

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 will be included on Student Course Evaluation Surveys for all sections of Philosophy of the Person. The Undergraduate Committee will review the results of the surveys, assess whether our Core offering of Philosophy of the 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 to be included on Student Evaluations of Philosophy of the Person in AY2017-2018 were designed to assess Course Characteristics F1, F2, F4 (Foundational Content). Results indicate that students Strongly Agree/Agree that Philosophy of the Person "exposed them to a wide variety of ideas from different historical eras" (4.5/5), provided a "strong foundation of knowledge about important historical periods, figures and texts" (4.49/5), and provided "a clear understanding of the fundamental human questions addressed by Philosophy" (4.48/5). Thus, we feel that we are successfully meeting Course Characteristics F1, F2 and F4.

Detailed review of individual student comments revealed several areas for improvement. While student feedback was mostly positive, many expressed a desire for (i) greater focus on issues of contemporary relevance, and (ii) inclusion of texts by women and people of color. As part of our departmental Direct Assessment of the Core (see below), the Undergraduate Committee identified diversifying the curriculum as an important goal. Student feedback confirms that we can improve in this regard.

One of the stated learning outcomes 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 AY20-21, the supplemental questions on student evaluations of Philosophy of the Person will target this learning outcome, and we aim to strengthen student assessment of this outcome.

Direct Assessment:

Beginning in 2015-2016, we introduced a list of standard texts to be covered in all sections of Philosophy of the Person. In Spring 2019, the Undergraduate Committee reviewed and revised the list of recommended texts. 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.

The Undergraduate Committee worked with the Graduate Committee 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 was brought in alignment with the list of recommended readings for Philosophy of the Person. We also launched a Diversity Reading Group focusing on approaches to teaching texts from the new 'diversity' list.

Syllabi for the course 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 learning objectives. In addition, every three years, the Undergraduate Committee collects and reviews samples of student work. Collection of assignments is underway, and the next review will commence in Fall 2019.

In an effort to introduce more consistency across sections of Philosophy of the Person, the DUS is developing 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.

- 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 AY2017-2018 supplemental questions on Student Course Evaluations of Philosophy of the Person aimed to assess Core Course Characteristics **F1, F2 and F4** (Foundational Content) as articulated in the Core Renewal Initiative's 'Toward a Renewed Core'. The student response rate was high (85.2%), and the majority of students strongly agreed that Philosophy of the Person is achieving Core goals F1 (4.5/5), F2 (4.49/5) and F4 (4.48/5). No changes to the Foundational aspect Philosophy of the Person were made on the basis of the results.

While students gave a strongly positive assessment of Philosophy of the Person in their narrative remarks, many expressed a desire for greater inclusion of texts by women and people of color. In response to this feedback, and in keeping with BC's goal of inclusive excellence, the Undergraduate Committee revised the list of recommended texts for Philosophy of the Person. Texts by women and people of color were added to the recommended curriculum, and 'diversity text' requirement was added, such that all sections of Philosophy of the Person must now include at least one text from the 'diversity' list.

The Undergraduate Committee worked with the Graduate Committee 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 was brought in alignment with the new list of recommended readings for Philosophy of the Person. We also launched a Diversity Reading Group focusing on approaches to teaching texts from the new 'diversity' list.

Philosophy of the Person is taught primarily by Graduate Teaching Fellows, and part-time faculty. For this reason, the DUS aims to introduce more structure – and more accountability – to our Philosophy of the Person courses by way of the introduction of a new Teaching Handbook that will include a revised curriculum, explicit expectations for student assessments, and sample assignments and classroom activities. This project is underway.

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.