

University General Education Committee meeting minutes

Meeting via Zoom, October 7, 2022

Voting members in attendance: Keith Gamble (chair), Leon Alligood, Nita Brooks, Janet Colson, Warner Cribb, Rebecca Fischer, Sydney Fischer, Mark Frame, Terry Goodin, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Yi Gu, Angela Hooser, Sungyoon Lee, Ann McCullough, Scott McDaniel, Keely O'Brien, Amy Sayward, Cheyenne Sweeley

Voting members absent: Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Rachel Kirk

Ex-officio members present: Christopher Brewer, Susan Myers-Shirk, Steve Severn

Others in attendance: Anne Anderson, Betsy Dalton, Christabel Devadoss, Tammy Melton, Debbie Perry, Kristen West, Elizabeth Wright

Introductory matters:

Keith Gamble, chair of the University General Education Committee (UGEC), began the meeting by calling for any edits or comments on the minute; there being none, the minutes were considered approved. He stated that although the next item on the agenda was a statement from Susan Myers-Shirk, the General Education Director, this statement would be deferred until later in the meeting. Therefore the next item of business was course approval procedures.

Course approval procedures:

Gamble called for an initial discussion of the draft course approval procedure—without formal motions—during which he would take note of any issues that would require a committee vote. He clarified that although the committee has course approval authority, it has to defer to some other campus stakeholders on the course approval process, as is reflected in the draft process.

Myers-Shirk offered a summary of the updates made from the last meeting, including the suggested workflow in Curriculog. Although there had been some discussion previously about whether Dynamic Forms or Curriculog would work better, both Mitzi Brandon (Curriculum Review Specialist in the University Provost's office) and Amy Aldridge-Sanford (Vice Provost for Academic Programs) in the Provost's Office had a strong preference for the centralized archival repository function of Curriculog. Myers-Shirk pointed out that suggestions received from the committee from the retreat and afterward had been integrated into the current document.

Anne Anderson stated that her concern with Curriculog is that a lack of approval at any one step stops the form from progressing. She wanted there to be a right to comment on but not stop a proposal, especially at the Dean's level. Myers-Shirk averred that the Executive Team had already raised the same question, which has resulted in a time limit on how long a level has to review the proposal before it automatically moves forward. Specifically, since UGEC, and not Deans, decides what will be a part of the General Education curriculum, this time limit will apply at that level.

Curriculog workflows:

Myers-Shirk said that in conversations with Brandon, they hoped that the workflows envisioned could be integrated into Curriculog by November and ready to receive proposals:

- The first workflow—the fast track for existing courses already in the General Education curriculum—would start with the course originator, move to the General Education Director for review, and then move to UGEC.
- The second workflow would be for courses already in the catalog but new to General Education.
- The third workflow would be for courses new to both the catalog and General Education, in which case after the proposal was approved by the University Curriculum Committee (UCC), it would move directly to UGEC for consideration in General Education (rather than having to restart through the Curriculog process).

She stated that the new General Education courses would not be added to the upcoming (2023-24) catalog; that the goal was to have as many courses as possible approved—no later than January 2024—for the launch of the Fall 2024 General Education redesign.

Anderson asked why these workflows had to wait until November. Gamble stated that he had volunteered to assist Brandon if it would be helpful, as he personally hoped that the portal could be open in October for new course proposals. Myers-Shirk stated that the move of Brandon's office as well as the training of a new assistant were slowing the timeline.

Gamble answered a question from the Zoom chat function about whether the current edits in the document would be approved. He stated that the goal is to approve these following the discussion. Myers-Shirk stated that one line had been changed already to come into alignment with a UGEC decision at its first meeting—that course approvals would not be considered structural changes and would therefore require only a simple majority of the voting committee members present for approval (assuming a quorum).

Gamble brought forward another question from the chat about whether a new course had to be approved by the Dean and college committee once or twice. Gamble and Myers-Shirk reiterated that new courses would go directly from the UCC to UGEC and that UCC was clear that it was deciding on whether the course should be added to the catalog, leaving the decision on whether it should be included in the General Education curriculum to UGEC. She did point out that this meant that Deans could stall a proposed new course while it was in the UCC Curriculog workflow, a conclusion seconded by Anderson and Nita Brooks.

