

**University General Education Committee minutes**  
**April 22, 2022 via Zoom**

Committee members present: Lando Carter, Amy Sayward, Keith Gamble, Deana Raffo, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Janet Colson, Terry Goodin, Ryan Otter, Rachel Kirk, Scott McDaniel, Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Leon Alligood, Rebecca Fischer, Warner Cribb, Laura White, Mark Frame, Keely O'Brien, Sydney Fischer

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

Others in Attendance: Mary Hoffschwelle, Katie Brackett, Brian Frank, Kate Holt, Kari Neely, Kristen West, Beth Wright, Christabel Devadoss

Introductory matters:

Lando Carter, Chair of the University General Education Committee (UGEC), welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He reminded the committee that a revised version of the minutes had been circulated with the changes tracked. He then asked for discussion of the revised minutes; there being none, the minutes were approved.

Susan Myers-Shirk pointed out that Mary Hoffschwelle was joining the committee in place of Amy Aldridge-Sanford (who had to attend the University Curriculum Committee meeting this afternoon). She then shared a couple of reflections in light of the robust discussion over the previous week. She stated that she has been repeatedly struck in all of the conversations this year over General Education about how deeply faculty care about our students—that we all share this common high ground. She also thanked the committee for its commitment and perseverance, recognizing that this university committee has required more of its members than almost any other and that the work of this committee has frequently bled over into members' relationships with their departments and into their friendships. She then asked for more commitment and perseverance to do the creative and relational work that this committee needs moving forward. She stated that the work of the committee in opening up the conversation about General Education redesign will ultimately make it richer and more rewarding, in contrast to the top-down Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) redesign that took place in 2004. Myers-Shirk affirmed that in the Chairs Council there is a sense that change is needed but that it should be evolutionary rather than revolutionary in order to serve students and the university well. She concluded by asking the committee to review the revisions proposed by the design team and make a decision about whether to send those revisions for campus comment.

Myers-Shirk then shifted to the focus of the day's meeting, to decide whether the revisions drafted by the Design Team are responsive to the university community's feedback. In line with her earlier reflections, she stated that she did not think that a strict interpretation of Robert's Rules of Order allows for the dialogue needed to do the work of the committee, although they are needed to guide the motions that are voted on by members of the committee. But to foster the open discussion that the committee also needs, she suggested a committee "egalitarian," whose job would be to ensure that all sides and voices are heard during UGEC debates. She also suggested that Jeff Gibson, an ex officio

member of the committee, might be a good choice for that position, given his careful neutrality to this point in the committee's discussions. In response to a question, Gibson affirmed that he was willing to serve in this role. Warner Cribb asked if there would be substantive changes to the operating procedures of the committee and whether a member of the committee had requested such a position. Myers-Shirk responded that someone had requested something like a mediator or a parliamentarian and that there would not be a significant change to operating procedures but more likely the egalitarian's intervention in the discussion periods before votes were taken. Amy Sayward made a motion to have Gibson serve as the committee's egalitarian, Virginia Hemby-Grubb seconded the motion, and it was approved 17-1-0.

Myers-Shirk prompted Mark Frame about whether there were any items from his email to the committee that he wanted to discuss. Frame responded that his comments about the survey were future-oriented, specifically that when the committee collects data in the future, it should be clear that the data will likely be shared beyond the committee. He also suggested that there may be ways to better analyze the survey data, and he stated that he was taken aback by what he perceived as a more argumentative tone than in previous committee meetings. He also called for greater clarity in the committee's use of terms. Sayward replied that she strives to define the committee's terms and to write the minutes with a beyond-the-committee audience in mind and would welcome any suggestions to improve on that.

### **Review of Revised Models**

#### ***True Blue Core with Blueprints model***

Myers-Shirk stated by reviewing the True Blue Core with Blueprints model (the legacy curriculum with six categories adjusted to the new outcomes). Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand asked Myers-Shirk to be certain to discuss how the revisions were specifically responses to the feedback received during the university comment period. Myers-Shirk stated that this model was a direct response to issues raised by the College of Liberal Arts chairs and to feedback from the surveys and town hall meetings to keep the existing six categories that characterize the legacy curriculum. She then showed the "Quick Guide," which included each of those categories along with the hours in each and linking each to the new outcomes. She stated that this model ensures coverage of all eight outcomes without additional software or advising. Also, based on positive feedback, this model included Blueprints (referred to in the previous models that went out for university comment as Pathways but not renamed to avoid confusion with Tennessee Transfer Pathways). She additionally stated that Monday's meeting with the Student Government Association (SGA) Academic Affairs Committee had shown enthusiasm for Blueprints. The model also included, in brackets, suggested name changes for each category that would be better aligned with the outcomes. In each of the categories (except Communications, which has three outcomes), the course designer would choose a secondary outcome as well as the primary outcome assigned to the category. This was a response to requests from faculty and chairs to be able to generate additional courses in these categories that would align with the new outcomes. This also allows the new outcomes to be assessed across the curriculum and not confined to a single department. Each category would be designed during the Fall 2022 semester by an interdisciplinary committee to

