

## **University General Education Committee Minutes**

**March 4, 2022 via Zoom**

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

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

**Others in attendance**: Katie Brackett, Kate Holt, Betsy Dalton, and Kari Neely

### **Introductory matters**

Keith Gamble, Vice Chair of the General Studies Committee, welcomed the members of the committee, as Lando Carter, the committee's chair was not available. He explained that the minutes of the previous meeting were in the final stages of production and so would be reviewed at the next meeting. He then turned to Susan Myers-Shirk, General Studies Director, for subcommittee assignments.

### **Subcommittee assignments and semester schedule**

Myers-Shirk pointed out that she had sent everyone a link ahead of the meeting with the subcommittee assignments. She worked diligently to get place everyone on the subcommittee of their first or second choice, and she allotted design team members to the subcommittees to serve in an advisory capacity. Each subcommittee will elect its own chair, will have Myers-Shirk and Amy Aldridge-Sanford available for consultation, and will meet in March when the General Education models are out for university comment. Materials for the Outstanding General Education Teaching and General Education Assessment subcommittees will be forthcoming as soon as they are available.

Deanna Raffo asked what the committee's timeline was for the rest of semester. Myers-Shirk responded that everything was contingent on the committee's decision today about sending proposals out to university comment. But if the committee approved today to send the models out the Monday after Spring Break that the coming week would also include budget discussions with the Provost's office in line with the committee's instruction from its last meeting. She reminded the committee that a minimum of two weeks was required for public comment, and during this period there would be public meetings (on-ground and in Zoom), email feedback, and anonymous feedback, all of which would be collated and made available to the committee. That would leave the April University General Education Committee meetings (likely all of those currently scheduled) to work through the feedback, make changes, and possibly send its work back for another university comment period. The subcommittees need to complete their work by the end of the semester. There is also a May 6<sup>th</sup> committee scheduled, if needed, to decide (with a 2/3 majority) on the General Education redesign model. If the committee cannot complete its work by then, meetings can be held over the summer, but this would not be preferable.

### **Communications strategy and comment**

Gamble then opened discussion of the materials circulated ahead of the meeting, which will be circulated to frame the university comment period.

Rachel Kirk asked about the feasibility of integrative seminar and the state of the committee's discussion of this element. Myers-Shirk stated that the communications about the integrative seminar have incorporated the committee's input and will solicit additional university comment on this element. She then asked whether anything about the integrative seminar needed edits in the current presentation.

There being no specific recommendations, Raffo then made a suggestion about the communications related to pathways. She suggested that more examples of possible pathways at MTSU or from other programs might help people see and think about possibilities more effectively. Myers-Shirk thanked Raffo for that suggestion. Rebecca Fischer thought that examples would also help the campus community differentiate between pathways and integrative seminars, since the introduction, foundations, and disciplinary knowledge categories are identical. Myers-Shirk also stated that having the two presentations in different colors might help differentiate the two.

Jeff Gibson wondered out loud whether it might make sense to separate out the videos, with one addressing the big picture issues of process, resources, and what comes next—but with two separate, short videos, one with a focus on the seminar and one focused on pathways. Myers-Shirk thought this was a great idea; the first, overview video with shared elements could be watched first, and then the pair of short videos would highlight the differences.

Laura White complimented the work done so far but pointed out that the explorations comparison was not a clear comparison, which was a bit confusing. Myers-Shirk agreed, stating that they were trying to highlight the hours adjustment in this slide, so the slide should likely have a different title.

#### **Discussion on quality of data collected in comment period**

Ryan Otter asked what the big picture was for the university comment period. What is the goal of sending these models to the faculty at large? Is the committee seeking general or choice feedback? Myers-Shirk stated that they had been thinking entirely of the committee's obligation to bring these models to the university community for public comment, where people can raise concerns and make constructive suggestions that will be brought back to the committee and design team with the goal of reaching broad consensus between the campus and the committee on the work of General Education redesign.

Otter stated that he thought there was a specific request for feedback on the question of integrative seminar vs. pathways with a more general question about whether the campus community thinks that the work of the committee to date is going in the right direction. Asking for specific feedback would demonstrate the committee's focus and clarify. Gamble pointed to the "5 Specific Questions" slide and asked if Otter had suggestions about those specific questions. Myers-Shirk asked if Otter was suggesting a campus preference poll.

Otter suggested that the five questions head in many different directions. He suggested that the question about integrative seminar vs. pathways needed to be separated from the larger conversation. He was concerned that otherwise, the design team would have too much general and diffuse feedback that would make it extremely difficult to identify the actionable feedback that can best help the

committee reach conclusions about redesign. Gamble suggested that polling such a large community can be difficult. Myers-Shirk suggested that the committee might need to circle back to this issue.

### **General discussion on communications**

Kari Neely agreed with Gibson that the materials were dense—especially at the beginning and in the naming of the General Education objectives as A1, B1, etc., which are only labeled at the top of the slides and should not be termed in this way in the video.

Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand asked whether we had determined definitively that DegreeWorks could not be used to track outcomes completion and that another badging software, such as Badger, would be required (because that language is in the current communication as a recommendation). She agreed that leaving language in the communications that indicated that we had heard earlier university feedback about advising and workability and had a potential solution would be helpful.

Warner Cribb thought it was important to make clear that the committee may not choose either of these models but that whatever model moves forward will have to meet the new outcomes approved last year; this will help departments know that they will have new assessment obligations in any case. Myers-Shirk confirmed that this would be made more prominent. Cribb elaborated that there are statutory requirements for General Education that must be met and could be included in the front matter.

Gamble pointed out that in the pathways presentation there were two slides labeled “One Last Thing” and two places where the language “Model 2” is still in place. Gibson also suggested some small edits in the comments area of the Zoom meeting.

Myers-Shirk then requested that the committee circle back to Otter’s question about how to get better data by asking better questions. Sayward suggested posting the slide of five questions and asked whether the committee could avoid “poll-stuffing” by having to enter their MTSU username. Neely suggested that the order of the current questions seemed off, with the last question being the most over-arching. She also thought that the other four questions were meant to expose the potential problems with the models. She suggested broader questions instead, which Myers-Shirk thought was a good point. Sayward pointed out that none of the questions ask whether the respondents prefer pathways or the integrative seminar. And rather than the specific questions about program expansion and such, more general questions about the strengths and weaknesses of the two models might be better. Cribb pointed out that it would be the work of the Curriculum Committee, and not the General Education, would determine whether General Education credits could or could not be used toward major requirements. He also stated that the Curriculum Committee should be asked for specific comment on the models, as they will carry a significant workload as a result of General Education redesign.

Cribb also commented that he did not understand what was meant by “program expansion” in one of the questions, a sentiment echoed by Sayward. Myers-Shirk responded this meant not having an extremely large number of courses in the “Explorations” category, similar to the situation at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

Mark Frame, who identified his professional expertise in polling, asked what survey tool the committee would be using to gather data in order to get better data, both big-picture and specific. He specifically

suggested that we might want to conceptualize questions as a filter and decision tree, where a respondent's answer to one question leads to specific questions based on that initial answer. Brackett stated that she would love to consult with members on the committee on different survey options, but explained that the committee would have to accept feedback through a variety of formats—although a survey could be a useful part. Myers-Shirk elaborated that people attending the public forums, for example, could come to have their questions answered but could also then be encouraged to complete the survey. Frame elaborated that the Qualtrix software that Brackett was using could absolutely have decision-tree question types and that it also prevents multiple responses from the same IP address while preserving anonymity. Otter stated that this type of survey would be helpful but that members of the committee should take their responsibility as representatives of the faculty seriously and not expect consensus.

Otter expressed the hope that the feedback generated would facilitate the work of the design team and help the committee get to a final decision by the end of the semester. Cribb stated that he thought that the two models would help elicit evaluation from a variety of groups beyond the faculty, although this committee is charged with representing the faculty. He also reiterated the need to get to a final redesign question so that the committee could begin to assess the work of General Education, which has been on hold for two years now. Otter reiterated that the deliberative process has been real over the past three years, finally resulting in the committee sending forward two models that the committee believes are best for students and will get to the outcomes that have already been approved. Gray-Hildenbrand stated that she was in agreement and thinks that both pathways and seminars will be attractive to many in the university community, as they start the concrete work of looking at their courses and the new outcomes and deciding what they might want to redesign and put forward.

Frame highlighted Brackett's feedback in the chat about the significance of buy-in for redesign that is likely only from an iterative process. He pointed out that buy-in will be important in prompting course redesign and quality assessment. He worried out loud about whether sending the two models forward will create a sense of a false dichotomy. Otter reiterated that the committee has in fact engaged in a remarkable iterative process to this point and argued that buy-in will come from department chairs, who will engage their departments to maintain or expand their share of General Education seats in their departments' courses. Any redesign will generate 2-3 years of growing/adjustment pains, but 1/3 of all student coursework is at the General Education level and will require departments to engage if they wish to have those students in their classes. He expressed the opinion that sticking with the current program—even with new outcomes—seemed to be less “anti-change” than “anti-solution” to the issues that the committee has identified over the past three years.

Sidney Fisher, speaking as a student representative, stated that she hated the thought that it was even possible that there would be no significant change to General Education. Stating that she understood that politics, economics, and comfort could lead some to prefer no change, she emphatically stated that this would not help students' education. She stated that if General Education at MTSU is not made more valuable through the redesign process then it really is more suited to community colleges, as the current curriculum, which is a relic of the time when MTSU and the community colleges were in the same system, doesn't differentiate us at all from the community colleges. She emphatically stated that the General Education curriculum absolutely can and should be changed for the better. Gamble stated that the curriculum will have to change given the new outcomes.

