Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum
5/5/23
Department/Program: THEOLOGY

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?)

> Students enrolled in theology core courses are:
> 1. engaging the quest for truth and meaning that generate theological insight in Christianity and other religious traditions;
> 2. exploring the fundamental texts and practices that shape Christian theology;
> 3. understanding the dynamic relationship between religious truth-claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal;
> 4. engaging the various disciplinary methods required for theological reflection, including textual, historical, social, and cultural analysis; and
> 5. relating theological inquiry to the enduring questions animating the broader liberal arts tradition.

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?)

> The learning outcomes for all core sequences are posted on the Theology Department website. https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/theology/undergraduate/core-in-theology.html Additional learning outcomes specific to each course sequence are printed on course syllabi.

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?)

> Beginning in F22, the Theology Undergraduate Program Assessment Committee (TUPAC) collects indirect data derived from the following customized student feedback questions which are administered at the end of each semester to all undergraduates enrolled in Theology core courses via the University's course evaluation system; the items directly address the Theology core goals:
> 1. This course has helped me understand the fundamental texts and practices that shape Christian theology.
> 2. This course has helped me understand the relationship between religious truth claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal.
> 3. This course has familiarized me with the scholarly exploration of religious faith.
> 4. This course has helped me understand how faith and reason are related in the search for truth.[1]

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[1] The DUS intends on adding a fifth question in F23 to directly address theology core learning goal #5.

In addition to these indirect data, the TUPAC acquires direct evidence by collecting and scoring student work, focusing on both specific sections and types of standard core theology courses on the one hand, and specific theology core learning goals on the other. For example, during AY2022-2023, ca., 100 papers from STT core courses were collected were scored by TUPAC using a committee-designed rubric in order to assess student learning on theology learning goals #1 and #4 (see results, below). It is the intent of the TUPAC to conduct such large-scale assessment projects involving student work every three-four years, since such undertakings are excessively time-consuming (especially for a committee whose members are elected and uncompensated) and are not feasible on a yearly basis.

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 Theology Undergraduate Program Assessment Committee (TUPAC), led by the director of undergraduate studies constructs a process for assessing the individual learning goals, then interprets the data collected. The TUPAC constructs recommendations based on these data and analysis, and the undergraduate director presents this to the chair and department executive committee, before presenting them to the department as a whole. This collation of data, analysis, and recommendation from the previous Spring and Fall semesters, takes place in the Spring Semester every year.

    The current TUPAC members are:
> Jeffrey L. Cooley (DUS, ex officio chair)
> Fr. Liam Bergin (2-year term ending F2024)
> Natana Delong-Bas (2-year term ending F2024)
> Dieter Roth (2-year term ending F2023)
> Elizabeth Antus (2-year term, ending F2023)

At the conclusion of a TUPAC member's term, a new member is elected by the department. Thus, in the Fall of 2023, the theology department will be electing two new members to serve two-year terms.

    During AY2022-2023, the TUPAC conducted two major assessment tasks.

    The first was based on the mandate in the document, "Theology Core Revision" (April 23, 2018), 7. The TUPAC conducted a **post-3rd year review of the new theology core** which was implemented in 2019. As described in that document:

> "The Chair, DUS, and Undergraduate Advisory Committee will conduct a more thorough assessment at the end of Year 3 in order to determine the impact of the implemented changes to the Theology Core. The means of assessment will include review of syllabi, targeted add-on questions to course evaluations, focused conversations with faculty, dialogue with Advising Services, and review of previous E1A reports. The Theology Department will communicate the results of its assessment to the UCRC."

To accomplish this, the TUPAC collected (nearly) all the standard theology core syllabi from Fall and Spring of AY2021-2022 and reviewed them for their attention to the new core goals and their descriptions of the standard theology core. In lieu of "focused conversations with faculty," the TUPAC created and distributed a survey for all standard theology core instructors that focused on faculty satisfaction with the new core, knowledge of the new core's goals, and allowed for suggestions for improvement. Finally, the TUPAC compared the old student feedback survey data (reported in old E1A reports) from the last semester of the old core in S2019 with the results from the same questions for the S2022.

