GETTING STARTED AT BOSTON COLLEGE:
INFORMATION FOR NEW TEACHERS

The Connors Family Learning Center
2010
Boston College Students

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Boston College Students

Boston College, as you will often hear, is neither a college nor in Boston. BC is, of course, a university that sits on the border of Boston and Chestnut Hill, a section of Newton. The university has graduate and undergraduate programs in the College of Arts and Sciences, the Connell School of Nursing, the Lynch School of Education, the Carroll School of Management and the Woods College of Advancing Studies. There are also three graduate programs: the Graduate School of Social Work, the Law School and the School of Theology and Ministry. All together, 14,623 full- and part-time students were enrolled at BC in the fall of 2009.

(Statistics are from the Boston College Fact Book, available online.)

The Undergraduates

BC has more than 9,000 full-time and almost 1,000 part-time undergraduate students. The full-time undergraduate school is very selective and most students arrive at BC from successful high school careers. Most of them ranked high in their classes, earned excellent SAT scores (1920-2130 is the middle range for the class of 2013) and participated in many extracurricular activities. BC has a retention rate of 93%, and about 90% plan further education after their undergraduate degree.

Although nearly three-quarters of the undergraduates are from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states, increasing numbers come from California, Texas, and Florida, as well as from the rest of the United States. There are 424 international undergraduates, from 60 foreign countries. Slightly more than half the full-time undergrads are women, and over 24% are AHANA students. (AHANA is an acronym for African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American; see the “Supporting your Students” section for more information.)
BC students tend to be very busy. Most take five courses each semester in their first, second and third years and four each semester as seniors. In addition to fulfilling the core and major requirements, almost 400 undergraduates study abroad in a given year. Close to one third of the 2009 graduating class were double or triple majors. Also, in addition to all the usual things undergrads do—such as play sports, participate in clubs and student government, work, attend games and go to parties—BC undergrads are often seriously dedicated to doing public service. There are numerous volunteer programs on campus and they usually have long waiting lists of students wanting to join. Some of the freshman—about 800—live on the Newton campus, about a mile from main campus. They take shuttle buses back and forth. Much of the junior class lives off campus because of a lack of on-campus housing. (It gives some insight into the BC culture to know that almost all the seniors actively want to live on campus.)

But the fact that they are engaged in all sorts of activities does not mean that you have to be too easy on them. They are very capable and need to be challenged. Keeping in mind that yours is one of five classes, you can still expect them to do substantial amounts of reading, writing or other academic work. One undergrad told us that

“There are two kinds of undergrads at BC—those who work hard and are really trying and those who coasted through high school and got good grades without effort. Some students will test the faculty and find ways to avoid deadlines. If somebody has a good excuse to miss class or an assignment, the faculty should be reasonable. But it’s not fair to the student who hands things in on time if the professor tells some students it’s ok to hand things in three weeks late. I like it when faculty have high expectations and encourage me to achieve them.”

You are very unlikely to encounter serious behavior problems in class—most BC students are very polite. In fact, faculty members sometimes remark that they are too polite, even to the point of being reluctant to disagree with faculty or with other students. Sometimes this means making special efforts to engage a class in debate or active learning.

I like it when faculty have high expectations and encourage me to achieve them.
Getting to know students

Your first years at BC are sure to be very demanding and you may not have time to get involved in many activities beyond your teaching and research. But consider some of the less time consuming ways to get to know students. For example, the College of Arts and Sciences offers a subsidy to faculty who invite students to dinner. Or, you could become a mentor through a program such as the Mays Mentoring Program (described under AHANA student programs). Many faculty find it very rewarding to interact with students beyond classes, and it’s extremely valuable to the students:

When I first came to Boston College, the students seemed so confident and self-assured. So, I assumed that they all knew exactly what they wanted out of their education. But the more I talked to them, the more I realized how conflicted they were about their goals and how much they appreciated having someone to listen. They want mentors, and they will open up to you if you offer them the opportunity. The challenge is helping them realize that they are not inconveniencing you when they ask for your time outside of class.

