

Meeting of the University General Education Committee (UGEC)

February 10, 2023, via Zoom

Voting Members Present: Keith Gamble (chair), Nita Brooks, Janet Colson, Warner Cribb, Mark Frame, Terry Goodin, Yi Gu, Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Sungyoon Lee, Ann McCullough, Scott McDaniel, Keely O'Brien, Amy Sayward, Cheyenne Sweeley

Voting Members Absent: Leon Alligood, Rebecca Fischer, Angela Hooser, Rachel Kirk, Sydney Fischer

Ex-Officio: Christopher Brewer, Jeff Gibson, Susan Myers-Shirk, Amy Aldridge Sanford, Stephen Severn

Others present: Tammy Melton, Betsy Dalton, Christina Cobb, Thomas Hudson, Rebecca Calahan, James Hart, Matthew Duncan, Chris Stephens, Mary Beth Asbury, Kristen West, Kari Neely, Elizabeth Wright, Dovie Kimmins, Gregory Slade

Introductory matters

Keith Gamble, UGEC chair, welcomed committee members and departmental representatives to the meeting, especially those who had also attended the last meeting.

Gamble then moved to discussion of the minutes, which included a question from the UGEC Secretary, Amy Sayward about the second vote, which had a minority of conditional “yes” votes. Gamble talked about his previous work with curriculum committees, which would frequently require a proposal to restart the process if there was any question from the committee and no departmental representative available to answer the question. But this committee wanted to be able to have the department make adjustments without having to restart the process. To that end, a conditional yes vote was a vote of approval, and the proposals from the previous meeting have been changed to bring them into alignment with the committee’s concerns. Gamble also saw the previous meeting’s conditional yesses as part of the committee’s learning process in terms of approvals—votes in favor of the proposal with additional information about what the committee member would like to see in the proposal, but if the department refused to make changes, that conditional yes would be recorded as a “no.” Sayward also added that she would need to correct the spelling of Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand’s name. Gamble thanked Sayward for documenting the work of the committee like a skilled historian, communicating with the university community about what we are doing and why. Gray-Hildenbrand seconded Gamble’s appreciation, and the minutes were approved without further edits.

Before resuming the committee’s course approval process, Gray-Hildenbrand asked about clarification of the category definitions, since there had been discussion in the town-hall meetings in May about further conversation between the committee and the departments about those. She thought it appropriate to revisit the question before considering the next course proposal since those categories are now informing UGEC’s consideration of the new course proposals, and she was particularly concerned that the old “History” category language not carry over to the new “Civic Learning” category definition. She also thought that the category language was important because it connects back to the goals and speaks to both faculty and students about the types of courses to be included in categories.

She therefore moved to task the Implementation Team to work in consultation with the departmental liaisons to refine, clarify, and update the categories document to make it easier to read and better describe and integrate the current True Blue Core goals, categories, and outcomes; Warner Cribb seconded the motion.

Gamble stated that he thought that the charge of UGEC was more properly to focus on structural issues than to wordsmith category definitions. Additionally, as the committee populated the categories with courses, that would effectively be defining the categories. He was not, however, opposed to the General Education Director and Implementation Team consulting with the departmental liaisons as needed or desired. Gray-Hildenbrand stated that the idea of starting a broader conversation about category definitions came from the belief that the relatively small number of people on UGEC should not solely define those categories, and so now having UGEC define the categories by populating them with courses does not seem to address that initial concern. Cribb stated that how the course fits the category should be part of the Curriculog proposal, and in this way the faculty and departments are defining what the category is. He stated that UGEC members might not yet have a full sense of those categories since they have considered so few proposals so far. Gamble followed up that if there was not a clear fit between the category and the proposal that this would trigger further committee discussion; he favored having the committee's work define the categories. Gray-Hildenbrand responded that having the departmental liaisons—who are already organized and working—review the categories would help ensure that the True Blue Core, and not the legacy definition and courses, will define the categories moving forward.

Susan Myers-Shirk, General Education Director, then proposed taking this task to the Implementation Team. She explained that the working category definitions had resulted from the UGEC's instruction at the end of the Spring 2022 semester to develop these category definitions as part of the work of helping prepare UGEC's work for the Fall 2022 semester with the ultimate goal of a Fall 2024 launch of the new General Education curriculum. To that end, she had drafted those working category definitions based on the input she had received. She stated that she would not object to revisiting those category definitions in order to address lingering concerns when she gives the university-wide update on February 17th. Gamble then asked if the committee was content with Myers-Shirk's plan or wanted to vote on the motion. Gray-Hildenbrand stated that she was content with the "ladies' agreement" that had been reached; she and Cribb withdrew the previous motion and second from consideration. Gray-Hildenbrand stated that she expected there would be continued conversations about the category definitions, and Cribb stated that he especially expected such discussion when the "Explorations" courses start to be considered by UGEC.

