

## Minutes of the University General Education Committee

19 November 2021 at 2 p.m. via Zoom

In Attendance: Lando Carter, Amy Sayward, Rebecca Fischer, Scott McDaniel, Nicolas Morgan, Virginia Hemby-Grubb, Leon Alligood, Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand, Deana Raffo, Janet Colson, Laura White, Keith Gamble, Terry Goodin, Ryan Otter, Mark Frame, Warner Cribb, Sungyoon Lee, Rachel Kirk

Non-Voting Members: Susan Myers-Shirk, Chris Brewer, Jeff Gibson, David Carleton

Additional Participants: Katie Brackett, Brian Frank, Kari Neely, Kate Holt, Beth Wright, Kristen West, Christabel Devadoss

### Introductory Business

Lando Carter, chair of the University General Education Committee, opened the meeting by welcomes everyone, and reminding the committee that there is one additional meeting before the end of the semester, on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. He then asked if there were any amendments needed to the minutes of the committee's previous meeting; there being none, the minutes were approved. He then previewed the beginning of the meeting by stating that Susan Myers-Shirk would provide the introduction to Model 2 before moving into small groups to do the same "keep, tweak, toss" exercise with this model that we had previously.

### Overview of Model 2

Myers-Shirk then provided an overview ahead of the day's exercise. She reminded the committee that our goal is to see what we agree on about Model 2 and what adjustments might be needed. Our goal after reviewing the models are to decide which model(s) best aligns with our values, outcomes, and assessment goals and therefore which we should send to the university community for comment.

Model 2's Explorations category has subcategories. The Integrative Seminar in this model was a change made by the Design Team in place of the one-hour First Year Seminar and the two-hour Grand Challenge, given the logistical issues that many committee and university members noted. This model contains the opportunity for Pathways of 2-4 thematically linked Disciplinary Knowledge courses, with each course having a different prefix in order to promote interdisciplinarity. She then went through the draft crosswalk, which showed how each of the outcomes would be met in this model. In this model, the Disciplinary Knowledge area is wide open, with each course having one primary and one secondary outcome, except that in the History category, one of those courses must meet the C1 [Intercultural Understanding] outcome and one must meet the C2 [Civic Engagement] outcome. In the Explorations category, one course must meet the B [Critical Thinking, Inquiry and Analysis], C [see above], D [Quantitative and Information Literacy] outcomes [Susan, can you provide a short-hand description of what outcomes A, B, C, and D are?], with each have the A outcomes [Written and Non-Written Communication] as secondary outcomes.

The Foundations category will include Written Communication, Non-Written Communication, and Mathematics (similar to the other models). The process for course inclusion in each of these areas will come out of Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) developing these course and the University General Education Committee approving them. The Disciplinary Knowledge category courses will meet the SACSOC requirements, and departments will collaborate to develop these courses.

The Integrative Seminar has grand challenge elements and could be friendly for MT Engage and/or experiential learning programs. Courses in this category would come from faculty participation and courses would be approved by the Undergraduate General Education Committee. This model is relatively transfer-friendly, with the Integrative Seminar coming later in students' general education program, with the exception being that the literature category and Explorations categories will be a bit more challenging, but these issues could likely be communicated as part of the envisioned summer transfer summit.

Myers-Shirk wound up her introductory presentation by reminding the committee of its mission and values in approaching redesign: that there should be flexibility for students and faculty, that the program needs to ensure that students develop core knowledge and skills, that students should find the general education program engaging, that the redesigned program contain relevant and innovative content, and that it promotes inclusion and intercultural competence. She wound up by including links in the chat to all key committee documents.

Carter thanked Myers-Shirk for her overview and reminded committee members that we would be following the same procedure that we had utilized with the previous two model reviews.

#### Whole Group Discussion on Model 2

Carter welcomed the committee members back from the small-group discussions, thanking them for their time and consideration before opening the floor for feedback on Model 2.

Keith Gamble opened by saying that he loved this model and therefore thinks that we need to keep it. He sees Model 2 as a blend of the current program (which allows for a certain degree of comfort) but allowing for multiple opportunities for innovation: that students can choose pathways, that the integrative seminar offers a powerful experience and opportunity for assessment, and that the Explorations category provides new areas for exploration. Amy Sayward also stated that she was a fan of this model for these reasons and especially also because of the Integrative Seminar, which could be more useful because it comes toward the end of the general education program. Rachel Kirk agreed with the strengths of the model already presented. She particularly stated that the Integrative Seminar helps to move students beyond a menu-based general education and toward a clearly expressed philosophy of general education in which students understand the point of the program.