Course approval process (continued):

Mark Frame asked about the relationship between the proposal and the assessment process. He wanted to ensure that the departments submitting the proposals would also be ensuring that all faculty teaching all sections of the proposed course in whatever modality would be following the same assessment plan. This buy-in for assessable assignments should be the overarching concern in UGEC's approval and assessment of General Education courses. Gamble averred that since each course has to be approved by the department chair, this implies assessment across the department. Myers-Shirk also stressed the essential nature of assessment and explained that those instructors not using D2L would

still be responsible for providing assessable assignments in paper copy. The Implementation Team is working on the assessment plan, which will not likely be based on a randomized sample, with sampling techniques currently being developed by Lisa Bass (Institutional Effectiveness Director).

Warner Cribb asked for clarification on question #8 in the proposed course approval process, asking that it be more specific that this question is requesting information about how the proposed course meets the outcome in the primary category. Myers-Shirk asked if the committee wanted to workflow to request a sample course syllabus, rather than simply assessable assignments. Cribb stated his agreement, and Myers-Shirk said it made sense to mirror the UCC requirement in this aspect. She also pointed to suggested language from Steve Severn requesting assent to the question, Do you understand that for assessment purposes you may be required to submit assignments through D2L and other means?

Cribb also asked for a revision of the wording related to #14 about staffing. Since committees and chairs cannot answer the question with any degree of precision, he stated that the wording should be how the department “expects to meet staffing needs” rather than “will meet staffing needs.” Myers-Shirk stated that the same concern and suggestion; her concern was that departments understand that the Provost has stated that no new lines will be provided exclusively to staff proposed new General Education courses.

Gamble added that the course-approval procedure would be a living document, that UGEC members are not voting on the document but that the document is the basis for our current discussion and initial implementation. However, UGEC and the campus community would learn through working through this initial round of course applications. Nonetheless, now was the time to raise any major issues that the General Education Director and other campus administration will work to operationalize.

Frame asked whether language should be included that warned of the consequences of not doing what you propose to do in a General Education course proposal. Myers-Shirk said that she understood the concern expressed but worried about discouraging new proposals. She thought that additional encouragement—perhaps following the example of Virginia Tech’s General Education assessment microgrants—could be a more positive way to institute constructive assessment at the course level than warning departments and individuals away from course proposals at this initial stage.

Cribb asked whether General Education courses in the College of Basic and Applied Sciences (CBAS) could submit a single proposal to cover both the course and the lab together. Myers-Shirk affirmed that this would be the procedure, and Gamble talked about this making sense in much the same way that cross-listed courses are a single proposal. Cribb stated that this would be positive, given that the assessment could then occur in either the lab or in the class, which would be ideal. Myers-Shirk stated that the Implementation Team had also raised that question.

Myers-Shirk also explained that every department with a General Education course had been asked to appoint a liaison, who will be working with other liaisons on developing these course proposals, with the goal of collaboration and incorporating best practices across courses. These liaisons will attend workshops and in the spring will participate in a Faculty Learning Community (FLC).

Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand requested that the timeline—with deadlines—be front and center to educate departments and proposal developers. Myers-Shirk reiterated that if courses are approved by UGEC this

year, they will not be in the catalog ahead of the Fall 2024 launch. Anderson stated that the time from receipt to moving forward for each level was needed for planning and decision-making. Gamble stated that he hoped that two weeks would be sufficient for each level of approval, but Tammy Melton worried that this might create an unnecessary bottleneck, for example, at the college level. She stated that there was a desire for healthy scrutiny of proposals at the college level and that delays cannot be necessarily construed as bad faith. Frame echoed her concern about a lack of scrutiny, especially in colleges (and even departments) that are racing to re-propose numbers of General Education courses.

Myers-Shirk then shared some chat comments from Severn about the chairs' perspective on the process. He specifically asked whether both documents—once approved—can be released to departments to guide their planning and course proposal development? Myers-Shirk said that they could be released; she is working on the video and liaison workshops. She stated her hope that the current 65 courses in the General Education curriculum (on the fast track) will be able to get through the course approval process before the end of this academic year. This will allow them to be scheduled for Fall 2023 and Fall 2024 and a hopefully seamless transition from one General Education curriculum to the redesigned one. After that was accomplished, UGEC could focus on approving new courses for the General Education curriculum, which will take slightly longer in the Curriculog process as well. Gamble stated that he shared this goal, which was why he was volunteering to speed the Curriculog process to get it open for proposals as soon as possible. He also stated that the goal of fast-tracking was not to avoid or circumvent scrutiny but to encourage as many of those courses to undertake the process as soon as possible.