replace the current catalog language for these categories that aligned with the old outcomes. During Spring 2022, new courses would be emerging to populate the model and faculty learning communities (FLCs) would be assembled to start work on Blueprints; this would lay the foundation for a launch of redesign in Fall of 2024. Recommendations from the Design Team included changing the names of the categories, including a True Blue Core Center, and including Blueprints in this model. Brian Frank added that keeping the legacy categories also responds to requests to make the model transfer-friendly, to minimize disruption, to maintain disciplinary, and to be simple and clear.

In response to a question from Gray-Hildenbrand, Myers-Shirk said that the Communications category carries a heavier assessment load and clarified the statutory requirement about U.S. History, while explaining that many of the locally-governed institutions (LGIs) in Tennessee include more course options within the “History” category while having the same statutory guidance. Hoffschwelle affirmed this and said that most often it is international students, students from out of state, and students who are seeking a second baccalaureate degree who have to take classes at the university to meet this requirement. Kathryn Brackett included the language from the statute in the chat, and Gray-Hildenbrand included a link to the statute as a whole. Hoffschwelle then distinguished the statutory requirement—which is currently flagged in Degree Works—from the General Education requirement. Rachel Kirk clarified that courses could meet the General Education requirement in the “History” category without the HIST prefix. Myers-Shirk that that was still to be determined. Kirk also asked if completion of 1000-level ENGL courses would still be required for a literature class, which might be, for example, French literature. Kari Neely clarified that the reason for the requirement was to ensure that students had the skills to write the required paper and that French literature is taught in English in the General Education curriculum. Warner Cribb stated that he found the inclusion of the current catalog language confusing.

Gray-Hildenbrand asked how these faculty interdisciplinary groups would function. Myers-Shirk clarified that there would likely not be a Center up and running in the coming academic year, but that these groups would—like FLCs—have stipends and would be open to all departments wanting to offer a course within this category. However, although these groups would recommend new catalog language to replace the current catalog language, it would have to be approved (or could be revised) by UGEC vote. Neely expressed a concern that this language could be used to exclude courses and police boundaries. Myers-Shirk stated her opinion that this language is primarily descriptive and meant to inform students about the types of courses in each category. There was discussion about how this process might work and how equity and access can be ensured procedurally. Frank offered his opinion that the next model to be discussed offered a better structural openness for new courses.

Gamble stated that he was now acting as chair of the meeting while Carter began traveling (but would still be participating in the meeting via phone). Neely expanded on her point that since university committees have an equal number of representatives from each college that the College of Liberal Arts can be consistently outvoted if the representatives from the Social and Behavioral Sciences choose to act as a voting bloc. Gamble stated that he thought the model was extremely responsive, a direct outcome of the university feedback. He heartily thanked the Design Team for its quick work in responding to this directive from UGEC.

### ***True Blue Core with Explorations and Blueprints***

Myers-Shirk then shifted to the Quick Guide to True Blue Core with Explorations and Blueprints. This model has one fewer “category” than the legacy curriculum because it combines the current Communication and Math categories into a single category of Foundational Skills. This Foundations section is similar to the models that went out for university comment and that was generally well received. A big change in response to university feedback was putting a “Disciplinary Knowledge” and an “Explorations” course into each of the categories, rather than having separate Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations categories. This was also a response to the feedback from Teresa Thomas and Tyler Hensen from our last meeting about making it easier for students to understand and see their options in these categories and also being easier to code for Records. Myers-Shirk pointed to the language that students have to take one Disciplinary Knowledge course but can take two. She said that putting the two (Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations) within each category makes for more choice and greater clarity, both of which were requested from university comment. Sydney Fischer wondered whether taking two Disciplinary Knowledge courses in each category might become many students’ default, but she stated that this model allowed students to choose a more traditionally disciplinary approach, a more explorative approach, or an approach that seems best suited to their major. Myers-Shirk said that this flexibility was what had excited the SGA Academic Affairs committee.

