

**Minutes of the MTSU General Education Committee
November 5, 2021, via Zoom**

Attending:

Committee members: Lando Carter, Amy Sayward, Janel Colson, Scott McDaniel, Deanna Raffo, Keith Gamble, Leon Allgood, Sungyoon Lee, Virginia Hemby, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Kristen West, Laura White, Sydney Fisher, Rachel Kirk, Warner Cribb, Mark Frame, Ryan Otter, Keely O'Brien, Terry Goodin

Ex officio, design team, & guests: Brian Frank, Jeff Gibson, Kari Neely Betsy Dalton, Christabel Devadoss, David Carleton, Susan Myers-Shirk

Introductory matters

Lando Carter, chair of the committee, opened the meeting by welcoming all attending and expressing his pleasure about the progress made so far in evaluating the models. In reviewing the minutes, Virginia Hemby and Rachel Kirk indicated that the minutes from the October 22nd meeting should be amended to reflect their attendance at that meeting. Otherwise the minutes were approved.

Overview of Model 1

Susan Myers-Shirk, General Education Director, then also thanked the committee before preparing the committee for its small-group discussion by providing a short presentation on Model 1. She reminded the committee that the goal was to identify what we can agree on regarding Model 1, to compare it to the other models, and ultimately to decide which model(s) would be forwarded to the university community.

The basic structure of Model 1 is similar in having Foundations, Disciplinary Knowledge, and Explorations categories. It has a First-Year Seminar (FYS) by designating one of courses within the program rather than having a dedicated FYS. Pathways were planned for the future for this model. Myers-Shirk then presented the draft crosswalk that showed what outcomes were connected to which parts of the model. The Foundations and Explorations categories were specific, with the greatest faculty flexibility in the Disciplinary Knowledge category. The Explorations category in this model focuses on four key areas: global awareness, STEM literacy, critical and creative expression, and history, people, & cultures (which divides the History requirement between Explorations and Disciplinary Knowledge).

The FYS designation would likely be given to a course that integrates (per the AAC&U definition) critical inquiry, frequent writing, and information literacy. Myers-Shirk also suggested possibly renaming the FYS as a Core Seminar, which would make it clear that this is not required to happen in the first year and which would make it more “transfer-friendly.” With the lack of Pathways in this model, it is anticipated that collaboration and integration will happen in the Explorations category.

Carter expressed his desire for the committee to continue participating in helpful, critical, healthy debate, and to that end, the committee broke up into small groups to facilitate discussion, to be followed by whole group discussion.

Discussion of Model 1

When the committee reassembled as a whole, Carter mentioned that his small group was excited about the opportunities within the Explorations category, but Amy Sayward said that her group was concerned that this category was not as open as it is in Model 3 (discussed in the previous meeting). David Carleton defined the distinction as student choice vs. guidance on fundamental material.

Discussion ensued about whether “STEM literacy” category was intended to be a 3- or 4-hour category, whether it was intended to be lab science or not. Possible flexibility within this model could introduce confusion. Warner Cribb mentioned that other categories would perhaps similarly need to be expanded to a 3-4 credit hour designation, for example in Non-Written Communication. Brian Frank said that 3-4 credit hours was used by the Design Team as a placeholder, as a 4-hour class is not necessarily a class with a lab but a data-oriented class, with that designation also applying to courses in Mathematics. Cribb concluded that he thought this designation should be included in the “tweak” category.

Keith Gamble characterized this model as being very close to the extant model. Although it is “transfer-friendly,” so is our current model, which allows students to transfer almost anything to meet General Education requirements.

The Core Seminar went into the “tweak” area to clarify if it is a requirement or an option Myers-Shirk said that it would be up to the committee to decide if it is required under this model. Sayward said that she preferred the Core Seminar name to FYS, especially for transfer students. Frank compared the Core Seminar designation to the existing Honors designation, whereby some sections of existing course are designated as Honors courses in line with Honors College procedures and requirements. Gamble compared the Core Seminar designation with the current course-delivery types of on-line and on-ground.

Myers-Shirk said that all Core Seminars would address information literacy and have limited class size, so some departments, due to staffing issues, might still not choose to offer Core Seminar sections. Carter expressed the concern of balancing student demand with faculty staffing. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand added that a similar but opposite issue has affected Raider Learning Communities in the past, resulting in a feeling of faculty frustration and collaborative work for naught. Cribb said that the choices in this category would depend on what faculty offer, but that this designation does allow faculty to redesign existing courses to meet the Core Seminar outcomes. Frank added that the most freedom in this model is in the Disciplinary Knowledge category. In the “toss” category for Model 1, Carter pointed out that one note was that the choice in this model is not explicitly student-driven.

In discussing the lack of Pathways, Cribb said that he thought that students would likely find it difficult to find courses that fit with their desired Pathway and schedule, as students currently

encounter such difficulties in constructing their minors and progressing efficiently toward their degree.

Some discussion of the naming of the categories within Explorations ensued, including a suggestion that the category might be renamed “Critical Thinking” or “Critical Thinking and Creative Expression” and that “History, Peoples, and Cultures” might need a different name. Carter mentioned the challenges involved in naming, which was important but which could perhaps be taken up at a future point.

Moving beyond the specific feedback from the small groups, Carter summarized that Model 3 (examined last meeting) provides students with more choice, while Model 1 provides faculty with more choice—and both crucial constituencies had expressed the desire for more choice within the General Education curriculum.

In discussing the timeline for the General Education redesign process, Myers-Shirk said that the original timeline had the decision on the model by the end of the Fall 2021 semester, with approval procedures and assessment decided in the Spring 2022 semester so that course redesign work could take place over the Summer 2022 and a launch in Fall 2023. However, the committee’s decision to evaluate one model at a time has forced a reconsideration of that timeline, as faculty will need to know the course outcomes and how these courses will be assessed before they can begin their redesign process. She stressed the importance of moving through the redesign process in a systematic and methodical manner that might well slow the process, and Carleton mentioned that it would be virtually impossible to assemble the Fall 2023 schedule (which takes place a year before) even on the original timeline, which was a difficulty raised by the College of Liberal Arts’ chairs. Cribb reiterated that the assessment plan has to be in place before redesign, which will require both money and departmental time. Myers-Shirk wrapped up this part of the discussion by saying that authentic, embedded assessment of the new General Education program was crucial and that we had probably missed the window for a Fall 2023 launch but that she was thankful for the hard work of the committee and the design team and everyone’s commitment to taking the time to handle redesign well. Carter concluded the meeting by thanking the committee and the Design Team for a fruitful discussion and reminding the group that the next discussion will be about Model 2.