Consideration of RS 2030 – Religion and Society

The committee then restarted its consideration of RS 2030, with both Gregory Slack (departmental liaison) and Gray-Hildenbrand (UGEC voting member and course originator) present to address any concerns or answer questions. Gamble asked if there were additional questions about the proposal. Mark Frame stated that he did not have specific questions about the course but reiterated the concerns he made at length during the previous meeting about the difficulties he imagined that assessors in the future True Blue Center would have in assessing assignments from a variety of courses. He also wondered if UGEC was abdicating its responsibilities for reviewing data related to goals and for providing overall leadership by not fully developing detailed assessment methods that will be used for

the university's General Education program. Gamble, who had frequently talked about the committee's duties under Policy 32, stated that his interpretation was that the committee would and was reviewing assessments of the program as well as carefully reviewing proposals, especially the assessable assignments in conjunction with the rubric—thereby fulfilling its Policy 32 responsibilities. He also saw UGEC fulfilling its leadership responsibilities by establishing a foundation for a General Education program assessment that will be significantly more comprehensive than the past, legacy assessment.

In terms of the RS course proposal, Frame stated that he thought the assessable assignment was solid and clearly related to the goals. Nonetheless, he continued to worry about how exactly the assignment will be assessed according to the rubric and about how the future assessors will determine what constitutes a benchmark level. Gamble reiterated his view that this was the work of the assessment team and not UGEC. Sayward then called the question about the RS proposal, as no new questions had been raised about the proposal.

Gray-Hildenbrand asked whether it was permissible for her to vote on her department's proposal. Gamble stated that it was, that curriculum committee members routinely vote on the proposals emanating from their departments. The proposal then passed unanimously, 15-0.

Consideration of PHIL 1030—Introduction to Philosophy

Discussion of PHIL 1030 started with the clarification that this course would meet the C1 “Intercultural Understanding” outcome, which was what was different from what was initially written into the UGEC agenda. Gamble stated that he found the assessable assignment attached to the proposal to be clearly in line with that student learning outcome. Sayward said that the Curriculog proposal had beautiful language about how this course fits with this outcome, so she was disappointed that none of that language had made it into the sample syllabus. Slack stated that he understood that the requirement was that the outcome be included on the syllabus. Sayward affirmed that was true but also said that the language seemed to be the result of the department's faculty thinking deeply about how the course would meet the outcome and would hate to see that understanding lost. Slack stated that many of his colleagues might be inclined to include such language in their syllabi. Gamble stated that he wondered how the essay assignment that constituted the assessable assignment might change in light of the way that AI (artificial intelligence) can now generate essays. With no more questions about the proposal, it moved to a vote and was approved, 14-0-1.

Consideration of COMM 2200 – Fundamentals of Communication

Gamble pointed out that this proposal was part of a different category, and then he asked if a representative of the department was available to address any concerns. Mary Beth Asbury, chair of the department, responded that she was present. Sayward expressed her concern that the sample course syllabus' listing of the course's outcomes seemed to focus more on the preparation of speeches and listening to other speeches rather than on the True Blue outcome that focused on the actual act of communication. Asbury responded that the assessable assignment was focused on this and that the course does cover all of those outcomes. Gray-Hildenbrand stated that she liked the fact that the course addressed many other outcomes, including critical thinking, especially since this category does not include an “Explorations” category. Gamble asked if there were any additional questions from committee members and stated that he liked the fact that the new General Education assessment

process will examine so many different kinds of artifacts. There being no further questions, the committee voted unanimously in favor of the proposal (15-0-0).

Consideration of Quantitative Literacy Course Proposals

Gamble then moved the discussion to a set of courses in Mathematics that are legacy courses that are proposed to be part of the new Quantitative Literacy category. He suggested considering them collectively. James Hart, a professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences and the author of the Pre-Calculus proposal, was present to answer questions along with Chris Stephens, chair of that department, and Rebecca Calahan, the department's liaison to UGEC. Sayward asked how well multiple-choice questions could measure the student learning of the outcomes in the Quantitative Literacy rubric. Myers-Shirk stated that she had had lots of conversations with the Department of Mathematical Sciences about how to measure student learning and that this is the department's initial proposal. It is possible that in the future the Assessment Committee might suggest or the department might choose to shift to one of the homework assignments described in the proposal as the assessable assignment, but use of multiple-choice questions on a common final is a valid measure of student learning. Gamble stated that he appreciated that the department had provided some specific guidelines about how the Assessment Team could assess student learning in this category. He then suggested that all of the proposals be considered in a single vote. Tammy Melton of the Implementation Team expressed her opinion that this did not set a good precedent. Gamble explained that his proposal was due to their similarities—all are legacy courses in the same foundational category—and that it seemed to make sense in this case. He did not intend to do this with all courses in a single category and indeed had not when considering the previous two proposals from the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies—therefore he did not see this as setting a specific precedent. He did, however, express the hope that when grouping proposals made sense that it could expedite the committee's work in approving courses. There being no further discussion, the proposals for MATH 1010 (Mathematics for General Studies), MATH 1530 (Applied Statistics), MATH 1730 (Pre-Calculus), and MATH 1910 (Calculus I) were approved by the committee, 15-0-0.