Myers-Shirk also explained that Blueprints still live within the Disciplinary Knowledge courses in this model. This model also guarantees that students meet all eight outcomes without additional software or advising. This model also lists potential Explorations courses based on input from departments last year; although those suggested courses were in response to a slightly earlier version of the outcomes, they still serve an illustrative purpose in this model. The timeline and processes for this model would be the same as the previous model. Gray-Hildenbrand asked how the “teach-out” of the current curriculum would fit with the proposed timeline for launching General Education redesign. Myers-Shirk and Hoffschwelle explained that these would be overlapping processes, and given the similarity between the courses in the current curriculum and in the models being proposed, there would likely be significant overlap between the two. Deanna Raffo stated that she liked how Explorations were integrated into this model, but she thought that definitions of what courses would count as Disciplinary Knowledge and which would count as Explorations would be needed to aid those who are proposing new courses. Myers-Shirk said that this would be the work of faculty-led groups in the coming academic year. Cribb asked whether this model offered a greater opportunity for new courses than the previous model and expressed the opinion that having Blueprints that included both Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations courses might work better and invite more course development. Gray-Hildenbrand also expressed support for including courses from both categories into Blueprints. Kirk commented that the difference between Disciplinary Knowledge and Exploration was simply how they were approved, but Gray-Hildenbrand expressed a clear distinction between the two categories of courses. However, Gamble stated that there are still lots of possibilities and still uncertainty that will not be wrapped up this academic year. Neely stated that structural change is needed to ensure greater course options in General Education. Frank affirmed that in this model two things need to be negotiated—what the discipline is (compared to a walled city), and what the associated studies are (compared to the forest outside the city)? Fischer shared that definitions of General Education has been changing and that different types of students will be looking for different things from General Education. Myers-Shirk

addressed a question about transfer from Carleton in the chat, stating that collapsing Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations into their respective categories has greatly simplified the question of transfer clarity. In response to Neely's question about the disadvantages to this model, Myers-Shirk stated that it might be a drawback that Blueprints are only in Disciplinary Knowledge.

### **University Comment Period**

Sayward then moved that both models should go out for two weeks of university comment; Cribb seconded the motion. Gamble then suggested two friendly amendments: (1) that Blueprints include both Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations courses and (2) that the comment period close the night before the UGEC meeting. Sayward and Cribb accepted both friendly amendments to move to discussion. Frame wondered about the quality of the feedback likely to be received during a university comment period that included finals and worried that it was setting the stage for negativity. Cribb agreed and asked what the advantage was of winding up the comment period in two weeks. Gamble stated that the redesign process had faculty attention now, and that this would likely wane following graduation and make it harder to obtain faculty feedback. Sayward agreed that we were likely to get more and better feedback now than at a later time. Neely worried that the earlier, extended time period may have set expectations high for this second comment period. Kirk asked what the committee would do if this feedback was also negative. Myers-Shirk said that although we cannot know what the feedback will be, we do know that the committee has made a real effort to address the concerns previously expressed, especially about the Explorations category and about fostering evolutionary change. Carleton asked what mechanisms would be employed during this comment period to gather responses and suggested highlighting the ways in which these models respond to previous feedback.

Cribb noted that two weeks from today is May 6, the day after last day of finals, when many faculty (including himself) would be grading diligently. He therefore suggested extending the comment period to May 13<sup>th</sup> and having UGEC meet on May 20<sup>th</sup> to review the feedback, giving the committee a week to read and digest the feedback. He offered this as an amendment, but Sayward did not accept it as a friendly amendment; discussion therefore followed on the proposed amendment, which was seconded by Frame. Gamble offered that the chairs are very engaged in the process and will provide feedback within two weeks and that faculty feedback will likely drop off quickly after graduation. Cribb countered that the faculty members of the committee needed the additional time to review the university comments. Gamble suggested that committee members read the comments as they come in using the links that Myers-Shirk provides. Neely proffered her opinion that when faculty are pressed for time they are most likely to choose the most conservative and familiar option. Frame commented on the problem of "change fatigue" and the challenges of keeping up with the changes in the models. This amendment passed by a vote of 9-4.

The amended motion—to send both models out for university comment until May 13<sup>th</sup> and to amend the second model to have Blueprints drawn from both Disciplinary Knowledge and Explorations courses then moved to discussion. Frank asked whether the models had to go out as written today or with possible packaging to make them more public-facing. Gamble clarified that one change that would need to be made (if the vote was successful) is to change Blueprints and that otherwise the packaging was up to the General Education Director. Sayward called the question, and the motion passed 12-1.

Myers-Shirk stated that the plan was that this comment period would not be as extensive but would invite university comment through email and anonymous comments on the website. It could also include a rank ordering.

### **Concluding matters**

Gamble added that today's vote provides clarity on the timeline moving forward, which will continue into the summer.

Raffo asked if the committee was still meeting next week. Myers-Shirk affirmed that the upcoming meeting had been on the calendar since the beginning of the semester and would likely be needed to tie up loose ends. Carleton suggested at least once Zoom question-and-answer session during the comment period. Neely requested that any survey request information about the respondent's department (rather than simply college) so that the feedback of smaller departments is not drowned out. Myers-Shirk stated that the comments from the previous session had not yet been made available as they had been waiting for further feedback from Frame, but they would now complete the anonymizing work and make those available to Chairs Council and the Faculty Senate through a password-protected folder. Gamble thanked the committee members for staying and thanked Gibson for his work as the committee's egalitarian. He called for any new business; there being none, the committee adjourned its work at 4:26 p.m.