Gen Ed Meeting Notes, 3/19/2021
Notes recorded by Kevin Krahenbuhl

Attendance:
Committee Members: Tammy Melton, Ryan Korstange, Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Samuel Blumer, Kevin Krahenbuhl, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Lando Carter, Ryan Otter, Greg Nagel, Laura White, Warner Cribb, Mark Frame, John Sanborn, Rachel Kirk, Aliou Ly, Janis Brickey, James Piekarski
Ex Officio members: Susan Myers-Shirk, Chris Brewer, Steve Severn, Nita Brooks, Jeff Gibson,
Design Team & Guests: Michelle Boyer-Pennington, Katherine Brackett, Kristen West, Brian Frank, Meredith Funderburk

Approval of Minutes:
- Katie Brackett's name was misspelled and corrected
- Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand offers minor clarifications to how conversation was recorded to be clearer to the intent
- Minutes approved

Updates on Gen Ed Redesign
- Susan Myers-Shirk updates from many meetings to keep the committee informed
  o Dean's Cabinet, Quest 25, Chairs Council, Assessment Institute Update, 3 Q&As (with good attendance),
  o Good questions raised from Q&As
    ▪ Job loss – raised related to literature requirement (2 models do not specifically mention literature; 2/3 assume they're linked to open explorations) – what implications might this have on those who teach those courses?
      • We don't know fully as there are a lot of other parts (FY seminars, e.g. – pathways likely include part of literature *if pathways approved*)
      • Bottom line, it's hard to predict
      • Susan seeking tools to gauge potential impact of various models using a system
    ▪ Ryan Otter – not certain if such a software exists, anticipates it does but not certain if we have access to anything, through what we currently do have
    ▪ Susan notes we'll continue to monitor this and capitalize on it, if possible
    ▪ Jenna Gray Hildenbrand asks for clarity if spending our time to find this software is the wisest use of resources - in one of the group meetings, similar conversations have occurred in psychology departments, part of this might be creative and flexible imagination – impacts of if we don't have an innovative program
    ▪ Rachel Kirk suggested creation of a matrix across the pathways as an alternative solution for helping this conversation
    ▪ Steve Severn noted that if a program/college loses a line because, whatever it is, there will be a reduction in numbers there – in English, grad students/lecturers/tenure track faculty all teach these – if the line is taken off "required" line – enrollment would drop (first impact would be on grad students, other impacts would follow as needed)
    ▪ Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand suggests that the concerns, while real, do not seem as if there will be a decrease in number of Gen Ed offerings but more a reallocation

of them, asks for confirmation if that is the case – can these potentially impacted course just be modified to fit under the new framework?
- Steve notes that it depends a lot on what happens but the choices that are made here will have implications for some departments, hard to predict, but finding some idea about this is worthwhile
- Ryan Korstange noted that implications also may bear upon graduate programs
- This conversation will be continued at a later meeting
o Other questions included benefits of redesign and what kind of research there is on benefits
- Limited research because how these are defined vary notably
- AAC&U going to offer a Gen Ed happy hour regarding this to share with Susan
o Another question raised regarding content/skills emphasis
- Outcomes framed in terms of skills; Models framed in terms of content
- Some shared the idea that a public conversation around this would be helpful – but by clarifying outcomes now this might make that a more meaningful conversation in fall
- Provost in support of focusing in on goals for remainder of the semester with an aim of "approval of outcomes" (not to have set in stone but approved to help make the decision but tweaking can be permitted) – would be helpful, especially for the assessment team this summer
o Update on what was found on outcomes
- Q4 was "what is missing from the outcomes?"
- Responses provided via sharepoint: 2021_03_19_Outcomes Data Summary Myers-Shirk.docx (sharepoint.com)
- Notes from submissions by department/group on the document are reviewed, summarized, and discussed
  - Specific note regarding how civic engagement can lend itself towards potential ethical issues around activism within the classroom (another faculty member noted similar concern as noted by Steve Severn)
- Intercultural competence and literacy outcomes were most favorably received by student group
- Link provided in continuation of report regarding skills emphasis in report: https://mtsu.edu/genedredesign/faq.php
  - Jeff Gibson – affirmed noting the items that Susan reviewed but also thought that comments on aesthetics/creative/creation, etc. and there notable absence from the document (no art, no aesthetics anywhere in the document)
  - John Sanborn – Wants to be explicit that: is it the function of this committee to meet student needs or institutional needs? We can't do both very well – perhaps we need a balance but in process of redesign we are going to hurt elements of the established institutional structures – how much do we have to consider the latter in doing our primary job of redesign?
    o Susan supports his note and says her emphasis is on redesign for student benefit because it's what we ought to do but also wants to think about implications on faculty, too – for her, the big question is: what can we do to make the most of this experience for our students?

