the first workshop for department liaisons (from all departments that have a course in the legacy curriculum and from all departments that have expressed the desire to propose a new General Education course). The next workshop will be on high-impact teaching practices, and the third is now planned to focus on "Developing a Strategic Plan for Your Proposal." In the spring semester, there will be a kick-off event, and then the departmental liaisons will divide into mini-FLCs (faculty learning communities) to talk and work through the process.

Myers-Shirk also explained that there had been work on developing the Curriculog workflows, which were almost done. There was some discussion about what level of detail UGEC members required or desired in the course proposals, but ultimately, the answer to that question will be developed through UGEC's collective work in the spring semester, which is not a very comforting answer for the liaisons

currently crafting proposals. Myers-Shirk stated that new course proposals will likely need a greater level of specificity.

In response to a question about UGEC feedback on proposals, discussion followed about the new requirement (developed last year in draft by the Course Approval Subcommittee) that UGEC will provide specific feedback to all proposals that are lacking in some aspect of the proposal with the goal of improving the proposal so that the new course can be added. Frame asked if there was a way for the committee to revise its language to clarify this new process, perhaps something like “revise and resubmit” rather than “reject.” Sayward suggested that UGEC could table the proposal and communicate with the proposer rather than voting the proposal down and requiring a resubmission. Gamble emphasized that when UGEC votes against proposals that reasons for that negative vote are required.

Gamble, replying to a question, answered that he envisioned the future General Education curriculum would have more courses and that some departments might offer just one or two sections of a General Education course, creating a lighter and more diversified curriculum than the current curriculum.

Myers-Shirk emphasized that she welcomed all questions about the proposal process, despite being seen as a “mythical figure” by some. She also hoped that some liaisons and others might start attending UGEC meetings to observe and better understand the process moving forward. She also reminded the committee that \$2,000 per course will be provided to legacy departments to be used as they desired to facilitate the new course proposal process; \$1,500 will be provided for developing new courses. Gamble reminded UGEC members that they would start getting Curriculog notices about new course proposals, and he encouraged them to set their notifications to a weekly digest to make these emails more manageable.

#### **Approval of legacy curriculum assessment reports**

Gamble asked for a motion to accept the assessment reports provided under the legacy curriculum. Frame made the motion, which was seconded by Sayward and that passed unanimously 11-0-0.

#### **Conclusion**

Gamble asked if there was new business. He reminded the committee that the next meeting would be on January 27<sup>th</sup> at the new time of 12:30 p.m. in JUB 100. The meeting then adjourned at 3:16 p.m.