**FHSU Liberal Education Committee**

**Minutes**

Meeting Called by

Shala Mills, Chair

Date: Monday 2/27/2017

Time: 3:00-4:00

Location: Rarick 329

Members

Douglas Drabkin (AHSS)

Bradley Will (AHSS)

Dmitry Gimon (BE)

Jessica Heronemus (BE)

Kevin Splichal (Ed)

Teresa Woods (Ed)

Glen McNeil (HBS)

Tanya Smith (HBS)

William Weber (STM)

Tom Schafer (STM)

Robyn Hartman (Lib)

Helen Miles (Senate)

Megan Garcia (SGA)

Cody Scheck (SGA)

Cheryl Duffy (Goss Engl)

Kenton Russell (FYE)

Chapman Rackaway (Grad Sch)

*[Minutes will be somewhat less complete this week as the recording secretary was presenting ideas and leading discussion, not taking careful notes. What makes this particularly unfortunate is that, with an unusually high number of committee members absent, and the conversation scintillatingly brilliant (or pretty interesting anyhow), detailed minutes would have been welcome. That said:]*

3:02 (4 minutes) All were present except for Garcia, Gimon, Rackaway, Scheck, Schafer, Smith, Splichal, Weber, Will, and Woods. Hartman was serving as proxy for Schafer, Heronemus for Gimon, and Drabkin for Will and Woods. With all this proxying, a quorum was met. The minutes from last week’s meeting were belatedly approved. Drabkin explained the inclusion of the dolphin and anchor emblem at the bottom of the minutes the ancient adage traditionally linked to it, “festina lente,” which translates roughly as “make haste slowly.” The adage refers to doing things with a careful urgency, pushing ahead as quickly as can be managed but without screwing up and doing a shabby job. Drabkin recommended that this serve as our committee’s motto.

3:04 (52 minutes?) Drabkin presented the following sketch for a new way to think about setting up our liberal education program:

**Modes of Inquiry Courses** ***[“the Branches”]***

18 hours total, 6 courses, 3 hours each. Students would take, in no particular order, one course for each of six modes of inquiry.

Students would have options from which to choose for each of the six modes of inquiry. Any department could, in principle, offer a course in any of these categories provided the course provides a genuine introduction to the reasoning characteristic of the particular mode of inquiry. We would need to have fairly strict rules about this. The primary aim of these courses would not be fact-transference – passing on the results of aesthetic judgment, historical judgement, mathematical judgment, and so on; the primary aim of these courses would be to enable students to get a taste for what it is like to think like an artist, to think like an historian, to think like a mathematician, and so on. The proposed Science for Citizens course that we were considering last week aims to provide the sort of thing these courses would be aiming to provide (insight into what it is to do science, and why this is a more or less reasonable way to think about some aspects of the world). But whereas Science for Citizens takes up examples drawn from a wide range of work that has been done across several disciplines in the natural sciences, without much context, it is easy to imagine how a very good mode of inquiry course could have a very narrow focus – trying to understand the circadian rhythms of land snails, perhaps – as long as the course enables students to develop an appreciation for what it is to think like a scientist. The point is that the course must teach the mode of inquiry. The liberal education committee (or a sub-committee of faculty members advising the liberal education committee) would have to regularly check to see that these courses are doing what they are supposed to be doing.

* historical – narrative approach to human data
* social scientific – empirical approach to human data
* natural scientific – empirical approach to non-human data
* mathematical – logical approach to necessary truths
* philosophical – dialectical approach to non-empirical questions
* aesthetic – imaginative approach to subjective experience

**Essential Facts about Time and Space, Cause and Effect, and How Things Work *[“Trunk”]***

0 hours total, 6 mini-courses, entirely online and automated, 0 hours each. A passing grade in each would be required to graduate.

This is the idea that got floated in one of our meetings a couple weeks ago of zero-credit all-online mini-courses, at no cost to the student, leading to exams that would be administered through a university testing center. The point would be to set students up with some of the basic, uncontroversial information (essential facts) that any college-educated person is expected to know. Exams could be something like the civics test administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Possible mini-courses with exams include:

* geography/culture facts
* government/civic facts
* information literacy facts
* technology literacy facts
* health/nutrition facts
* financial management facts

**Foreign Language Course *[“Trunk, with a taste of Fruit”]***

3 hours total, 1 course, 3 hours.

