

Undergraduate General Education Committee Meeting

18 February 2022, 2-4 p.m. CST via Zoom

Voting Members: Amy Sayward, Lando Carter, Leon Alligood, Terry Goodin, Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Scott McDaniel, Deana Raffo, Sungyoon Lee, Laura White, Janet Colson, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Rachel Kirk, Keely O'Brien, Mark Frame, Keith Gamble, Ryan Otter

Ex Officio: Susan Myers-Shirk, Amy Aldridge-Sanford, David Carleton, Jeff Gibson

Others in Attendance: Katie Brackett, Brian Frank, Kari Neely, Kate Holt, Beth Wright, Christabel Devadoss, Louis Woods

Introductory business

Lando Carter, the committee chair, welcomed the committee's members. He framed the work of the meeting as preparing to distribute the models for distribution to the university community for a two-week comment window. He emphasized that during this meeting the focus would be on open discussion—in small groups and the whole committee—rather than formal motions and votes, however if any motions were needed, they could be made at the end of the meeting. The goal of this discussion was to reach broad agreement on the strengths and challenges of Model 2 and a strong rationale for sending two versions of Model 2 to the university community. Before starting these discussions, Carter asked if there were any corrections to the minutes from the last meeting; there being none, the minutes were approved.

Susan Myers-Shirk, General Education Director, then highlighted a change to the committee's schedule, shifting the meeting originally scheduled for April 1st to April 8th. She also cautioned committee members to plan on attending all meetings, including those currently marked "tentative" on the website (https://mtsu.edu/gen_ed/committee-meetings.php), including the meeting tentatively scheduled for May 6th.

Carter then introduced the next introductory item of business, which was having members express their preferences for the subcommittees that would be working during the university comment period. Myers-Shirk identified the four subcommittees and their primary tasks:

- The course-approval procedures subcommittee, which would draft an initial policy to be discussed by the committee and move toward approval.
- The assessment development subcommittee, which would draft an initial policy to be discussed by the committee and move toward approval.
- The assessment reports subcommittee, which would receive assessment reports from Communications, English, and Math and report to the full committee.

- The Outstanding General Education Instructor Award subcommittee would review the portfolios of the eight nominated faculty members (due March 16th) and make the award.

Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand asked about the change in procedure for the Outstanding Instructor Award from the previous year, and Myers-Shirk explained that the subcommittee making the award was actually a return to traditional practice. Gray-Hildenbrand also asked the subcommittees would meet during scheduled Friday committee meeting times or would have to be scheduled in addition to these existing meeting times. Myers-Shirk answered that the subcommittees might have to have additional meetings; she then sent a link to a preference poll. Mark Frame asked whether it made sense to begin developing course approval and assessment procedures in subcommittees before a final decision had been made about the model for General Education redesign. Carter replied that drafting ideas about how these processes might work in light of the committee's discussions to date can provide a helpful start to the conversation that the committee will have to pick up in earnest following the comment period. Katherine Brackett also reminded the committee that outcomes had already been approved, and those will be the basis of the course approval process. Myers-Shirk informed ex officio members that they could also register their preferences and stated that they would try to give each member their first preference.

Strengths and challenges of Model 2

Carter then reminded all participants that the discussions shared out with the entire group would help shape the communication strategy for the university comment period. Then people moved into break-out rooms for discussion on the first question:

*What should we identify as the strengths of Model 2?

What should we identify as issues that need further attention and feedback?

When the break-out rooms closed, Carter shared his group's assessment of areas of concern with Model 2, including whether it would be transfer-friendly, whether it would be difficult for advisors, whether it would require tracking, badging, or another system, whether there might be a stacking of major requirements within the Explorations area, and how the recent change in hours in the categories might have complicated logistics for this model. Brian Frank reported that his small group discussed what was meant by the model, and Amy Aldridge-Sanford said that there seemed to be questions still in need of clarification within the committee. Carter stated that further discussion in the committee today might help clarify some of these issues.

Brackett shared that her group identified the strength of the model to be how it addresses the values of student choice and flexibility while still having some continuity with the current curriculum. There was some concern about how the hours change might affect the crosswalk and objectives for the "Explorations" category and a sense that the communication with the university community should include contrasts between the current model and the proposed

models. Myers-Shirk said that it is a constant effort to balance between too much and too little background. Frank offered that readers seek insight more than information, and Carter suggested a control group before the university launch.

Amy Sayward shared that her group especially valued the flexibility of Model 2 (which could also be an advising challenge) but was concerned about how to get faculty buy-in on the redesign. The small-group conversation quickly turned to the advantages and disadvantages of Integrative Seminar and Pathways. Advantages of Pathways included that they would be easier to staff, could attract broader faculty interest, had more flexibility, and fostered greater interdisciplinarity. Myers-Shirk also added that the group had identified that Pathways had some synergy with the existing MT Engage program. Keith Gamble shared his group's discussion, identifying the model's strengths as the connections among disciplines, student choice, and the way in which learning outcomes shape possible student paths. They also discussed concerns and areas that needed further inquiry, including concerns that students might choose a narrow range of courses within Explorations, that the model might be difficult for advisors, and that there might not be sufficient resources from the administration to make it work well.