First-year Writing Seminar teacher

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The Core Curriculum

No matter which school they belong to, all undergraduate students are required to fulfill the core requirements. This means that if you teach a core course, your students may belong to any one of the colleges. The core is built around the philosophy that all students, no matter what their eventual major, should receive a broad background in the liberal arts in order to become well-rounded members of society. According to the Final Report of the Boston College Core Curriculum Task Force:

The core should address the questions and issues that are fundamental to human inquiry. Students ought to understand the major ideas and methods of inquiry of the disciplines that comprise their intellectual heritage and ought to begin to grasp the breadth and diversity of human knowledge. The core needs to communicate not only how the principle disciplines organize knowledge, but also how they are related to each other and how different disciplines bring distinctive perspectives to the same issue or problem. The scholarly exploration of religious faith ought to be an important part of the core experience. Students should develop the critical, mathematical and expressive skills that are essential tools of the educated person. Finally, the core ought to make a difference in the lives of students, so that through their core experience, they learn to examine their values and integrate what they learn with the principles that guide their lives. (p. 1, 1992)

To create this core experience, the University requires that all students complete (or, in some cases, show competency in) fifteen courses distributed among the humanities, natural sciences, mathematics, and social sciences. In addition, students in Arts and Sciences and Management must demonstrate competency in a foreign language at the intermediate level. In most cases, students may choose among various core courses, but those choices must represent specified areas of the Core.

If you’re teaching a core course, students may not understand how it fits in with the larger curriculum. It will probably be up to you to explain its goals within this broader context.

I got a D on my first philosophy paper. That woke me up, big time.
Grading

When it comes to grading, students arrive at BC accustomed to doing very well. In other words, they have mostly received A’s and B’s throughout school. For most of them, this will change in college. The average grade for undergraduates is some form of a B. Often students will have mixed grades in the first and second year, and higher grades by graduation time. Grades mean a lot to them, especially since most of them are planning to go to graduate school of some kind. Don’t hesitate to demand a lot for a good grade—they can do it! One BC student was quoted in a *The Chronicle of Higher Education* article on how much—or little—college students are required to work:

> Students do more work for some courses than for others, and a major factor seems to be how much their professors push and inspire them.

Will Imbriale, a sophomore at Boston College, said a philosophy professor he had last year helped him adjust to college work. “I got a D on my first philosophy paper,” said Mr. Imbriale, who added that he now studies more than 20 hours per week. “That woke me up, big time.” He said he worked harder for that course than for others, and that he got an A- on his final philosophy paper: “I felt like I earned that. He gave me a sense of achievement. He made me want to understand.”

But not every professor pushes students. Mr. Imbriale said that only two out of five of his current professors challenge him.

(December 6, 2002)
The Graduate Students

Graduate students make up about one third of the student body, with 1,759 graduate and professional degrees conferred in 2009, including 152 Ph.D.s and 256 law degrees.

The graduate students come from all over the U.S. and around the world; 493 of them were international students in 2008-2009. In 2008-2009, 275 of them were teaching assistants and 171 were teaching fellows, who may have full responsibility for a course.

As with graduate students at many schools, those at BC often seem less integrated into campus life than undergraduates, even though they may be on campus for much longer than the typical undergrad. One reason is probably that they don’t live on campus. Also, they often carry a lot of responsibility in their lives outside of school. Like grad students anywhere, they sometimes suffer from writer’s block or anxiety about their ability to complete their programs. They need encouragement and help to remember their eventual goals. Often connections to faculty are even more important to them than they are to undergraduates. One graduate student had this advice:

One important thing that professors can do to help students feel valued is to learn their names as soon as possible. I found it so surprising to have a professor call on me in a large class by name, after only the 2nd class meeting, and to acknowledge me by name when passing in the hallway. It gave me the feeling that I was valued and respected.

Here at BC, professors can print out a class roster that includes pictures and names of their students. A professor can obtain this list prior to the first day of class, and can spend a few minutes a day memorizing names and faces. This small investment of time on the professor’s part demonstrates a degree of interest and concern, which can have a very positive impact on a student.
Woods College of Advancing Studies

Boston College also has a thriving evening college, The Woods College of Advancing Studies, which enrolls about 720 undergraduate and 134 graduate students. Many are part-time students returning to school in mid-career, but some are traditional-aged, full-time students who prefer to attend school in that setting. There is some crossover between day and evening programs, both with faculty and with students, so you may have some Advancing Studies students in class. They are highly motivated and capable students who usually have clear goals for their education.
Questions about how things work at B.C.
These are some of the teaching-related questions we hear most frequently. For more information on these topics or for other questions related to teaching, you are welcome to contact Sue Barrett (barretsc@bc.edu or 552-0835).

What are the policies on academic integrity?

BC’s policy on academic integrity is very thoughtful and very thorough. You can find the policy at: http://www.bc.edu/integrity

In addition to defining cheating, plagiarism and collusion, it outlines the roles of community members, including students, deans and faculty, in promoting academic integrity and goes through the procedures to deal with violations.

