**FHSU Liberal Education Committee**

**Minutes**

Meeting Called by

Shala Mills, Chair

Date: Tuesday 12/6/2016

Time: 3:00-4:00

Location: Rarick 312

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 (Provost)

Chapman Rackaway (Grad Sch)

3:02 (4 minutes) Meeting began. All members present except for Gimon, Miles, Russell, Scheck, and Splichal. Will served as proxy for Russell. Established that a quorum was met. Chair introduced Terry Rhodes of AAC&U, formerly of Portland State University (PSU), who joined the committee from Washington, D.C. by teleconferencing. The topic of conversation was, by arrangement, the liberal education program at PSU.

3:06 (14 minutes) Duffy asked how writing is taught at PSU – their program innovations did away with the freshman composition sequence – and how their new program ended up affecting their English department. Rhodes’ answer focused on their year-long “freshman inquiry” course, which is writing-intensive, variable-content, and topics-based. Each of these courses is designed by a team of 5 or 6 faculty members, at least one of which is an experienced writing teacher, usually a member of the English department, and it is designed around a topic expected to be of interest to incoming freshmen. Each section is taught by a single faculty member from the team, and each faculty member agrees to make writing central to the course. So even if the faculty member doesn’t start out as a writing teacher, he or she becomes one. All sections share the same rubric for writing assessment. [Perhaps we can ask to see one.] Writing portfolios are used, and students are encouraged to reflect on their growth as writers. Upper-division undergraduate tutors are available in the classroom (“tutors on tour,” he called them); one result is that more students end up making use of the university’s writing center. He suggested that a benefit of this course is that students tend to care more about what they are writing; it has more focus and purpose because the students are writing about something that interests them that they chose to study. Class sizes tend to be in the 20 to 25 range. As for the effect on the English department, the change was disruptive, but the disruption was eased by a supportive administration, and the result is that the English department still exists, the same amount of English teaching is going on, and people are generally happy with the results. (Later in the conversation he returned to this subject, observing that the English faculty found increased opportunities to deliver more advanced coursework because of the reduced need for freshman composition classes.)

3:20 (10 minutes) Heronemus asked how PSU managed to pull off the transition from a distribution model for general education to their inquiry-cluster model. His reply involved six elements: (1) town hall style meetings to convince the faculty that the objectives were desirable, (2) getting influential senior faculty to be interested in the content of the topics-based courses, (3) supportive upper administrators who got the deans on-board and made it “harmless” for departments to navigate the ups and downs of student credit hour adjustments, (4) faculty senate support, (5) a three-year, full scale roll-out of the program with no pilot programs, and (6) an understanding that, if after three years no improvements were noticeable, there would be a shift to a different program.

3:30 (12 minutes) Weber asked what the effect was of moving away from a fixed set of core courses; the Chair then suggested that Rhodes might focus on how mathematical literacy is taught at PSU without a core math course. He replied that it begins with determining the mathematical needs of individual students. Students are required to take whatever math courses are needed for their majors, and most students take some basic math courses. All students, however, are taught “quantitative literacy” through the freshman and sophomore inquiry courses. It was somewhat unclear what he meant by this, but his examples suggested a basic sort of numerical framing of questions, and reasoning involving statistics.

3:42 (6 minutes) Woods asked how much pedagogical training was required to prepare faculty members to teach well in the PSU program. Rhodes mentioned two things: (1) faculty development workshops, e.g., working writing and quantitative literacy into the sophomore inquiry courses, and (2) encouragement from the deans to work more “engaged pedagogies” into courses (see what AAC&U calls “[high impact practices](http://www.aacu.org/leap/hips)”).

3:48 (7 minutes) Chair asked what the new program had to do with improved recruitment, retention, and graduation rates at PSU. He mentioned two things: (1) students found the topics-based general education courses more interesting than the old courses, and (2) the courses seemed practically useful, especially the project-based capstone courses. Regarding these project-based courses, he thought it impressive how the Portland community found so much good work for the students to do.

3:55 (8 minutes) Drabkin asked about other liberal education models, e.g. the “strands”/“ways of knowing” approach to structuring liberal education, and what their advantages or disadvantages might be in comparison to the PSU program. Rhodes took this question as an opportunity to sum up his advice to us in four points: (1) We should get clear on what we want the students to get out of our liberal education program. (2) We should come up with a program that involves developing skills beyond the single course, e.g., writing across the curriculum. (3) We should design a program that involves applications; people outside the university want students who can accomplish things, who can do things worth doing. (4) The traditional distribution model doesn’t serve college students as well as they should be served.

4:03 (3 minutes) Chair asked him to identify the “biases” of his organization, the AAC&U. He mentioned four. The AAC&U especially values: (1) integrated curricula, (2) returning to skills again and again across semesters, (3) taking up questions that don’t have easy answers, and (4) encouraging students to work closely with people different from themselves.

4:06 Meeting ended. Chair thanked our guest. This was the last meeting of the Fall 2016 semester.

*[Note: This session was recorded. Anyone interested may access it via the Liberal Education Committee's shared Google Docs folder. Contact the Chair if you need help accessing this folder.]*

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