Brian Frank raised some questions from the notes in the jam-board that raised concerns about having both Pathways and an Integrative Seminar. He stated that the committee could choose to

not include Pathways at the beginning of the model. Jenna Gray-Hildenbrand expressed the opinion that tackling both Pathways and an Integrative Seminar seemed like a lot in a new curriculum. She did state that there were several extant programs (MT Engage, Raider Learning Communities, and Experiential Learning) that could be the basis for pathways. She also stated that Pathways might therefore be better governed outside of the University General Education Committee.

Nicholas Morgan (a student member of the committee) expressed his opinion in the chat that he was drawn to this model due to the student opportunities available. But it also seemed more cohesive than the other two models. He thought that this model showed students that there was something key to gain from General Education. Virginia Hemby worried that students might not understand Pathways, with the thematic links.

Warner Cribb added that Pathways and Integrative Seminars can be a challenge to assess, because there are multiple faculty and course involved and therefore it's not always clear who has responsibility for designing and assessing such courses. Cribb stated that he was skittish about recommending a model with either Pathways or a seminar without an assessment plan or method. There was some discussion about whether assessment must or should be built into the models at this point or whether the committee's guidance on what outcomes needed to be met and instructors' proposals about how they would meet those outcomes would develop the assessment method more collaboratively. Frank added that in an earlier model there was a designation system for a seminar, rather than a stand-alone course as this model proposes.

Laura White expressed the opinion that the worst-case scenario would be to have faculty buy in to creating Pathways courses and then have those courses not make or not be offered, which would snuff out the current level of faculty excitement about the opportunities provided by Pathways. Frank replied that this model doesn't have to have Pathways from the outset, but the committee might want to lay out the mechanism for adding them later. Grey-Hildenbrand stated that she didn't see faculty excitement in the feedback provided through D2L and that another bad outcome would be to launch the redesign with Pathways but not have sufficient faculty interest to create any Pathways. Kathryn Brackett-Fialka then shared a document that pulled together all of the ideas for Pathways or Seminar from the D2L feedback from the previous academic year.

Janet Colson asked how general education is currently assessed, and Brackett-Fialka shared that the three main competencies of Written and Non-Written Communication and Mathematics are regularly assessed and the program as a whole is assessed by the California exam given to graduating seniors, which makes assessment of general education alone very challenging.

Carter then stated that the main points from the small-group discussions as recorded on the notes in the jam-board had been discussed and thanked the committee for the fruitful conversation. He then began to preview the committee's next meeting. He stated that the committee's executive team had proposed that to close out the work of the semester on December 3<sup>rd</sup> that committee

members would vote on the models in rank order to see if we could move closer to deciding which model(s) would be forwarded for university comment.

Cribb asked if the existing General Education model would be discussed in the same level of detail as the previous three models. Gamble responded that the crosswalk would be presented but small-group discussions probably were not needed given the committee's lived experience with this model. Frank asked a clarifying question about the rank-order vote, to which both Carter and Gamble responded that no model is "finished" until the university community has had an opportunity to provide input. Gamble also clarified that assessment will have to be built into the models, but a rank-order vote would be a great way to capture what the committee has learned over the semester's consideration of each of the models in a sensible way and possibly lay the groundwork for moving forward.

There was discussion on whether the models would be considered "as is" (as they had been considered by the committee) or whether the Design Team would revise each of the models based on the committee's input to bring to that last meeting of the semester "new and improved" models. Gamble then moved that the Design Team tweak each of the models based on the feedback provided in the jam-board exercises by the committee. Deanna Raffo seconded that motion. In the ensuing discussion, Frank wondered if there was sufficient time for the committee to understand the changes that might be made by the Design Team before voting. Gamble said that any such changes would be discussed and explained before the vote as needed. Gamble reminded the committee that his suggestion was in keeping with the committee's working practice—that the Design Team has consistently taken the feedback from the committee to tweak the models but that the UGEC only has the power to vote to approve or reject those adjustments. As a result of this practice, the models have evolved over time. Cribb then called the question, and in the vote, the committee approved the request to have the Design Team tweak each of the models based on committee input before the next committee meeting by a vote of 17-0-1. Frank asked what would happen in the Design Team lacked sufficient time to complete this tweak before the meeting, and Carter responded that the committee trusts the Design Team to make the best call. He then adjourned the meeting at 3:51 p.m. after explicitly thanking everyone for this diligent and fruitful work.