

UNH FACULTY SENATE
MOTION # XX-M23

on Discovery Review Committee recommendations to leave Discovery Categories unchanged

1. Motion presenter: Scott Smith, chair of the Academic Affairs Committee
2. Dates of Faculty Senate discussion: 4/25/2016, 5/2/2016
3. **Rationale:** The Academic Affairs Committee moves that the following measure be adopted regarding the Discovery Program, based on the recommendations made by the Discovery Review Committee Report (henceforth "DRCR").

The DRC voted strongly in favor of reducing the number of categories (from the current eight [8] to either six [6] or four [4]), although the number of required courses would remain at eight (8). The Academic Affairs Committee has reflected on and studied the suggested changes to the number and distribution of categories, reviewed survey responses, sought out input from academic departments, and requested a response from the administration. Nearly all responses, from faculty to provost, were opposed to changing the status quo. Most responses from faculty reassert the long-held belief (since the General Education program was started in 1984) that breadth is an essential ingredient in an undergraduate education. In addition to pedagogical objections (e.g., there is no such thing as generic critical thinking, thus methods learned in a biological science course do not transfer necessarily to physical science) and strategic concerns (e.g. should we be limiting exposure to STEM disciplines?), such a change to the Discovery Categories would be unnecessarily disruptive. We are but six years into the Discovery Program and we have all finally gotten used to the new categories. The faculty would have to rethink advising. So too would campus advisers. The Office of the Registrar would have to reconfigure its software and tracking tools. There would be other ripple effects as well. In addition to the confusion and logistical complications of making such a change, there is the further concern that a reconfiguration of categories was in part predetermined by the nature of the charge itself (Oct. 2014; see section 1.3 above). Finally, a reduction in categories would not address the most common student complaint, namely, that there are *too many* required classes—a complaint not unique to the present generation. In summary, although the DRCR formally voted strongly in favor of reconfiguring the existing categories, the Academic Affairs Committee does not agree that this recommendation should be implemented. The reasons for such a reconfiguration (and which categories should survive or collapse into others) ought to be compelling and based on a broad support from the university faculty. At present, there seems little support for the proposed change.

We also append our summary of departmental responses, solicited by the AAC from November 2015–January 2016, found on AAC report of the DRCR, p. 11:

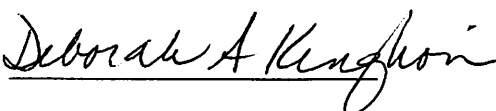
There was significant opposition to making any changes to the requirements—a solid majority, in fact—and only limited support to reducing the number of categories to 6 or 4. By our count, there was firm opposition mentioned eight times, while there was a smattering (3) of support for reducing the number of categories. In almost every case departments and faculty prefer more categories (6) than fewer (4) if there is a need to change. It was, however, unclear in some cases

whether respondents knew that keeping the categories as they are presently was a possibility, and upon follow up the departments made it clear that they preferred the *status quo*.

Furthermore, a reduction in categories does not address the most common student complaint, that there are too many required classes. A reduction in categories does not reduce the number of required courses, which will remain at ten (10) under any reconfiguration. Many, both in the Sciences and Humanities, complained that the redistribution of categories diminishes exposure to STEM courses, while the Social Sciences category (for instance) remains unchanged. Both faculty and administration have articulated a need, if anything, to increase exposure to STEM; the proposed reconfiguration does exactly the opposite. Some faculty cited literature that shows that critical thinking is content specific and that there is no such thing as generic critical thinking that can be transferred from topic to topic. Reducing the range of topics further limits the range of critical thinking.

4. Motion: The Academic Affairs Committee moves that the Discovery Categories remain unchanged, despite the strong recommendation by the DRCR to reduce the number of categories (to six [6] or four [4]) but keep the number of required classes the same (eight [8]);

5. Senate action: The motion passed with 41 votes in favor, 4 votes opposed, and 1 abstention.

6. Senate chair's signature: 

Forwarded to the following on May 13, 2016

President Mark Huddleston

Interim Provost P.T. Vasudevan

Mary Rhiel, Interim Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Barbara White, chair of Discovery Committee

David Richman, chair of Discovery Review Committee

All college deans

All department chairs