    The second major assessment task conducted by the TUPAC in AY2022-2023 was an **evaluation of the department Sacred Texts and Traditions (STT) courses' contribution to theology core learning goals #1 and #4** (i.e., 1. engaging the quest for truth and meaning that generate theological insight in

Christianity and other religious traditions; 4. engaging the various disciplinary methods required for theological reflection, including textual, historical, social, and cultural analysis). The TUPAC collected indirect evidence in the form of new questions added to all THEO core courses beginning in F22 that directly address the theology learning goals. Furthermore, the TUPAC collected direct evidence from the F22 STT courses (ca. 100 examples from 22 courses) and, working with Celeste Wells and Jessica Greene, developed a scoring rubric for those assignments that fixated on learning goals #1 and #4.

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?)

A. Post-3rd Year Review of the New Theology Core (Implemented in F19)

Faculty Survey: As noted above, the TUPAC conducted a faculty survey focusing on faculty satisfaction with the new core, knowledge of the new core's goals, and allowed for suggestions for improvement. We collected 26 responses,[2] 39% of which taught in the old core. Below are the key takeaways:

Faculty Satisfaction
- 60% of veterans of OC did not believe that new core solved any problems with the old: new core means less time, less time with same students
- 30% believe it does offer benefits: mostly administrative/continuity issues, more exposure to more students, more exposure to more faculty
- 54% (total) believe that one semester is enough for the topic, 42% is not enough (note, this seems to map on to the % of respondents who taught in the old core)
- 54% of respondents believe the standard theology core (CT & STT) fulfills the current and foreseeable theological needs of our students, 35% do not.
- There were lots of suggestions regarding "improvement" or satisfaction, but no emergent trends

Faculty Knowledge
- 19% of respondents had no idea where to find the learning goals, 40% did not include learning goals in their syllabi
- 39% of respondents claimed not to have included dept core learning goals in their syllabi
- 42% do not discuss THEO core learning goals with students
- concern of some respondents that they need to cover ALL goals in each core course

Syllabus Review: The TUPAC collected nearly all of the AY2021-22 standard core syllabi to determine whether the standard theology core is described in them and whether or not they list some or all of the theology core learning goals. We found that 87% of the syllabi mention or describe the theology core, while 13% do not. Moreover, 69% of standard THEO core courses either do not list the core goals or are using the old ones.

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[2] The relevant response percentage is very difficult to determine, but an educated guess would be well over 50%. The TUPAC sent the invitation out to the entire full- and part-time theology faculty listserv (ca., 70 people, only a portion of which teach or have taught in the standard theology core), and the department regularly offers ca., 35 sections of the standard core each semester. The invitation for the survey encouraged "all members of the faculty, whether full or part time, who have taught either a CT (God, Self, and Society, or Engaging Catholicism), STT (X and Christianity in Dialogue or Bible courses), or a CT/STT Enduring Questions/Complex Problems course since the Fall of 2019" to complete the survey.

Student Feedback Comparison: From before the new standard theology core was implemented in F19 through AY2021-2022, two supplementary questions have appeared on all student course evaluations, intended to assess student perception of their theology core class's fulfillment of the theology core's goals:

1. This Core Theology course has helped me understand the fundamental texts and practices that shape Christian theology.
2. This Core Theology course has helped me understand the relationship between religious truth claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal.

These are answered on a scale of 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The TUPAC compared the last semester's results of the old core (S19) with the sixth semester's results of the new (S20):

- Old Core S2019
  - Q1 = 4.42
  - Q2 = 4.44
- New Core S2022
  - Q1 = 4.43
  - Q2 = 4.49

While this is not direct evidence (which is unavailable, due to previous modes of assessment in the theology department), it is nonetheless clear student perception is that the new core is as effective as the old core in regards to fulfilling the theology learning goals as they are summarized in these two questions.

Conclusions and Actions: First, the faculty overall is well aware of the structure of the new core and does a decent job posting it in their syllabi for students to see. Second, students do not perceive a substantial difference in the effectiveness of the old core vs. the new core to address the overall goals of the theology core program. Third, there is general ignorance demonstrated by the faculty regarding the theology core learning goals – this is undoubtedly due, primarily, to boilerplate copying in core syllabi rather than genuine ignorance or apathy (indeed, the old goals are relatively similar to the new goals in sentiment, even if not verbal expression). In light of this, the TUPAC recommends that there be implemented standard onboarding protocols not just for all new faculty beginning in F23, inclusive of adjuncts and teaching fellows, that describe the core, core goals, etc. Furthermore, beginning in the 2023 summer session, the DUS will include the goals themselves in core reminder boilerplate distributed to the department at the beginning of each semester. As well, the TUPAC encourages the department to organize themselves if they feel that the core could be improved in some substantial way (e.g., by developing a new standard core course).

