

## Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

**Department: Philosophy**

**Program: PHILOSOPHY OF THE PERSON I and II (year-long course)**

This form covers Philosophy of the Person only. Program Directors for PULSE and Perspectives assess their respective Core offerings.

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

*In light of the University Goals and Principles for the Renewed Core, the following learning outcomes for the Philosophy Department's Core courses have been identified:*

The Philosophy core teaches critical and analytical skills so that students develop an intellectual and moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value and significance, challenging them to translate philosophical principles into guides for life. All Core offerings in Philosophy bring students to reflect critically on the kinds of claims made in different disciplines, from the natural sciences to theology, by considering questions about the nature of reason, evidence, belief, and certainty.

The Philosophy core aims to teach students that the philosophical habit of mind is part of a well-lived life, providing the perspective and tools for critical evaluation of, and engagement with, contemporary problems and questions. Thus, the philosophy core reflects the Jesuit commitment to the advancement of knowledge in ways that evince a concern for the whole person.

Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to

- Understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground and are questioned in contemporary culture
- Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships
- Examine their values in light of their reflection on philosophical views
- Develop the ability to analyze arguments in order to create a moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value
- Consider the nature of notions like reason, evidence, belief, and certainty such that they are able to think critically about the kinds of claims made in different disciplines from the natural sciences to theology
- Critically engage with contemporary problems and questions using the tools of philosophical reflection and argument

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

Expected learning outcomes for Core courses in Philosophy are published on the 'Philosophy Core' section of our departmental website. They are included on faculty syllabi for Core courses, as well.

- 3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether students have achieved the stated outcomes for the Core requirement?** (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes have been achieved more or less well?)

Indirect Assessment:

In Fall 2017, the Director of Undergraduate Studies developed a five-year plan for assessing Philosophy of the Person on the dimensions articulated in the Core Renewal Initiative's Goals and Principles of the Renewed Core.

Each year, a set of three questions targeting specific Goals and Principles of the Renewed Core is to be included on Student Course Evaluation Surveys for all sections of Philosophy of the Person. The Undergraduate Committee reviews the results of the surveys, assess whether our Core offering of Phil Person is meeting the goals of the Renewed Core at BC, and make recommendations as needed. At the end of year five, we will have examined in detail the effectiveness of Philosophy of the Person in meeting each of the Goals and Principles of the Renewed Core. Identifying areas for continued improvement during the next five years will lay the foundation for a new set of Indirect Assessment strategies to be developed.

Supplemental questions targeted to learning outcomes for AY20-21 were omitted in favor of questions focused on our emergency shift to remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. We felt that the shift in focus was necessary under the unprecedented circumstances of teaching and learning during the pandemic. The results of our assessment indicate a high level of satisfaction among students, and point to the value of synchronous class meetings and flexible assignment structures in the remote context. We aim to use the results in planning to teach through disruptions in the future.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic led us to focus program assessment on meeting the immediate need for high-quality remote instruction. We hope that a return to in-person instruction in AY21-22 will allow us to re-prioritize our focus on assessing the program in its post-emergency operation.

One stated learning outcome for the Philosophy Core is to "Critically engage with contemporary problems and questions using the tools of philosophical reflection and argument." While syllabi review (see Direct Assessment below) indicates that some of our instructors explicitly cover issues of contemporary concern, we recognize that others can improve in this regard. In AY21-22, we will implement supplemental questions on student evaluations of Philosophy of the Person to target this learning outcome.

Direct Assessment:

In 2019, the Undergraduate Committee reviewed and revised the list of standard recommended texts for all sections of Philosophy of the Person I & II. In keeping with BC's goal of inclusive excellence, we added a 'diversity text' requirement, and developed a list of recommended texts by women and people of color. All sections of Philosophy of the Person must now include at least one text from the 'diversity' list. Syllabi are collected at the beginning of each semester, and the syllabi of new-hires and new Graduate Teaching Fellows are reviewed for consistency with our recommended texts and learning objectives. This assessment is ongoing.

During Summer 2020, the department ran a well-attended series of pedagogy workshops centered on diversity texts to be taught in Philosophy of the Person. Faculty with experience teaching selected texts presented to the group, with a focus on incorporating the topics into the Phil Person curriculum.

In an effort to introduce more consistency across sections of Philosophy of the Person, the DUS developed a Teaching Handbook for Philosophy of the Person, which includes expectations for student assessments, sample assignments, learning activities and other pedagogical techniques. Sample assignments and activities are explicitly tied to the formal learning outcomes for the Philosophy core. Each year, syllabi are assessed against the expectations set out in the Handbook. This assessment is ongoing.

The Graduate Committee has been tasked to ensure that our Graduate Teaching Fellows are trained to teach the texts recommended for Philosophy of the Person. The reading list for Graduate Student Comprehensive Examinations aligns with the list of recommended readings for Philosophy of the Person, and Graduate Teaching Fellows participate in a teaching seminar focused around Philosophy of the Person. Teaching fellows are observed in the classroom each year, and the Chair and DUS review teaching evaluations for part-time faculty each year.

- 4) **Who interprets the evidence? What is the process?** (Who in the department is responsible for interpreting the data and making recommendations for curriculum or assignment changes if appropriate? When does this occur?)

The Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS), along with the Undergraduate Committee, has primary responsibility for both direct and indirect assessments of Philosophy of the Person, and for designing/implementing all program modifications. The DUS reports to and is advised by the department faculty regarding undergraduate issues, curriculum and program modifications.

- 5) **What were the assessment results and what changes have been made as a result of using this data/evidence?** (What were the major assessment findings? Have there been any recent changes to your curriculum or program? How did the assessment data contribute to those changes?)

In response to students' desire for greater inclusion of texts by women and people of color, and in keeping with BC's goal of inclusive excellence, all sections of Philosophy of the Person now include at least one 'diversity text.' Demonstrating competence with a diversity figure or text is now a requirement for graduate student examinations, to be completed prior to teaching Philosophy of the Person. The requirement was implemented in 2019-2020, and we have continued to monitor and offer instructor support.

The new Teaching Handbook detailing our Philosophy of the Person curriculum, and setting explicit expectations for our teaching faculty, has introduced more structure – and more accountability – to a course taught primarily by Graduate Teaching Fellows, and part-time faculty. With upward of 40 sections serving more than 1200 students each semester, **the course would benefit from reducing our reliance on transient, part-time instructors.** In the meantime, the Teaching Handbook and annual review of syllabi and teaching evaluations creates accountability.

- 6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

Our last external review took place in 2009-2010.