

GENERAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE
255rd Meeting
Thursday, March 19, 2020

MINUTES

Present: E. Klonoski (AVP), R. Caughron (BC, Chair), J. Pendergrass (BUS), P. Smith (EDU), R. Sinko (EET), B. Montgomery (HHS), V. Garver (LAS/H), S. Self (Student/CLAS), M. Pickett (Director Academic Advising Center), R. Subramony (AVP Academic Assessment), C. Zack (Associate Director Academic Assessment), D. Halverson (CC/CE)

The meeting was called to order by Rod Caughron, Chair. A brief discussion of process for the Teams meeting ensued. Caughron suggested to address new business and then move to Old Business A. 1 and 2. There were no objections.

I. Adoption of Agenda: Montgomery made a motion for adoption. Self seconded with no discussion. **Motion passed unanimously.**

II. Approval of Minutes: The 02.20.2020 minutes were approved by quorum via email. Garver requested an edit of C4 for clarification and presented the edit without committee discussion being requested. Minutes **APPROVED** via quorum.

III. Announcements:

A. The applications for inclusion to the General Education Roles effective Fall 2020 for LATS 101: Creativity and Critical Analysis, HIST 323: Nature and Technology, and SCL 200: Society and Culture were approved by electronic vote. This is now reflected in the 2020-2021 catalog and the approvals have been forwarded to Registration and Records for coding in MyNIU.

IV. New Business:

A. HON 300 B Human Genetics and Evolution application was presented by Caughron. Montgomery made a motion to approve the application for this topic. Self seconded with no discussion. The motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

B. A request from CVPA to remove ART 100, 101, 102, and 103 from the General Education and their Pathways roles effective Fall 2020. The rationale was presented by Caughron and Halverson. There was a brief discussion with a motion to approve the removal made by Garver. Montgomery seconded. The motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

C. A brief presentation of the Faculty/Department Chair Pathways survey was made by Klonoski. The survey results were not available to members in advance so the suggestion was made to table the discussion until members could consume the results. Montgomery made a motion to table the discussion. Pickett seconded.

Self was concerned that the data will impact the committee discussion for Old Business on today's agenda. Caughron felt while the data is important it would have the largest impact on VI. 3 and that discussion could be postponed to the April

meeting.

Garver asked for clarification on how the survey went out. Klonoski confirmed that one email was sent to faculty and another to department chairs. Both emails contained the same link and there was only one survey for both stakeholders. Garver concurred that the discussion could be impacted by the survey data. Caughron called the vote to **table** and it was **APPROVED** unanimously.

V. Old Business

A. Continued discussion of the Pathways.

1. Ideas for way to reduce the number of the Pathways to make oversight reasonable. Self **made a motion** to engage in continued discussions of the Pathways. Montgomery **seconded**. The motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

Caughron and Montgomery discussed if the data the committee is using to investigate intentionality actually reflects this metric. Specifically the spreadsheet with data reflecting how many students have taken 1, 2, or 3 courses in a Pathway. Klonoski suggested that it might be more effective to decide what the committee would like to structure going forward versus basing the decision exclusively on potentially misleading data. Process for this could be to dismiss this unreliable data and treat the proposal as if the committee is being tasked with building a pilot using metafields that integrate with NIU curriculum.

A resulting broader conversation about the purpose of Pathways followed to begin building out framing criteria. Montgomery and Klonoski both discussed the relationship between a Pathway and Minor. Montgomery stating that Pathways should offer a unique opportunity that differs in topic from NIU Minors. Klonoski suggested that Pathways can be a good conduit to a Minor for many students. Self indicated that the student body, in general, has difficulty seeing the merit of the Pathway program versus getting a second major or a minor. Self likes the idea of the Pathways for those students who come in to NIU as undeclared. However, these students may feel overwhelmed by the number of Pathways.

Pickett questioned if the committee should be looking at modifying the courses or keeping those in place and just reducing the number of Pathways. Klonoski suggested that one possible goal in restructuring might be to get greater integration across courses, to increase meaning for students. One flaw in the current Pathway framework is the number in the program which multiplies the number of courses to integrate. Creating interaction among faculty to garner integration for students is currently a real challenge due to this. Creating interaction could also deepen faculty buy in so there is a dual purpose to this.

Caughron questioned what the process for this would be. Klonoski mentioned that a pilot Pathway framework might benefit from looking at the Themed Learning Community framework to help create better intentionality, for both students and faculty, in the program. <https://www.niu.edu/learning-communities/themed-learning/index.shtml>

Caughron circled back to the data available to the committee, to discuss intentionality, expressing that you can find value in the numbers. Stating that

the committee should avoid imposing the desires of faculty/administration over the desires of students. Pickett concurred, drawing on the numbers for 2 courses completed which seems to lead more directly to intentionality. Garver agreed, stating that the data for 3 courses completed shows interest even if intention is lacking. Continuing, Garver added that interest is an important metric that can help the committee to plan, coordinate with faculty, and impact enrollment for general education courses.

