FORM E-1-A FOR BOSTON COLLEGE CORE CURRICULUM

Department: Philosophy
Course: Philosophy of the Person

1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed?**

Yes. By introducing students to the great philosophical questions, philosophy offers a perspective that enables them to have an integrated vision of physical, human and spiritual reality. It weighs propositions fundamental to personal identity, dignity, religious belief, and social responsibility. And, it examines moral issues facing individuals and communities. The Philosophy core teaches analytic and interpretive skills needed for students to evaluate critically, and engage with, questions of ultimate value and significance, thereby challenging them to translate philosophical principles into guides for life. Thus, the philosophy core reflects the Jesuit commitment to advancing knowledge in ways that evince a concern for the whole person.

Students completing the Philosophy core will be able to:
1. Understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground, and are questioned, in contemporary culture.
2. Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships.
3. Examine their values in light of their reflection on philosophical views.
4. Analyze arguments and claims, so as to develop a moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value.
5. Consider the nature of notions like reason, evidence, belief, and certainty, such that they can think critically about the kinds of claims made in different disciplines, from the natural sciences to theology.
6. 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:
https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/philosophy/undergraduate/core-in-philosophy.html

They are also included on faculty syllabi for Core courses.

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?)

In 2023-24, our department saw the need to review the Philosophy of the Person course in a comprehensive way, with an eye toward strengthening the course's approach and diversifying its content. It is worth noting, that while Philosophy of the Person is the most common way for BC students to complete their philosophy Core, the course does not have a dedicated director to oversee all the sections or provide additional resources and support to instructors (unlike Perspectives or PULSE).

Starting in Fall 2024, Prof. Eileen Sweeney chaired a committee with three other core teachers to begin an extended study of Phil Person, working closely with the new DUS in philosophy, Prof. Marius Stan.

To assist in this project, in spring 2024 we asked instructors for Phil Person to answer five questions about the syllabus and possible ways to improve the course. Those questions were:

1. Of all the texts and/or authors you covered, please name one or two that you think worked the best, and that you would certainly use in future versions of this course.
2. Of all the texts and/or authors you covered, please name one or two that you think worked the worst, and that you would not use in future versions of this course (or would prefer to see dropped from the syllabus).
3. Are there any texts and/or authors you think should be required for Philosophy of the Person but are currently not required—i.e., that should be added as essential reading (or listening or viewing) for all the sections?
4. Currently, the Philosophy of the Person course does not have a dedicated director, in contrast to Perspectives of the PULSE programs. Do you think the course could benefit by having a faculty member in this role? If so, what would you like to see a director do? What are the needs / gaps / issues / etc. that you think a director might address?
5. Do you think the course could benefit from more events and/or shared resources specifically for Philosophy of the Person instructors? If so, what events and/or shared resources do you think would be most helpful for instructors?

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 14 responses to the survey were passed to a subcommittee formed to consider ways to enrich teaching and the curriculum in the course.

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 the survey results, in 2024-25 the department organized four workshops. Their common focus was on ways to integrate new texts and thinkers into the Phil Person syllabus. The individual themes were: philosophy and race; philosophy and gender; faith, reason, and the common good; expanding the history of philosophy beyond the Western canon. The workshops were respectively led by faculty at BC, administrators familiar with our students' backgrounds and needs, course instructors with experience in experiential learning, and historians of philosophy from outside universities. Attendants included every group involved in teaching this core course: graduate-student instructors, part-time teachers, professors of the practice, and regular faculty. The workshop presentations were recorded for future use by new teachers of Phil Person. Further workshops are scheduled for AY2025-26.

   See below for further results. Discussions are ongoing about how to improve both the Philosophy of the Person course and our assessment of that course. A study group, led by Prof. Sweeney, is currently working on recommendations on how the course syllabus can be enriched and better integrated across the many sections of this course.

6) **Date of the most recent program review.**

   (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.)

   Our most recent External review took place in 2009-10.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED

Note: This is a reduced sample of the answers we received. A larger sample can be found in our E1A from (Philosophy of the Person) for 2023-34.

1) Of all the texts and/or authors that you covered this term (or year), please name one or two that you think worked the best, and that you would certainly use in future versions of this course.

Students responded to and were most engaged with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, specifically Books I, II, VIII, and IX. The content on moral virtue and its examples, and the material on friendship, resonated strongly with their own experiences. This was also some of the most memorable for them.
Michael Sandel: *Justice*
Of the required texts, Nicomachean Ethics consistently goes over the best, when given enough time. Of the non-required texts, I taught "Estranged Labor" from Marx's 1844 Manuscripts and it was one of the more effective readings in the spring semester.
Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and Hobbes' Leviathan

(2) Of all the texts and/or authors that you covered this term (or year), please name one or two that you think worked the worst, and that you would not use in future versions of this course (or would prefer to see dropped from the Philosophy of the Person syllabus).

Mill's *Utilitarianism* was—surprisingly—one with which the students engaged least. I anticipated they would agree most with Mill, given the influence of his thought on American politics today. He provided a useful critique of Kant's *Groundwork*, but it might be worth making the Mill text optional.
Plato's Republic, Descartes' Meditations, and Augustine's Confessions
I am not able to detect such a text/author.

(3) Are there any texts and/or authors that you think should be required for Philosophy of the Person that are currently not required -- i.e., that should be added as essential reading (or listening or viewing) for all Philosophy of the Person sections?

The reading list is already quite substantial, and leaves very little room to maneuver. I think instead of adding authors, we should think about eliminating required readings and giving options to instructors about what they would like to emphasize.
The present list of the required texts or authors is robust and substantial. Since the course is an introduction to philosophy, our students need to become familiar with some of its pivotal works. I believe reading the classics is the best way to become familiar with Philosophy and lay the foundations for further studies.

Some treatment of contemporary issues, or connections between historical texts and contemporary issues, should be required.

Nothing specific comes to mind - maybe Marx or an early modern empiricist like Locke (not his political philosophy) or Hume.

Perhaps Hume's theory of morals. The students have a big reaction when I teach it – probably because it is so emotional. It offers an essential contrast with Kant, who seems very unaware of Hume's inertness of reason doctrine. It is partially covered with Mill's Utilitarianism, however.

(4) Currently, the Philosophy of the Person course does not have a dedicated director, in contrast to Perspectives of the PULSE programs. Do you think the Philosophy of the Person course could benefit by having a faculty member in this role? If so, what would you like to see a director do? What are the needs / gaps / issues / etc. that you think a director might address?

No. This would create more administrative red tape. Also, Perspectives and PULSE are more intensive programs that have requirements such as additional course time, assignments, service obligations, etc. A "regular" introductory survey course should be the responsibility of the department to provide, and Phil. Person currently does so.

A director would be helpful. They could ensure some continuity among sections, while still allowing for flexibility. They could make sure all the new instructors have some orientation to the department and the course. Some instructors have been around for years, but among others, there's a lot of turnover. Having a leader to create community and add some cohesion would benefit the program.

I'm not sure what a course director would do, so I will remain ambivalent.

(5) Do you think the Philosophy of the Person course could benefit from more events and/or shared resources specifically for Philosophy of the Person instructors? If so, what events and/or shared resources do you think would be most helpful for instructors?

Not events but resources might be helpful. Maybe a shared Google doc of folders containing lesson plans and outlines etc for individual thinkers like one for Descartes and one for Kant.

Yes, definitely. It would be beneficial to have occasional meetings (maybe one or two each semester), where instructors could share their experiences, talk about their teaching styles, good and challenging in-class experiences, assignments, and similar.

We could also discuss and share current social and political events and/or the biggest challenges our students face.