The policy gives faculty responsibility for creating an atmosphere that encourages academic integrity. The policy goes far beyond making sure nobody cheats on exams. Specifically, it states that faculty should discuss academic integrity at the beginning of every semester to make sure that students understand the concept in the context of the class. Faculty should also provide a written syllabus that clearly outlines course requirements and due dates, if possible, as well as a statement on academic integrity. Exams and assignments should be new each semester or, if not, all students should have equal access to old exams. Exams and assignments should be carefully designed to minimize the possibility of dishonesty. Proctors should be present at exams. Faculty must respect students’ intellectual property and confidentiality. Finally, grades should be awarded in a manner that is fair to all students.

If, in spite of your efforts, students violate academic integrity, it’s important to hold them accountable. Your first step is to discuss the suspected violation with the student. If you decide to impose a grade penalty, you are expected to send a letter to the student’s class dean, describing what has occurred. The student will receive formal notification of the charge and have an opportunity to respond. First offenses typically receive only a warning. The case will eventually come before the Committee on Academic Integrity for the student’s school, as described at the web site given above.
Starting in fall 2008, incoming undergraduates have been required to complete an online tutorial covering the basics of academic integrity. The tutorial takes a very positive approach to scholarly work and includes videos and vignettes of faculty and students. The tutorial automatically appears in all faculty Blackboard Vista sites so that you look it over and also have your students take the tutorial or review the tutorial if you want to be sure they understand.

**Is class attendance required?**

As a matter of policy, students are expected to attend class but handling the specifics of that are up to you. It’s a good idea to have an attendance policy of your own, but it’s also good to know that the college catalogue explicitly states that attendance is required. If a student has to miss several classes because of illness or other exceptional circumstances, the student or the family should communicate with the appropriate associate dean, who will notify you that the student needs special consideration. Absences for religious reasons are also excused.

Faculty sometimes have questions about students missing classes because of involvement on varsity sports teams. These absences are legitimate, and you should receive an official travel letter telling you which dates the student will be unable to attend class. The athletes will be responsible for making up all work. The academic lives of student athletes are taken very seriously at BC and if you have any questions, please call Learning Resources for Student Athletes at 552-8533.

**How are teaching evaluations handled?**

All course evaluations are now online. This has several advantages for faculty, including immediate reports as soon as your course is completed. The online survey contains several standard response questions and 4 open-ended ones. Faculty can also add up their own customized questions. You can easily access your evaluations through Agora.

There is also an on-line evaluation system run by the undergraduate student government where interested students can submit comments about teachers. It is quite unofficial and inconsistent in that students at either extreme tend to submit comments—those that loved or hated a class—and the others usually don’t bother. Although most faculty do not take these reviews seriously, many students check them before signing up for classes.

You may also want to get some feedback on your teaching without waiting for the end of the semester. There are many methods of getting mid-semester feedback, including just asking your
students how the class is going for them. This has the advantage of simplicity, but the disadvantage of not allowing them to answer anonymously. One way around this is to invite someone else in to gather information for you. You might have a department colleague visit your class mid-way in the semester and ask the students to write short answers to three questions: what does this teacher do that helps you learn? What does the teacher do that does not help you learn? And what one or two specific things could this teacher do that would help you learn more in this class? Your colleague can then type up the answers, to protect anonymity, and give you the feedback. (This is a service provided by The Connors Family Learning Center.)

**What should I do when I have a student with a learning disability?**

Kathleen Duggan, who coordinates services for students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder, contributed the following answer to this question.

It’s very likely that sooner or later you will have a student with a learning disability (LD) in one of your classes. These students may or may not identify themselves to you with a letter from Kathleen Duggan, the University’s Coordinator of Academic Support Services, or from Dard Miller, the Learning Specialist for Student Athletes. If they do bring you a letter certifying their LDs, and ask for special accommodations, such as extended time on tests or the opportunity to take tests in The Connors Family Learning Center, it’s important that you make every reasonable accommodation. Any student with such a letter has a specific, diagnosed learning disability and most likely needs the requested accommodation—at the same time, it's his or her legal right. If you need advice or consultation regarding a specific request, call Kathleen Duggan at The Connors Family Learning Center (552-8093). Other students with learning disabilities may choose not to identify themselves; they may feel that they don’t need any special help and that they’d rather not disclose their disabilities.

In either case, it's useful for you to know what the phrase “learning disability” means. A person with a learning disability has average or above average intelligence but has difficulty taking in, remembering, or expressing information in an understandable way. Students with learning disabilities don't have one set of characteristics, but they do share one thing—they learn in noticeably different ways than their peers.