Aldridge-Sanford stated that the administration is hopeful for a new university core that is different and that the Provost has been excited to see the work of the committee and these two models moving forward. She reminded the committee that Myers-Shirk and Brackett would be meeting next week with the Provost's office to talk through the finances connected with the two models. She also stated that the University Curriculum Committee is aware of the increased workload coming their way but that they volunteered for this committee assignment because they are absolutely committed to fashioning a university curriculum that's best for students.

### **Discussion of sending models for university comment**

As the discussion lagged at this point, Sayward moved that the communication about the two models that had been presented (incorporating the feedback received from the committee) be sent to the university community. The motion was seconded by Gamble. Both then accepted the friendly amendment, in keeping with regulatory requirements, that "for at least two weeks" be added to the end of the motion.

In discussion on the motion, Kirk suggested that the committee had not sufficiently explored the option of keeping the current General Education structure with the addition of an integrative seminar or pathway option. Gamble expressed the opinion that the current communications point out that this is still an option, and it might emerge from the comment period that this is favored. Cribb suggested that if this is truly a third option that it should be included in the information being sent out to the faculty. Discussion then ensued about whether Kirk's goal could be accommodated in the current motion or whether she wished to make a different motion.

Kirk then motioned that the committee send three models to the university community, including the legacy curriculum with a seminar and/or pathway option. The motion was seconded by Cribb.

Myers-Shirk stated that although the design team had crosswalked the legacy curriculum as part of the committee's consideration of it, that model was not nearly as polished as the other two. Gamble stated that while he was open to an adaptation of the legacy curriculum, which is still on the table, he would not support a separate presentation of this option to the university community. Fisher stated that the committee and design team had worked very diligently on all of these models, but that the legacy curriculum with pathways/seminars would, in her opinion, appear to students as the "same old thing" with a new "hoop" that had to be jumped through, rather than a redesign and rethinking of the General Education curriculum. Therefore she stated that she was strongly opposed to asking for public comment beyond the two models already approved by the committee.

Cribb thanked Fisher for her input and suggested that seeking formal feedback on the legacy curriculum at this point (which, he agreed was not off the table, in line with Gamble's point) would dilute the feedback that the committee was seeking. Gray-Hildenbrand agreed that committee should seek comment on two models, which will provide data on whether the "Explorations" category might prevent buy-in or whether advising is the key problem. But that we need that data first.

There being no further discussion on the amendment to the motion, calling for three models to be sent for university comment (rather than two), the vote was taken. 21% of voting committee members voted in favor of the motion, 79% against the motion, and no one abstained—so the amendment failed.

### **Discussion of length of university comment period**

Discussion then resumed on the motion. Cribb stated that he believed that two weeks was an insufficient time period for university comment, as most departments will have to schedule a meeting of its General Education committee and then develop a collective comment. He then asked Myers-Shirk if a four-week comment period would prevent the committee from completing its work before the end of the Spring semester. Gamble also asked Myers-Shirk if there was some indication that could be used to close the comment period that could still be accommodated within the current motion's language of "at least two weeks." In discussing possible timelines, the work of the design team, and the decision-making process required of the committee, Cribb stated his preference to give the university community four weeks to provide feedback, which would give the design team and committee a week less time to complete its work.

Cribb moved that the motion should be amended to state that the deadline for public comment would be four weeks following the release of the redesign communications from the committee. Gray-Hildenbrand seconded the motion. In the discussion that followed, Gamble expressed his opinion that four weeks was too long of a period and that two weeks was sufficient. Gray-Hildenbrand then quipped that other departments might not work as efficiently as Gamble's. She believed that a specific (rather than contingent) timeline was needed and that it should be longer in order to provide faculty with the time needed to process the information and make decisions. Fisher stated that she thought that a month might make sense, given that everyone would be coming back from spring break. Neely, who represents the Faculty Senate, agreed that a longer period could help to mitigate some feelings of frustration, hostility, and nervousness among the faculty. There being no further discussion, the voting members of the committee voted in favor of the motion to have a four-week university comment period by a vote of 68% in favor, 32% opposed, and none abstaining.

Gamble then asked if there was any further discussion of the amended motion on the floor—that communications about the two models (as modified by committee feedback) be sent to the university community for public comment for a four-week period (beginning with release date). There being no further discussion, the voting members of the committee passed the motion by a vote of 95% in favor, none opposed, and 5% abstaining.

### **Concluding matters**

Myers-Shirk asked that any further editorial changes be sent so that they could seek to integrate them as best as possible into the communications, which she will try to circulate to the committee one more time before it goes to the university community. She will also be sending details and reminders to members of the committee about events during the community response period.

Fisher then asked about how the information would be sent to students. Myers-Shirk said that there had been some discussion about whether the same information should be sent to students or whether it should be tailored more specifically. Fisher expressed the opinion that a different poll with slightly varied information would be preferable to cut down on confusion. She then expressed a willingness to work with Brackett and Myers-Shirk on this tailoring process.

Brackett asked for final clarification on whether the committee wanted a poll, as it had discussed earlier in the meeting. There was broad consensus in that direction. The committee expressed confidence in

the ability of Brackett to generate that poll and the availability of Otter and Frame to assist as needed. There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m. CST.