Consideration of FIN 2010 -- Personal Financial Planning

Gamble then turned to the course that he had designed for the Department of Economics and Finance, "Personal Financial Planning," which was the first new course to be considered in UGEC's work this semester. Sayward said that her concern was whether the course met the outcome's requirement that the course show quantitative literacy "in a variety of settings." Gamble explained that across the course's seven units, students learn about budgeting, taxation, estimating taxes for certain career options, managing credit and debt, considering risk, statistical analysis, and retirement planning, which draws on elements of actuarial science, accounting, and statistics under the umbrella of financial planning. Cribb stated that he agreed with Sayward that the proposal did not demonstrate clearly how the assessable assignment would meet the True Blue outcomes and suggested that including the rubric might help the committee see how the assignment connects to the rubric. He also stated that he did not believe that the proposal demonstrated quantitative literacy in a "variety of settings," despite hitting a number of elements within the world of finance. In sum, he believed that it was too discipline-specific to fit under the Quantitative Literacy category and suggested that the Social Science category might be a better fit. Cribb also asked why ECON 2110, which FIN 2010 is cross-listed with, was not part of the Curriculog proposal. Gamble explained that Curriculog does not allow 2 prefixes in the system,

but the text of the proposal does clearly explain that this is a proposal for both cross-listed courses. In terms of what category is the best fit for this course, Gamble explained that it appears in different General Education categories in different universities across the nation, but he believes this set of outcomes is best suited for the course.

Cribb asked if a student with a 12 ACT score could register for this course. Gamble replied affirmatively and enthusiastically, stating that he thought the course might be especially helpful for students to develop their quantitative literacy within the context of real-life financial decisions. Terry Goodin stated that he did not have an opinion about which category the course belonged in, but from the perspective of caring for students, he firmly believed that students need this information desperately as they go forward. Matthew Duncan, Chair of University Studies, asked whether students could potentially take this course to circumvent prescribed courses in math. Gamble stated that this General Education course would not be different from the other MATH courses in the category; students with prescribed courses in mathematics will have to take those before taking the General Education course in Quantitative Literacy.

Frame agreed that the students could learn beneficial information from this course, which is now a requirement for Tennessee high school students. Gamble explained that a PhD student in his department had researched the learning outcomes in the required high school course, surveying teachers about what they are doing in their course. This research uncovered that many instructors are not ready to teach about investing. In any case, this course—at the college level—will be distinct and will pick up where the high school course leaves off.

Stephens returned to the question of prescribed courses (also known as K courses), which meet more often to help students remediate any deficiencies in English and Mathematics upon entering the university. These prescribed courses must be taken immediately upon entry into the university and cannot be dropped. Gamble reiterated that FIN 2010 would not replace or circumvent a prescribed MATH course.

Gray-Hildenbrand suggested that it might have been better to have Ann McCullough, Vice Chair of UGEC, run the meeting, since Gamble was wearing two hats—both running the meeting and advocating for his course. But her primary concern was to ensure that Gamble's understanding about how the proposed new course would interact with prescribed courses was correct. Gamble said he had never seen a chair of a college curriculum committee step aside during deliberations of a course in their department.

Cribb asked if this course was required in the Economics and/or Finance major. Gamble explained that it was not a requirement in the College of Business or in the major. Cribb thought that the course—with more information—might better be an Explorations course in a different category. He said that if the courses define the category that the category has been defined by a bloc of MATH courses; he would need more information about this course before he could vote to add it to this category.

Duncan stated that as the proposal is written—with no prerequisites, it seems to indicate that students would not have to take the prescribed courses before taking this course. Gamble stated that there was a difference between prescribed courses and prerequisites.

Scott McDaniel noted within Curriculog that the Dean of the College of Business had had questions about the course. Gamble explained that the course had previously been approved unanimously at all levels, except by the Dean. The current True Blue Core process does not require the Dean's approval. The current Dean did note his objections, but that Dean is stepping down this summer. Amy Aldridge-Sanford, Vice Provost for Academic Programs, said that the Provost would want to meet with the course proposer and dean to define any pertinent issues. She also indicated that it would make sense for her office to work through any issues related to prescribed courses to ensure that state code and best practices were being followed. Sayward then said that any further business would have to be carried over to the next meeting, since time had expired for this meeting.

Gamble thanked the committee for its work, which had led to the approval of a larger number of courses than the previous meeting. He apologized to the departmental representatives whose courses had not yet been considered. Cribb asked if Gamble could submit additional information—especially to help the committee to better understand how the assessable assignment might map to the Quantitative Literacy rubric, and Gray-Hildenbrand stated that the meeting that Aldridge-Sanford had proposed seemed likely to address the concerns she had about how this course might interact with prescribed courses in mathematics. Gamble stated that he looked forward to seeing the committee members in person for the committee's next meeting on February 24th.