Some general tips are helpful in teaching students with learning disabilities—and in helping all students learn better:
* Be positive and give praise when appropriate
* Encourage student responsibility
* Build upon the student’s strengths
* Insist that the student fulfill course requirements, but, if possible, provide him or her with several possible strategies for doing so.
* Explain information in as many ways as possible. These ways could include speech, writing, illustrations, or demonstrations.
* Be sure to be clear and concise in your presentation and pose specific questions to see if the student understands the information.

What do I do for students with physical challenges?

BC also serves a number of physically challenged students, including some with vision or hearing impairments, and some of these students may require accommodations in your course. Possible accommodations include signers, notetakers, adaptive software and alternative testing arrangements. All of these students are able to complete academic work successfully and they deserve and have a legal right to reasonable accommodations. The person to contact with questions about accommodating a physically challenged student is Suzy Conway, Assistant Dean for Students with Disabilities. Her phone number is 552-3470.

Is there support for teaching students for whom English is not the first language?

BC has a large number of international students and also some students who come from U.S. backgrounds where English is the second language. When students are having trouble with English, they may sometimes seem to be having trouble mastering course material. This may or may not be the case. They may understand the material perfectly well but have difficulty demonstrating mastery. There is always a question of fairness—should they have extra time to do work? Should you try to overlook grammar and style errors and evaluate them only on their knowledge? Or do you think that all students should be able to demonstrate mastery of English as well as of your subject matter? There is no policy that will answer the question for you. There are ESL courses available to these students, but they may still have difficulty even after taking the courses. You may decide that it would be fair to allow such a student extra time to complete assignments or in-class work. You can encourage him or her to join a study group or to come to your office hours. Make sure the student knows that the Connors Center offers free tutoring in English for Foreign Students, as well as in specific course materials. If you have questions regarding international students, contact the Office of International Students and Scholars at 552-8005.
Campus Resources for Your Students

Here are some offices and organizations we thought you might want to know about as you interact with students. Although some are relevant to undergraduates only, most services are available to all BC students.

**Academic Advising Center**

The Academic Advising Center offers excellent programming for all BC students and coordinates advising for first-year students and undeclared sophomores in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Management. The Advising Center staff can help students with any questions about requirements or problems in classes as well as with larger questions about choosing majors and thinking about future careers. Their main number is 552-9259.

**Academic Deans**

All BC undergrads are assigned an academic dean, according to school and year of study. These deans can be an extremely useful resource for you.

If a student seems to be having a lot of academic problems, you can suggest that he or she make an appointment with the appropriate dean to get some advice. Sometimes a student will suddenly stop coming to class, or will give you excuses about family situations or illnesses--the appropriate dean can either inform you about what's going on or write the student a letter asking for explanation.

Below is a list of the current deans for each group of students and their phone numbers. (All phone numbers below begin with 552-)

**College of Arts and Sciences**

- **Sophomores:** Clare Dunsford 2-2274
- **Juniors:** Akua Sarr 2-6870
- **Seniors:** William Petri 2-3272

**Freshmen in Arts and Sciences and Carroll School of Management:**
- Akua Sarr, Interim Director, Academic Advising Center 2-9260

**School of Management**
- Richard Keeley 2-8739

**School of Nursing**
- Catherine Read 2-4925

**School of Education**
- John Cawthorne 2-4204
AHANA Student Services

AHANA is BC’s acronym for African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Native American students. The AHANA Office has several programs that support AHANA students on campus, including tutoring, counseling, academic advisement, and career counseling. The AHANA Office also offers a summer program, Options Through Education, which prepares 40-50 pre-freshmen to enter BC each year. If you have any questions about AHANA, or if you have a student who might benefit from getting in touch with them, call 552-3358.

AHANA also sponsors the Benjamin E. Mays Mentoring Program which pairs faculty and staff with AHANA students who want a mentor. Becoming a Mays Mentor is an excellent way to get to know students as well as other faculty around campus. It doesn’t require a huge time commitment but it is very enjoyable. Call Ines Maturana if you are interested (552-4806).

Technology Services

Several kinds of technology support are available to you and your students. Current BC students can use the workstations in the Student Learning and Support Center (SLSC) in O’Neill.

BC’s course management software (Blackboard Vista) enables you to securely add course material, create discussion boards, and offer assignments, quizzes and surveys. You can also set up e-mail communication with and among your students, have them work collaboratively, and assign projects which require using the internet.

