**FHSU Liberal Education Committee**

**Minutes**

Meeting Called by

Shala Mills, Chair

Date: Monday 4/3/2017

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 (1 minute) All were present except for Garcia, Heronemus, Rackaway, Russell, Schafer, Scheck, Smith, and Woods. Will served as proxy for Schafer. Established that a quorum was met.

3:03 (5 minutes) Chair drew attention to a nationwide survey of general education programs (“[What Will They Learn? 2016-17](https://www.goacta.org/publications/what_will_they_learn_2016_17)”) conducted by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. Our current program, by their standards, earns the grade of C, i.e., mediocre, although it was the highest score for any 4-year institution of higher education, private or public, in the state of Kansas. Their basis for evaluation is whether or not courses in composition, literature, foreign language, government, history, economics, math, and science are required. Our only discussion was to ask who the ACTA are, what their agenda is, and whether we should care. Shala indicated that they are an organization that supports [a particular vision](https://www.goacta.org/about/mission) of general education. The report was offered to the committee for our information and not as a call for action.

3:08 (53 minutes) The conversation picked up from the meeting four days ago and our examination of the proposed “sequenced, integrative, reasoning-and-writing courses.” Duffy started things off with a revisiting of her concern that the proposal’s emphasis on argumentative writing (giving reasons in support of claims and evaluating this reasoning) may be too narrowly focused. There are so many other kinds of writing (expressive writing, short stories, step-by-step technical writing, etc.)—why this apparently exclusive focus? Drabkin replied that reasoning-based writing is at the heart of what a university education is about, that it is difficult to achieve proficiency in it, and so it deserves the focus. Besides, what we are discussing here is “general education,” which is to say, requirements for all our students. Other kinds of writing will continue to be taught at the university, but for general education, no other kind of writing is of comparable importance. McNeil questioned the value of intermediate and upper-level writing courses outside of the major. Chair noted that the proposed capstone course would be in the major, and that the Composition I, Composition II, and the upper-level integrative requirements in our current program could perhaps be thought of as worked into the proposal under consideration. Drabkin noted, however, that the proposed intermediate-level, integrative reasoning-and-writing course would be a considerable change from the current Composition II course. Miles reiterated her concern that Composition II be retained in the new program for accreditation purposes (see minutes from 3/30/17, at 3:07). Weber suggested that a significantly modified course could nevertheless satisfy all the learning outcomes of our current Composition II. Will reminded the committee that, if we ask too much of a modified Composition II course, this will cause significant staffing problems, particularly if all instructors are required to handle content that integrates multiple modes of inquiry. Drabkin suggested a possible compromise: adding Composition II to the proposal at the second level of the sequence (after the entry-level reasoning course and the entry-level writing course), dropping the intermediate-level integrative reasoning-and-writing course, replacing it with an intermediate-level reasoning-and-writing course in the major, keeping the upper-level integrative reasoning-and-writing course as a university requirement, and keeping the capstone in the major. Gimon suggested that this sequencing of courses could be operationalized with a modification of TigerEnroll so that, for instance, a student couldn’t enroll in the intermediate-level course in the major until the Composition II requirement had been satisfied. Chair asked if the learning outcomes of the entry-level reasoning course could be satisfied in a revised version of the freshman seminar. Splichal, who sits on the committee studying the freshman seminar, said that, in his judgment, the answer is no. Miles asked if the outcomes of the entry-level reasoning course wouldn’t be achieved through the six modes of inquiry courses. Drabkin noted that this could possibly occur, but reminded the committee that there is no sequencing of the modes of inquiry courses under the current proposal, and so, even if these were truly taught as modes of inquiry courses (as *reasoning* courses, with real emphasis on how a historian thinks, how a scientist thinks, etc.), the students wouldn’t be receiving this at the start of their college education. So it wouldn’t set up the joining of reasoning and writing that we hope to achieve at the Composition II level and above. Chair also noted another advantage of providing an entry-level reasoning course, particularly one that would serve as an introduction to the six modes of inquiry: as students taking the modes of inquiry courses would already have some familiarity with the kind of reasoning involved in each mode, this would take some of the pressure off of the instructors of the modes of inquiry courses to change what they are already doing. McNeil emphasized just how important not changing things too much will be in order to get buy-in for any new program we propose. Faculty are willing to change only up to a point; if pushed beyond that point, the called-for changes will be rejected, or ignored. Drabkin noted that, if we choose to keep anything like the reasoning-and-writing sequence being proposed, the upper-level integrative course will pose special challenges. These courses would involve students pursuing unique framing-and-research projects on difficult questions; the classes would have to be approximately half the size of our current upper-level integratives (which cap at 35) and would require faculty able to understand and properly evaluate this research. Chair suggested that the upper administration would need to provide resources for the faculty development necessary to pull this off. Somewhere in the middle of all this discussion, Will reminded the committee that we need to keep all of our program objectives in mind. He mentioned, in particular, that we might need to work something like the current speech course into the new program.

4:01 Chair’s closing remarks were to encourage us to formulate a plan that, while making significant improvements in the education of our students, is focused, and simple, and workable. Meeting ended. The next will be on Thursday April 13 at 3:00 PM in Rarick 312.

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