* just a smattering, enough to get a person started listening, speaking, and reading a new language
* one of the aims of the course would be to encourage students to continue working with the language, to travel abroad, to meet and interact with native speakers, etc.
* this course could be completed as part of a study-abroad project

**Sequenced, Integrative Reasoning-and-Writing Courses *[“Trunk, Branches, and Fruit”]***

15 hours total, 5 courses, 3 hours each. Two courses would be entry-level and would be taken in the student’s first couple semesters; one would be an intermediate-level course; one would be an upper-level course; and one would be a capstone course taken towards the end of a student’s time with us.

* entry-level reasoning course
	+ emphasis on analyzing, understanding, and evaluating arguments (giving reasons in support of claims)
	+ inductive and deductive lines of reasoning contrasted
	+ students study representative arguments from all six modes of inquiry
* entry-level writing course
	+ emphasis on clarity of expression, accuracy of description, good grammar, and proficient use of writing conventions
	+ assignments to focus on expository writing, especially on clearly and thoroughly setting out other people’s arguments
* intermediate-level integrative reasoning-and-writing course
	+ students choose one course of this type from a list of options
	+ topics should encourage cross-disciplinary thinking (multiple modes of inquiry) about complex questions
	+ assignments to emphasize expository writing and introduce evaluative writing
	+ all teachers would be experienced writing teachers or teachers committed to becoming experienced writing teachers
	+ all teachers would work together to establish an appropriate standard for assignments
* upper-level integrative reasoning-and-writing course
	+ again, all teachers would be experienced writing teachers or teachers committed to becoming experienced writing teachers, and all teachers would work together to establish an appropriate standard for assignments
	+ topics would tend to be of the “wicked problems” type (e.g., problems involving difficult resource management choices, or problems involving contrasting value systems)
	+ assignments to emphasize evaluative writing and introduce framing-and-research writing (framing a question is to set it out in a way that can be handled in a reasonable way applying one or more of the modes of inquiry; research is taking on a question that has been appropriately framed)
	+ all teachers would need the appropriate disciplinary qualifications to evaluate framing-and-research related to the course’s subject matter
* capstone course
	+ ideally this framing-and-research reasoning-and-writing project would be woven into each student’s major program and would help draw the student’s college experience into a meaningful whole
	+ if the student’s major program doesn’t have a capstone, then the student would select from a range of university liberal education capstone choices

Most of the discussion focused on figuring out just what this would mean and exploring alternative means to the proposed ends:

* Re. the Modes of Inquiry Courses: Chair observed that the six modes of inquiry may best be thought of as a greater specification of the three-part division of the liberal arts now part of the university’s general education program (arts and humanities; mathematics and natural sciences; and social and behavioral sciences). Drabkin concurred and observed that the six part division makes more sense, as the difference between history and psychology, for instance, or between mathematics and biology, or between philosophy and music is pretty fundamental; and grouping them this way (in 3 heaps) is misleading; it makes no more sense, for instance, to group mathematics with biology than it does to group it with sociology or with accounting, and so on.
* Re. the Essential Facts Mini-Courses: Miles (and Woods, who had some of her views expressed through her proxy) suggested that these courses may be better set up differently, as for-credit courses with a combination of face-to-face discussion and online studying. Chair observed that adaptive learning platforms have recently been developed that would enable students to work at their own pace in acquiring these sorts of essential facts. Heronemus and McNeil warned that facts learned out of context tend not to stick with people.
* Re. the Foreign Language Course: McNeil spoke in favor of this course and observed that a course very like it was proposed some years ago for inclusion in the general education program; he will look for the paperwork from that course proposal. Heronemus, Hartman, and Miles wondered if there should not be other courses developed besides this one to meet the intercultural competence objective (objective 3.2). There was some discussion, for example, of study abroad, and of coursework that would involve students interacting with immigrant populations here in the United States.
* Re. the Sequenced, Integrative, Reasoning-and-Writing Courses: Most of the time was spent just figuring out what the proposal came to. Hartman observed that the information literacy objective (objective 1.4) would be important for the framing-and-research component of the upper-level integrative reason-and-writing course.
* The impression overall was that the proposal deserves further thought.

4:00? Meeting ended. The next meeting will be Thursday March 9 at 3:00 PM in Rarick 312.

**----------------------------------------------------------------------**

**Submitted by D. Drabkin, Recording Secretary**

***Festina lente.***