Myers-Shirk also explained that new courses would still have significant scrutiny at all levels. The 8-10 departments that have already expressed an interest in proposing a new General Education course will also have liaisons welcome to participate in the workshops and FLCs. Gamble stated that Brandon could override—if needed—any unjustified delay within the Curriculog process even for these courses. Brooks encouraged clarification on the language about new courses to reflect the substance of this discussion.

In answering a question from the chat, Gamble encouraged UGEC members to attend the upcoming liaison workshops, specifically to offer better answers to questions from the university community about the course approval process. Myers-Shirk also invited committee members to attend the LT&ITC fall festival, which will include a UGEC display on redesign.

There being no further comments, Gamble moved to the next item of business.

Category definitions document:

Gamble stated that given the committee's extensive review, revision, discussion, and amendment of this document already that he was calling for final input on the document before it would be shared with the university community.

Cribb stated that he liked the alternative descriptions of the categories (developed by a previous UGEC) to the language from the Tennessee Board of Regents' legacy curriculum. He then asked if a new course in the Scientific Literacy category would have to have a lab, understanding that it would still be four credit hours. For example, could the other credit hour be devoted to another type of experiential learning that meets the outcome, such as field work. Myers-Shirk stated that it was certainly allowable

and exciting to imagine different possibilities for the additional credit hour (which needs to be maintained for transferability). Gamble and Sayward shared Cribb's enthusiasm for the alternative definitions, which would apply to both disciplinary knowledge and explorations courses within the categories.

Discussion of courses moving from one category to another:

Myers-Shirk then made her statement about courses moving from one category to another. She acknowledged that the committee had approved language that would allow a course already in the General Education curriculum to apply to become part of another category, which might make better sense in terms of the outcomes in the new model. However, she stated that she does not support this policy, which could complicate the transition to the new curriculum and could be especially problematic for transfer students. She stated her strong preference for all existing General Education courses to transfer to their parallel category in the redesigned model and then for new courses to be proposed for the explorations section of a new category. She stated that she would discourage departments from changing categories. Frame appreciated Myers-Shirk's perspective but stated that given the change in outcomes he thought that some category change would be inevitable, especially given the centrality of assessment of learning outcomes to the new General Education curriculum. He feared without UGEC's willingness to entertain and not discourage logical realignments with the outcomes that bad feelings might result. Myers-Shirk appreciated Frame's perspective and did state that coming off the "fast track" of approval might be sufficient deterrent for changing categories, a sentiment that Gamble shared. He stated that 1-4 courses potentially shifting could be manageable, whereas 25 might merit a revising of the committee's decision.

Category definitions document (continued):

Cribb clarified that the foregoing discussion was about a course shifting from one category (for example, Scientific Literacy) to another category (for example, Foundational Knowledge) rather than a shift from explorations to disciplinary knowledge within the same category. Myers-Shirk confirmed that and stated that those changes were even further in the future, having to come after the Fall 2024 debut. A discussion followed about the distinction between courses in disciplinary knowledge and explorations that resulted in a consensus that there would be no substantive difference in pedagogy or focus of these courses and that the essential difference was those courses that were part of the legacy curriculum and those that would be added to the new model. Eventually, UGEC might even dissolve the distinction between the two, but it serves an important purpose in the rollout and initial implementation of the redesign of General Education.

Frame asked if new proposed General Education courses could have prerequisites. Committee discussion agreed that the goal was not to see departments stack courses within General Education (having CHEM 2 as an explorations course with CHEM 1 as the prerequisite in the disciplinary knowledge category) but that some courses (for example, multicultural psychology, which could be a good course to meet the intercultural competency student learning outcome) might need a prerequisite of General Psychology (which is in an entirely different category). Myers-Shirk said that currently General Education courses do not have prerequisites outside of developmental Reading courses. Gamble stated that as all courses are applying for admission into the General Education curriculum, there should be an effective stop to departments building major requirements into General Education; authority to do this is housed in the Provost's office. Gamble also stated that he hoped that the questions that will come up

from the university community can be partially fielded by UGEC members attending the course development workshops.

Conclusion:

With the end of discussion on the category definitions, Gamble stated that the committee appeared ready to share both the course approval process and the category definitions documents with the campus community. There being agreement, the UGEC meeting for Friday, October 11, 2022, was canceled. UGEC will next meet on November 4th to work on the assessment plan and any new issues that come up from the course proposal workshops with departmental liaisons. The meeting was adjourned at 3:27 p.m. with Gamble wishing everyone a good Fall Break.