

# FHSU General Education Committee

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## Minutes

### Meeting Called by

Bradley Will, Chair

**Date:** Thursday December 6, 2018

**Time:** 3:30-5:00

**Location:** Trails Room, Memorial Union

### Members

Douglas Drabkin (AHSS)

Marcella Marez (AHSS)

Jessica Heronemus (BE)

David Schmidt (BE)

Sarah Broman (Ed)

Kevin Splichal (Ed)

Trey Hill (HBS)

Glen McNeil (HBS)

Joe Chretien (STM)

Tom Schafer (STM)

Robyn Hartman (Lib)

Helen Miles (Senate)

Adam Schibi (SGA)

Cheryl Duffy (Goss Engl)

Tanya Smith (Grad Sch)

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3:31 (1 minute) All members were present with the exception of McNeil and Smith. Miles served as proxy for McNeil and Smith. Determined that a quorum was met.

3:32 (44 minutes) The FHSU CORE objective and outcomes having been approved in faculty senate on Monday, the committee spent most of the meeting trying to understand the objections that were raised by the seven senators who voted against the proposal. Hartman reported that the objections fell into two categories: **(1) that the FHSU CORE underemphasizes the natural sciences**, and **(2) that the FHSU CORE would require faculty members to do things they aren't already doing**. Regarding (1), Schafer suggested that there may be as many as three concerns at work here: **(1a)** that, while the FHSU CORE requires students to identify the essential characteristics of science questions, to evaluate the merits of examples of natural scientific research at the level of an informed citizen, and to apply scientific methodology to a natural science question to increase understanding, etc., it doesn't require students to learn any particular body of scientific knowledge – students may, in other words, end up graduating college ignorant of important facts; **(1b)** that the FHSU CORE doesn't explicitly require that students have a hands-on lab experience; and **(1c)** that the FHSU CORE appears to allow non-science majors to get through college with fewer credit hours of science coursework than the current general education program. The concerns behind objection (2) were harder to identify, but the committee identified three candidates: **(2a)** that the FHSU CORE would require faculty members to change how they teach the courses they already teach, and this is perceived as burdensome, perhaps even a threat to academic freedom; **(2b)** that the FHSU CORE calls for students to “produce a written document on a difficult question involving the disciplinary content of the student's major that subjects the student's reasoning to sustained, intelligent criticism

according to the standards of that discipline,” and this is perceived as burdensome; and **(2c)** that there is a general distrust of taking an outcomes/assessment approach to education. Regarding **(2c)**, Schafer suggested that there is suspicion in some corners that a system of metrics will inevitably lead to “gaming the system,” resulting in the collection of meaningless – or worse, misleading – data, wasting time and resources, and getting in the way of the important work of preparing our students for life after college. Regarding **(2a)** and **(2b)**, it was acknowledged that change can indeed be uncomfortable, but that discomfort can be part of very valuable change. It was also noted that, if a department finds themselves unable or unwilling to satisfy outcomes 1.1A.1 or 1.5.3, the university will create non-discipline specific courses that will invite students to continue practice their reasoning and writing skills. Regarding **(1c)**, Hill noted that if fewer students do in fact end up taking certain natural science and social science courses, there may be an impact on funding for graduate teaching assistants. Chair replied that this wouldn’t happen all at once, and so it is unlikely to harm any particular student’s funding. Regarding **(1b)**, it was noted that nothing in the FHSU CORE proscribes the use of labs to teach natural science courses, and depending upon how the third outcome for the natural scientific mode of inquiry is interpreted (“apply scientific methodology to a natural science question” etc.) the FHSU CORE may require it. As far as how many credit hours of coursework would be necessary to achieve the natural scientific mode of inquiry outcomes, it would be left to departments to make proposals and to the natural sciences faculty group that would be overseeing approval of these proposals to judge if they are adequate given the 2.1-D outcomes. (It was noted in passing that the department of chemistry is currently teaching General Chemistry as 2 credit hours of lecture and 1 credit hour of lab, whereas they teach University Chemistry, the introductory course for students who desire a deeper understanding of the subject, as 3 hours of lecture and 1 credit hour of lab.) Drabkin wondered if social science courses wouldn’t benefit from labs, as well as certain courses in the fine arts. Chair observed that the natural sciences are different in requiring special equipment; “labs” in the natural sciences are places, requiring special scheduling, etc. Regarding **(1a)**, the concern that the FHSU CORE does not require that graduating students know any particular set of natural scientific facts – this, it was acknowledged, is true, and is perhaps a weakness of the proposed program. This of course is a feature of our current 55-hour general education program as well. We have chosen, for good or ill, to keep this aspect of our students’ education unspecified.

4:16 (18 minutes) The committee speculated about what impact the Workday system may or may not have on the university’s transition to the FHSU CORE.

4:34 (11 minutes) Schmidt, Heronemus, Drabkin, and Chair met with Earl Ruder, the university web content manager, on Wednesday to begin planning a remaking of the general education website. Drabkin presented a summary of the group’s first thoughts on how to organize the site. Suggestions were made to improve the wording and to add some content. See **Appendix** below.

4:45 Meeting ended. The committee’s next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 13 at 3:30, but its location is yet to be determined. Conviviality and good cheer is likely.

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Submitted by D. Drabkin, Recording Secretary



**Appendix:**

**TASKS FOR REMAKING THE GENERAL EDUCATION WEBSITE**

Identify all content for deletion.

Decide on the message for the landing page.

This should explain what we mean by general education, and why general education is important.

Decide on the content for the “For Students” left-side navigation button.

This content will fall under one of three sub-buttons:

1. “For Students Seeking a Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.) Degree”
2. “For Students Transferring to the University with an Associate’s Degree or 45 or More Hours of Coursework”
3. “For All Other Degree-Seeking Students”

Decide on the content for the “For Faculty” left-side navigation button.

This content will fall under three sub-buttons:

1. “Advising”
  - a. Explain the various currently active General Education programs.
  - b. Set out any rules faculty need to guide students.
  - c. Include information on general education requirements for students at our international partner institutions.
2. “The FHSU CORE”
  - a. key features and terms (measurable learning outcomes, reasoning and writing across the curriculum, modes of inquiry, etc.)
  - b. objectives and outcomes
  - c. implementation timeline
  - d. policies and procedures
  - e. assessment rubrics
  - f. how to propose new courses
3. “The General Education Committee”
  - a. membership
  - b. minutes