- o Steve notes that this may not be either/or – if a Gen Ed structure is created that harms faculty, it will impact the student experience, as well – we have to keep all these things in play because there are practical, real constraints
  - Ryan Korstange noted that, at the end of the day, Gen Ed is a system – there is a lot of power associated with creating/redesigning a system, benefitting students? Which ones? Revising from a fairly static to a hopefully more dynamic system? Weighty obligation but the current system is relatively entrenched and will get pushback
  - Samuel Blumer said a lot of students who do not complete work at MTSU do leave during Gen Ed – might this redesign potentially change that? This could be good for all.
  - Brian Frank noted that outcomes inform assessment, creativity had been part of it but is not now – doesn't mean unimportant, but outcomes are there to inform assessment

Ryan Korstange leads on outcomes work
- See where we are regarding consensus on these outcomes
- Current draft being shared from Susan – emailed prior to our meeting and added to screen for our review
- 3 key questions: What needs to be change before moving out for public comment? What interests or concerns need to be addressed/what is missing? Are these equitable outcomes – which students do these leave out?
- Board shared with committee to post notes to these questions to drive follow up conversation
  - o Posts can include comments re: outcomes and/or other aspects at this point
- Discussion of notes
  - o Q1: Policy 32 assumes we think it is "good" to share it with public – there may be issues regarding sending out draft work
  - o The type of public comment sought is important to be clarified – likely we will throw out anything we send out – rather it's more about collecting public comment to inform our vote
  - o Readers of this may not have contextual background so providing a rationale to this might be worthwhile to add
    - ▪ Front matter: Rationale, flow chart of the process, glossary
    - ▪ Steve Severn suggests you can include it as a "if you want" so that this front matter does not gather comment – consider adding this to the D2L shell
    - ▪ Susan Myers-Shirk may add a short video to direct them to the information if desired
    - ▪ Janis Brickey suggested perhaps we link this with mission/vision of university – to demonstrate alignment with system's philosophy – align with Quest25
    - ▪ Jeff Gibson noted the importance of helping reviewers be certain that just because something is not specifically included does not mean it is specifically excluded
    - ▪ Ryan Korstange asked for an example
      - • Jeff replied that the creative products, for example
    - ▪ Lando Carter noted that the visual process will help provide that full disclosure and offering a link to provide that maximum user-friendliness

