**FHSU Liberal Education Committee**

**Minutes**

Meeting Called by

Shala Mills, Chair

Date: Monday 3/13/2017

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)

3:04 (66 minutes) All were present except for Garcia, Gimon, Rackaway, Scheck, Smith, and Woods. Established that a quorum was met. The topic for discussion this week was the first part of Drabkin’s program proposal: “modes of inquiry courses.” In order to help focus discussion, he brought the following description for the committee to consider:

*The committee has already agreed that students will come to “possess a broad understanding of the world, having studied the humanities, mathematics, the natural sciences, and the social and behavioral sciences, and the ways of knowing characteristic of these disciplines” (objective 2.1). To this end, the university will adopt a modes of inquiry model for designing, teaching, and assessing certain of our courses. We understand that this list may need to be revised and refined, but tentatively we identify six modes of inquiry:*

* *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*

*Separate assessable student learning outcomes will be developed for each of the six modes of inquiry. Students will take, in no particular order, one course for each mode; at 3 hours per course, this comes to 18 hours of coursework. Students will 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. The primary aim of these courses is not to be fact-transference—passing on the results of aesthetic judgment, historical judgement, mathematical judgment, and so on; the primary aim of these courses is to teach the mode of inquiry so that students 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 liberal education committee (or sub-committees of faculty members advising the liberal education committee) will carefully study course proposals for inclusion under each of the modes of inquiry, and will also regularly check to see that these courses are doing what they are supposed to be doing. Any course included as an option under one of the modes of inquiry will be required to submit each offering of the course to assessment measures approved by the liberal education committee as appropriate given the established learning outcomes for that mode of inquiry.*

Heronemus observed that the last part of this would be very important. For these courses to be true modes of inquiry courses, they would have to have clearly articulated modes of inquiry learning objectives, and be assessed regularly. It would not be good enough to have a course syllabus on file somewhere claiming one thing and something very different going on in the various offerings of the course. The committee agreed. McNeil wondered if “applied” might not be a seventh mode of inquiry. The committee, wondering what this would be, agreed that this is something that might be a good idea to look into. Will noted that it may be too restrictive to say that “the primary aim of these courses is not to be fact-transference”; he imagined a biology course which had fact-transference as its primary aim but nevertheless fully met the learning objectives for a natural scientific modes of inquiry course. The committee generally agreed, while acknowledging that whether or not the restriction is appropriate turns on just what those learning objectives would be. Miles wondered if this 18-hour requirement would be too burdensome for students in highly prescriptive accredited programs. Chair observed that this 18-hour proposal would be replacing what is currently handled with the 28-hour liberal arts distribution section of the university’s general education program. Miles wondered if requiring modes of inquiry courses would cause problems for programs that require “cognates” (required courses for students in highly prescriptive accredited programs). Chair observed that the proposal would allow major programs to offer modes of inquiry courses tailored to the needs of its students. Heronemus observed that, if anything, the proposal would free up hours and choices for students. Miles wondered if it were important for students to be familiar will all six modes of inquiry. Might it not be good enough for students to be familiar with just one or two? Drabkin insisted that they are all important, and that lack of familiarity with these modes of inquiry results in a failure of appreciation for the basis of human knowledge. McNeil noted that it may be too restrictive to require that these all be 3-hour courses; a 5-hour course may, for instance, also achieve the desired learning objectives. The committee agreed. Schafer expressed concern that a natural scientific course with primary emphasis on the mode of inquiry instead of fact-transference could leave a student not knowing about something as fundamentally important to the study of geology as the theory of plate tectonics. Drabkin observed that the university currently does not require that graduates know anything about plate tectonics (or a great many other similarly important things), and suggested that this lamentable state of affairs would be addressed in part two of the proposal (“essential facts about time and space, cause and effect, and how things work”). McNeil noted that these modes of inquiry courses would need to be considered as part of the larger picture and recommended that the committee not vote on anything just yet. The committee generally agreed. Splichal observed that his own children, students at the university, would benefit from the kind of thinking these sorts of courses would encourage, but cautioned that this proposal would call for a “huge shift” from what we are currently doing. Heronemus concurred, but saw this as one of the proposal’s strengths.

4:06 Meeting ended. The next meeting will be Thursday March 30 at 3:00 PM in Rarick 312. With the modes of inquiry proposal simmering on a back burner, the committee will turn its attention the fourth part of Drabkin’s program proposal: “sequenced, integrative reasoning-and-writing courses.”

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

***Festina lente.***