Pathways vs. Integrative Seminar in Model 2

Carter then called on the small groups to move back into break-out rooms for ten minutes to discuss

*What should we identify as strengths and weaknesses of the two version? (pathways vs. seminars)

When the group came back together, Carter shared his group's view that the strengths of Pathways are that they give students the "big picture" of General Education, that they promote connections across General Education better than an Integrative Seminar, that they could become a selling point for MTSU, and that their being optional would make it easier for transfer students. The challenges of Pathways are the faculty time and resources needed to create the coherence sought, the need for chairs and deans to buy in for scheduling, and the need for a coordinator and center to coordinate Pathways. On the other hand, Integrative Seminars have the strengths of being customized, providing practical and engaged learning that can "hook" students, and allowing faculty to design the best curriculum they can, but challenges are the potential lack of coherence and challenges of scheduling. Frank said that his group had many of the same things. He affirmed that Pathways give students choice and provide opportunities for cultivating compelling connections within General Education, but there are questions about logistics. Pathways also can be more easily scaled up to meet the needs of General Education than Integrative Seminars. He also pointed out that the cohorts created within an Integrative Seminar would not persist past the semester, but they would be more sustained within Pathways; and Integrative Seminars are more instructor-dependent. Finally, he advocated

changing the name “Pathways” to make it more distinctive. Carter stated that he particularly liked the phrasing that Pathways would consist of “compelling and connected choices.”

Brackett’s group thought that Pathways could be easier for faculty, as these courses may well already exist. A General Education Center would be an absolute necessity to foster and manage Pathways, and therefore some in the group thought that it might make sense to secure administrative support of such a center before moving forward. They thought that Integrative Seminars could be really appealing to students, and some courses might be created and others retooled—but the driving question was whether faculty would buy in to the philosophy and demands of the Integrative Seminar. Sayward reported that her group had persuasively highlighted the advantages of Pathways, including how they could make MTSU General Education distinctive (more important than being able to accommodate transfer students), how they offer both flexibility and opportunities for faculty to be creative and collaborative, how students would likely see Pathways as “value added” rather than another “requirement” (compared to the Integrative Seminar), how not having an Integrative Seminar allows for a course within Explorations that focuses on Communication, and how an Integrative Seminar might be put off almost indefinitely by students (thereby evading its fundamental purpose). Gamble’s group’s discussion had focused on the challenges of the Integrative Seminar, including staffing challenges, the difficulty of assessing several objectives in a single class, and the question of whether Integrative Seminars would be scalable to meet the needs of all General Education students. Challenges with Pathways included that since they are not required, it is not clear how they would make the new General Education curriculum distinctive. There was also concern that faculty can create Pathways but lack the authority to launch and sustain them, which could create challenges. Also, if faculty leave the university, a specific Pathway could well fall apart. Frank expressed some concern that the committee’s understanding of the Integrative Seminar was different than what is in Model 2.

One Model with Two Variations

Myers-Shirk then asked the committee to talk briefly about the reason that it is recommending two versions of the same model in order to assist with the communication of that choice to the broader university community. (Question: What should we identify as the rationale for sending two versions of the same model?)

Gray-Hildenbrand stated that most of the university community will not recognize what is going forward as the Model 2 that community members reviewed previously. Also, Model 2 offers the greatest flexibility and therefore was the best home for both Pathways and an Integrative Seminar. Myers-Shirk stated that there was a certain portion of the university community that did not want a wide open “Explorations” area with lots of courses and student choice, which would be a significant change from the current General Education curriculum.

Myers-Shirk stated that having Pathways only in Disciplinary Knowledge will make the process of making those pathways easier and more streamlined. It can also offer coherence and

simplicity for students. Including “Explorations” courses in a Pathway would mean that the courses in the Pathway could come from the same discipline rather than automatically and purposefully constructing a Pathway across disciplines.

Gamble commented that he liked Model 2 with its Explorations area because in looking at examples of innovative General Education curricula from other universities, this was where exciting and innovative courses appeared. He also expressed the opinion that Model 2 has some elements similar to the existing General Education curriculum, which will provide a level of comfort in the midst of the substantive change in the Explorations area. He did state, however, that Model 2 has some potential challenges, especially in terms of workability and staffing. Frank expressed the opinion that having two versions of one model might better communicate the clarity of the vision shared by the current committee. Ryan Otter similarly commented that this committee represents the faculty and should be developing a vision that it will share with the university community. Beth Wright also weighed in that the committee had done its due diligence, that students would be served by either model moving forward to comment, and that we do need a new name for the model formerly known as Model 2.

Sayward stated that she would like to see Pathways expand from the Disciplinary Knowledge category into the Explorations category in order to draw in the broadest set of faculty and colleges in order to get the level of buy in that many are fearing we won't have. Myers-Shirk commented that it might make sense to do that only after the redesigned curriculum has launched and had a year or two to get established and work out initial challenges.

Myers-Shirk then asked the whole group a final question, in terms of roll-out communication, is there anything you want to add that hasn't surfaced yet?

*Are there remaining concerns that need to be addressed now before sending the model for comment?

Frame asked whether it might be prudent to have administration preview the recommendation and reaffirm the commitment of resources to redesign before moving to the university comment period? Because lacking that, innovative redesign could not move forward. Amy Aldridge-Sanford stated that she had been sharing the proposals with the Provost and meeting regularly with Myers-Shirk and Katherine Brackett. Myers-Shirk agreed that another meeting with the Provost might be helpful. David Carleton warned against an incremental funding model, which has choked other ambitious curricular innovations in the past, especially since the committee had spoken repeatedly about this teaching needing to be done by full-time faculty members and not adjuncts, which will have a real budgetary impact.

Frank offered that the rearranging of credit hours that was approved by the committee at its last meeting might need additional thought. Sayward stated that if we flag it in our roll-out communications then we will receive comment from the university community on that issue and will be able to take that input into consideration in our subsequent decision-making.

There was a final discussion among committee members about whether the committee had or had not closed off other options moving forward now that it was forwarding two versions of Model 2 for university comment. Myers-Shirk clarified that the redesign does not require a university vote, simply feedback. The meeting adjourned at 4:02 p.m.