B. Evaluation of Sacred Texts and Traditions (STT) Courses' Contribution to Theology Core Learning Goals #1 and #4

Theology Core Learning Goals #1 and #4:
- Goal 1: engaging the quest for truth and meaning that generate theological insight in Christianity and other religious traditions;
- Goal 4: engaging the various disciplinary methods required for theological reflection, including textual, historical, social, and cultural analysis

Results from Student Feedback Questions: As noted above, customized questions were added to all[3] sections of the theology core beginning in F22. Two of these questions are relevant to address theology core learning goals #1 and #4:

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[3] Due to an error in Student Services, the questions were not added to student feedback surveys for THEO143X X and Christianity in Dialogue courses.

2. This course has helped me understand the relationship between religious truth claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal.
3. This course has familiarized me with the scholarly exploration of religious faith.

Students responded on a scale of 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Student responses in STT courses (exclusive of THEO143X X and Christianity in Dialogue courses, but inclusive of STT-designated EQ courses) are calculated below:

This theology core course:

Familiarized me with the scholarly exploration of religious faith.	Helped me understand how faith and reason are related in the search for truth.
4.56	4.42

These results clearly indicate that student perception is that their STT courses fulfill theology core learning goals #1 and #4.

Results from Scoring of Student Work from STT Courses: As noted above, the TUPAC collected Collection and Scoring of Student Work from all (but one) F22 STT sections of the Core (ca. 100 examples from 22 courses; this represents roughly 15% of all students enrolled in STT courses that semester). Each student's performance in addressing each criteria was scored on a scale of 5-0 (with 5= exemplary, 1 = benchmarked, 0 = not benchmarked):

	Engages with the "search for truth" process	Engages with Christianity and other religious traditions as appropriate	Explores connections between God, Self & Society	Employs an appropriate method of analysis for the topic	
Dialogue	1.47916667	1.77083333	1.35416667	1.25	raw
Bible	2.10416667	1.63265306	2.06122449	2.06122449	raw
EQ	2.66666667	1.16666667	1.33333333	2.66666667	raw
ORIGINAL CALC (ROUNDED)	1.41	1.29	1.14	1.32	*Formula issue*
REVISED CALC	1.82	1.65	1.67	1.70	*Updated formula to include entire column*
REVISED CALC	2.12	2.04	2.11	2.13	*Updated formula to include entire column, but exclude "0"s[4]*

Ostensibly, scores in the 1-2 range might be considered low. However, it is crucial to recognize that the theology core learning goals – by design – emphasize **engagement/exploration**, not competency/mastery/etc. Thus **any score ≥1 (i.e., ≥ benchmark) is considered fulfillment**.

Conclusions Regarding STT and Theology Core Learning Goals #1 and #4: *Both indirect and direct evidence supports that STT courses are fulfilling theology core learning goals #1 and #4, and the TUPAC does not recommend any curricular changes.* Nonetheless, in light of results from the post-3rd year new theology core assessment (described above) as well as logistical challenges the TUPAC encountered when undertaking this semester's assessment, we strongly recommend that all theology

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[4] Full scoring data are available on request from the DUS.

core instructors not only post the theology core learning goals in their syllabi, but also index individual assignments as addressing specific learning goals listed. This will not only underscore for students that the learning goals are being addressed (even if clearly they perceive them as being addressed), but will also assist instructors and the TUPAC identify and collect relevant student work for assessment projects in years to come.

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

A full program review of theology was conducted in 2012.

In addition to that, in the summer of 2020 the department conducted a self-study of the new theology core implemented in AY2019-20. The results of that study confirmed that the department had the staffing and available seats necessary for students to fulfill their theology core, and that students felt that the new theology core fulfills the learning goals of the theology core as well as the old theology core did. The new theology core, as noted above, is currently undergoing another self-study, the results of which will be will be submitted to the UCRC, as per the mandate.