- o Knowledge not explicitly focused on, instead emphasis is on Information Literacy – how do we deal with this issue of what may be presumed about knowledge in this context?
  - Brian Frank said we might clarify broad purposes of Gen Ed – delineating what we will assess (broad outcomes) and what we will not (specific content – such as what was learned in Biology)
  - An outcome could be included within disciplinary thinking
  - Tammy Melton commented that the very idea that you can access information and organize it in your head, you can classify things, and you can say why things are in one category but not another, these are intellectual skills that are generated but *only in the case that they understand the specific factual knowledge*
  - Warner Cribb commented that you need a certain knowledge base in order to identify a problem
  - John Sanborn also echoed the importance that having knowledge and perhaps adding in a particular outcome for that
  - Brian Frank noted that we don't assess this currently except in a few domains – suggests that inquiry and analysis requirement in the course becomes a pedagogical issue
  - Tammy Melton asked if we ought to leave it out based on this?
  - Brian Frank responded he believes that the answer is no because we won't know which knowledge area each student will take
  - Kevin Krahenbuhl noted that a major problem we will run into is that: if our assessment says Billy can't critically think we are not really sure if it is that he can't or he didn't know the content topic at hand. Great example is a baseball study (Recht & Leslie, 1987)
  - Janis Brickey indicated that we can't solve a problem unless we know the material about the problem – information literacy is big, and a general ed experience is important in this regard
  - Laura White suggested that we cannot probably specify all the specific disciplinary knowledge and so there could be ways to frame it more broadly within the categories that already exist by adding in additional information regarding "content knowledge" – the places where we currently find knowledge within the rubric may provide a way to help us address content knowledge
  - Greg Nagel asked if critical thinking includes sanity checking – some people tend to take things on face value but don't cross check things, even at the MBA level
  - Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand mentioned that comparing with AAC&U includes specific reference to content knowledge within inquiry and analysis in their model – would doing something like this satisfy this concern? (separate them as they are in AAC&U, e.g.)
- o Ethics, Civic Engagement, and Source Analysis/Identification
  - Source analysis/ID may be an expansion of information literacy
  - Ethics may be something that is missing based on comments – is it something we might consider adding?
  - Brian Frank noted that early on the design team did some work drawing from AAC&U things and mixing them together but found flaws in breaking it from their holistic design and so it is something to keep in mind
  - Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand mentioned that ethics fits in multiple categories when looking at rubrics that go along with these outcomes

- Samuel Blumer asked: Should the university be responsible for cultivating any ethical views or should it simply be about helping students develop their own
- Steve Severn noted that they had to create 3 elements for outcomes in SACS program-level assessment – if 3 learning outcomes existed, at least 1 needed to be "values/ethics" – may not be applicable for Gen Ed but might be important to consider – Susan will look into this (current required 3: (1) Knowledge, (2) Values & Ethics, (3) Skills
  - Laura White noted that refining the language of the rubrics may help address a lot of these concerns by adding details to existing rubrics for the outcomes – also may help clarifying the nebulous meaning of a term, which could be problematic
    - Equity – who is being left out?
      - Transfer students noted
      - Embodied communication
      - Language inclusivity
      - Need not just structural changes but supports ready and faculty equipped
      - Ryan Korstange notes that transfers are interesting and hard to figure out – since they'll enter with an undefined starting points – makes it very difficult to think about them
      - Brian Frank notes that when pushback is provided about civic engagement pushing a particular lens, he says its always whiteness/patriarchy, we need to be aware of when those criticisms are coming from a place that is ultimately going to be about hurting students, privileging certain voices – suggests the criticisms come from a position of implicit biases

- Ryan offered some summarizing comments in conclusion recapping some key next steps (glossary and front matter) and affirming areas where we did not leave with a clear consensus (adding any) and that the 3rd question may need some more thinking
- A revised product will be prepared for next meeting in light of these thoughts
- Next meeting is scheduled for next week, Friday, 3/26
- Samuel Blumer noted he does not want to disenfranchise anyone by making the comment regarding ethics of things – used the example of 1010 English, get involved with community, write a letter to congressman, for those who may not have thought about that – he was not seeking to disenfranchise anyone
- Kevin Krahenbuhl supported Samuel and suggested that we need to be cautious about dismissing any views we don't like as simply being a façade for some implicit bias
- Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand noted that there also well-meaning professors who may host events that include a religious organization and this can include an assumption about the religious backgrounds too, even a very well-meaning item, we ought to be cautious about this (tending in religious and political areas)
  - Should take these items seriously
- Ryan Korstange responding to a comment from Janis Brickey in the comments that those who come in with an associates degree they are to be treated as if they have already completed Gen Ed
  - We do this to some accept when we accept them as Susan Myers-Shirk noted
- Comments will be incorporated and shared updated version next Friday
- Meeting is adjourned