**FHSU Liberal Education Committee**

**Minutes**

Meeting Called by

Shala Mills, Chair

Date: Thursday 2/13/2017

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)

3:02 (77 minutes) All were in attendance except for Garcia, Gimon, Russell, Smith, Weber, and Woods. The meeting took place in Rarick 329. For the rest of the semester, this room will be the location for the committee’s Monday meetings. Established that a quorum was met. There was only one item taken up for discussion during the meeting: Andree Brisson made a presentation to the committee of the sketch for a new course, “Science for Citizens,” which has been taught successfully for a few years now at Sam Houston State University and is being developed as a “blended course” (part online, and part face-to-face) through AASCU for national distribution. Brisson’s intention is to offer a pilot version of this course as a requirement for students participating in the living and learning community EarthRise during the Fall 2017 semester. Her request of the liberal education committee was that this first offering of Science for Citizens be counted towards the current 55-hour general education program under the “liberal arts – distribution – mathematics and natural sciences” designation (or under the “upper-division integrative” designation, if the committee thinks it fits better there). The understanding would be that this is a onetime exception; any future offerings of the course beyond Fall 2017 would need to go through the formal course approval process for general education courses. The point of Science for Citizens would be to introduce students, who for the most part would be non-science majors, to the kind of *reasoning* that is at the foundation of the natural sciences. Topics would include: controversial matters like evolution and climate change; facts, laws, and theories (what they are); science vs. pseudo-science; the compatibility of religion and science; the value of considering multiple hypotheses; graph reading; the principle of parsimony; things that are measurable vs. things that are not; and science, not just as a body of authoritative claims, but as a reliable approach to understanding the natural world. Discussion of Brisson’s proposal involved just about everyone in attendance. Some of the highlights:

* Miles confirmed that if the liberal education committee votes to allow the course to be used toward the current general education program then that vote should be forwarded to the academic affairs committee of the faculty senate for their consideration.
* McNeil asked why the university should offer this course, right out of the gates, as a general education course; this sort of exception is unusual. The course could be taught simply as an elective for students in the learning community.
* Heronemus, speaking as director of one of the living and learning communities, observed that it is helpful to the first year students in these communities to take general education courses in their first semester.
* Heronemus also observed that the approach of Science for Citizens, focusing as it does more on the reasoning that undergirds science than on any given body of established facts, may do more good for students who will not be taking much science in college than any one of the discipline-specific science courses being offered for general education credit.
* Miles inquired of Drabkin whether the Science for Citizens course was more of a philosophy course than a science course. Drabkin said this is unclear. Although the proposed course does focus on some aspects of critical thinking, and was originally developed at SHSU in part by members of their philosophy department, philosophy focuses more on normative than on empirical questions, and this course appears to be focused primarily on empirical thinking, specifically in the context of science as a way of knowing.
* Rackaway reminded the committee that we have considered integrative courses of this sort as potentially valuable additions to the liberal education program being developed. He suggested that the committee might encourage the piloting of this course to get data and insights about its value with respect to our recently modified program goals and objectives.
* Drabkin observed that the course might serve as a model for other ways of knowing (modes of inquiry) courses, an approach to liberal education under discussion by the committee.
* Will observed that it would be appropriate for a fuller description of the course to be provided, at least a full syllabus and a list of measurable learning outcomes.
* There was considerable discussion about where the course might fit in the current general education program:
  + Chair noted that under the 45-hour Bachelor of General Studies or Transfer and Articulation versions of the program (see minutes from 2/9/17), any course delivered by a department in mathematics or the natural sciences could be counted for general education credit, since those versions of the general education program are not restricted to specific courses. Rackaway further noted that the lack of flexibility in the 55-hour general education program is one of the things that many people have hoped would change under a new program.
  + Committee members considered IDS options for the course. There is an IDS 199 variable content course that might be used, but the course description specifically prohibits its use in the general education program. (Also, if the committee chose to recommend it to count as an upper-division integrative course, the lower-division course number would not work.)
  + The committee observed that departments in the natural sciences have variable-content topics courses. One of these might serve as an acceptable home for a pilot course.

In the end, the committee was largely supportive of the course, and liked the idea of it being piloted in the fall; but the committee wasn’t ready to put Brisson’s request to a vote. Brisson was asked (1) to work up a sample syllabus complete with learning outcomes, (2) to consult with department chairs and come up with both a department to house the pilot course and a course number (HEGIS designation), and (3) to make another presentation to the committee, preferably at our next meeting.

4:19 Meeting ended. The next meeting will be on Thursday February 23 at 3:00 PM in Rarick 312.

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