Pendergrass disagreed, stating that there is little meaning in the data and that success should be based on what each student feels has intrinsic value and meaning. If the committee's goal is for the Pathways to function as an organizational tool, for those students who are undecided or searching for greater meaning in their general education requirements, that is the audience we need to reach. Pendergrass continued with, this will never be a huge program, but it is an important tool for helping some of our students. If this is the starting point, then the problem becomes one of marketing to that audience. If the pilot is structured with this goal in mind, we can then determine what metrics to collect to assess the program.

Pickett and Montgomery agreed that the committee needs to approach this as a pilot, that is flexible as data is gathered, to assess the program going forward. Pickett suggested that the first step should be to pare down the number of Pathways offered during the pilot. Smith expressed concern about students that are currently engaging with a Pathway if that one is not chosen to be part of the pilot. Caughron responded that a process will be put in place, for students in that situation, to complete. Klonoski concurred indicating that advisors could be the link to reach those students and to assist with completion and sunset of the existing program.

Klonoski suggested that the pilot Pathways don't have to retain the existing framework or even the same courses. One goal could be to better align the Pathways with current NIU initiatives. This could increase the potential of funding so popularity/intentionality should not be the only factor considered. Other issues to factor in are; what can be managed, what will entice funding, and what is marketable to students and faculty as well. Montgomery concurred that alignment with university goals will be critical in funding, marketing and ultimate success. Garver injected that faculty may not be inclined to align with what administration decides are the priorities. It is the job of faculty to advocate for priorities, that the administration may be overlooking, to best serve the needs of students. Sinko concurred, but indicated that there are currently initiatives on campus that have both administrative and faculty buy in. The Institute for the Study of the Environment, Sustainability and Energy is one example that Sinko cited as a unit that exemplifies this union.

Self suggested that each member vote on their top three within the structure of the Teams chat function. Pendergrass and Garver concurred and Garver **made a motion** to proceed with that process. Self seconded and the motion was **APPROVED** unanimously.

The majority outcome, of the vote for top three Pathways, was:

1. Sustainability
2. Health and Wellness
3. Social Justice and Diversity

Pendergrass made a **motion to adopt** the three Pathways from the vote for retention. This was seconded by Montgomery. Discussion of the motion was requested by several members. Garver expressed concern about the fact that the Pathways chosen are a departure from traditional liberal arts and this could be an issue to get faculty buy in. Garver continue, stating that the choices are of the present and knowing where you come from has value. This humanities approach can drive the present, so the interplay of the two is an important general education concept. Klonoski added that while this is important, the Pathways program is a small subset of the general education offerings, which will be targeted at a specific student population. Garver acknowledged that this is true, but still expressed concern over the optics of the pilot with the indicated Pathways; stating it could be perceived as prioritization of certain subjects. Given this, there could be a buy in issue for some departments/faculty. Klonoski agreed, but thought this could be addressed. Continuing he stated that linking, a general education subset pilot program, with university strategy can help to address the question of creating meaning within general education requirements. Caughron called for the **vote to retain** the three Pathways; Sustainability, Health and Wellness, and Social Justice and Diversity, in the pilot restructuring of the Pathways. This was **APPROVED** by quorum.

Caughron turned to the creation of the proposal itself. Pickett stressed the need to address the role of coordination and the need for having access to the appropriate bodies across campus to make the pilot a success. Pendergrass and Klonoski emphasized the need to determine the functions within the framework and then decide how those roles should be allocated. Given potential resource limitations, discussion focused on how to do this without the coordinator role or with one coordinator for the pilot. Smith proposed that the advisors could have a key role in marketing to and managing students who engage with the pilot.

To build out the framework it was decided that two sub-committees should convene to look at:

1. Coordination Memorandum of Understanding – the goal is to bring back to the GEC a framework for the coordination of stakeholders and what the responsibilities and roles will be. Pickett, Caughron, and Klonoski volunteered to form this sub-committee.
2. Parameters Sub-committee – the goal is to bring back to the GEC a framework for structure and inclusion. Items such as course balance - between upper and lower division courses, course frequency, course retention, faculty interaction, and stakeholder buy in will be a key consideration for course inclusion. Garver suggested that as this framework is being constructed faculty/department chairs should be included in the discussion. Continuing that the GEC should provide feedback, as to the new criteria that is being considered, that could impact inclusion of a course in the new framework. Garver, Smith, and Klonoski volunteered to form this sub-committee. Klonoski indicated that absent member Hathaway would also be a good candidate for this work.

The outcomes will be presented at the April 16, 2020 GEC meeting.

Member Subramony was not able to stay to the end of the meeting, but requested via email that Klonoski and Caughron report on their presentation to

the University Assessment Panel (UAP). Klonoski summarized, that with Vice Provost Omar Ghrayeb and Caughron, he presented the current state of Pathway restructuring to the panel. Assessment process of the Pathways pilot will be a critical piece of the reformat. The three presenters will be going back to the UAP to explain the final reformat and assessment metrics when applicable.

- VI. Adjournment** – Montgomery called for a motion to adjourn 2:20 pm. This motion was seconded by Pendergrass. The motion was **APPROVED unanimously**.

The next meeting of the General Education Committee is scheduled for April 16, 2020.

Respectfully submitted by Denise Halverson, Curriculum Coordinator/ Catalog Editor.