If you’d like information or advice on using technology in your teaching, contact Instructional Design and eTeaching Services (www.bc.edu/offices/instruction). Media Technology Services (located in Campion Hall G36) can provide you with multimedia training and equipment for your classroom presentation (x2-4219). You can also check out the Faculty Microcomputer Resource Center (FMRC) for faculty-to-faculty help with technology (fmwww.bc.edu/fmrc)
The Connors Family Learning Center (CFLC)

The Connors Center offers several kinds of academic support services to you and your students, including tutoring (552-0611 for appointments) for most core courses, many upper division courses and some grad level courses as well. The Center also coordinates services and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. For information on tutoring, to arrange for extra time on proctored exams in the CFLC, or for responses to any other questions about students with LD, please call 552-8055.

The CFLC also sponsors a number of programs on teaching for graduate teaching assistants and teaching fellows as well as for faculty. For an up-to-date calendar, check the website: www.bc.edu/connors The CFLC does mid-semester teaching evaluations, videotapes classes, and provides general teaching consultation for grad students or faculty. The CFLC is located on the second floor of O’Neill Library.

The Office of International Students and Scholars

This office provides assistance for international students in the form of advising, orientation, and help with housing, adjustment and immigration form. The office also facilitates intercultural clubs and organizations on campus. If you or your students have questions about international or intercultural support, call 552-8005.
Learning Resources for Student Athletes (LRSA)

Varsity athletes at BC meet the same academic standards as everyone else, despite their demanding practice and game schedules. BC has an excellent record in terms of athletes' graduation rates, and LRSA is one of the reasons for this success. The LRSA staff will notify you if you have a varsity athlete in your class, and they will follow up to make sure that student is managing to keep up with his or her work. If you have any questions about a student athlete, or about LRSA, call 552-8533.

Learning to Learn

Learning to Learn’s mission statement says that their “first priority is to provide first generation, financially needy college students with academic assistance” (LTL web site). LTL has a variety of services to assist students, including a three-credit course, Applications in Learning Theory, designed to help students improve their analytical thinking and overall academic performance. The course is offered through the Psychology Department, as PS 005, and has an impressive, well-documented record of success. If you have students who could benefit from LTL services, or if you are interested in finding out more about LTL, go to www.bc.edu/ltl or call 552-4551.

Office of the Dean for Student Development (ODSD)

ODSD administers a wide array of programs: student clubs and organizations, judicial affairs, drug and alcohol education, intramural sports, residence halls, and off-campus and commuting student affairs. ODSD also sets and enforces policies regarding student conduct and discipline. If you or your students have questions about any of these matters, call 552-3470.

Tutoring Services

BC offers a number of options for students who want tutoring. The Connors Family Learning Center (CFLC) provides tutoring for all students on campus, free of charge, in about 60 different courses. The Math Department has a free walk-in tutoring service, AHANA has various tutoring opportunities for its students, and Learning Resources for Student Athletes provides tutoring services for varsity athletes. Many departments also maintain lists of students who are willing to tutor; the average charge for such private tutoring is between $25 and $35.

Tutoring can be a real help to you as the instructor. If a student needs more individual help than you have time to provide, consider suggesting that he or she seek a tutor; if you’re teaching a course in which small group interaction with a trained tutor would benefit students (such as a language course), you can arrange this through the CFLC. For most core courses, and many others, the tutoring is free of charge (at the CFLC, math department, AHANA, etc.) so you shouldn’t hesitate to recommend it.
University Chaplaincy
The University Chaplains' Office offers spiritual support and counseling to all BC students. You might suggest the Chaplains' Office to students who want someone to talk with about religious or personal problems and to students who want to become involved in community service and volunteer work here or abroad. The Chaplains' Office sponsors worship services, retreats, prayer groups, and community projects, as well as offering individual counseling. Call 552-3475 for more information.

University Counseling Services
While the University Chaplaincy is primarily concerned with the spiritual development of students, University Counseling Services seek to enhance their emotional development. In addition to a number of ongoing programs, Counseling Services offers individual and group counseling to all BC students. Students can call for appointments (552-3310). The regular office hours are Monday through Friday, 9am-5pm, but there is a psychologist on duty 24 hours a day. In an emergency, you can reach him or her by calling the Infirmary (552-3228).

University Libraries
BC's libraries are a wonderful resource for you and your students. The University Libraries belong to the Association of Research Libraries and recently celebrated the acquisition of their 2 millionth volume. The libraries also have hundreds of digital databases and indexes. You can help your students get off to a good start by making sure they're aware of the library resources for your discipline and that they know where to go if they need help. The reference librarians in all the campus libraries are eager to assist undergraduates as well as graduate students and faculty.