A Renewed Core at Boston College
Call for Proposals: Due Friday, October 14, 2016

Summary
The University Core Renewal Committee invites proposals for pilot classes to be taught in the 2017–2018 academic year as part of the third year of an ongoing process to renew and strengthen the Boston College Core Curriculum. Classes in the Renewed Core will contribute to the rigorous intellectual development and personal formation of our students in the tradition of a Jesuit, Catholic university. These courses will encourage Boston College students to broaden their intellectual horizons; introduce them to the best of contemporary pedagogy, research, and teaching; and promote the integration of knowledge, beliefs, and actions.

Two kinds of courses involving interdisciplinary collaboration will be offered in the pilot phase (more details below):

- **Complex Problems** courses are team-taught, six-credit classes that address a contemporary problem.

- **Enduring Questions** courses are linked pairs of distinct three-credit classes of approximately 19 students that meet separately, each taught by a faculty member from a different department. Both classes are connected by a common topic and set of questions, and they share some readings and assignments.

In both types of courses, each of the two faculty members represents one of eight existing Core subject areas (Arts, History, Literature, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Social Sciences, and Theology).

Both Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses will integrate structured reflection and activities outside normal class meeting times. Faculty will work to develop co-curricular programming that deepens academic study with opportunities for exploration and personal growth. To facilitate such co-curricular activities, each pair of faculty will be provided with a $1,000 budget. More information, including examples of reflection sessions from previous years, is included below and online: [www.bc.edu/core/core-renewal](http://www.bc.edu/core/core-renewal)

Because these labor-intensive classes reflect a dramatic shift in the way many of us teach, faculty who have not previously taught a pilot course will be required to participate in planning and pedagogical workshops in the spring of 2017, for which they will receive a stipend of $10,000. For each faculty member, a Complex Problem class will count as two courses of his or her normal teaching load. Proposals not selected for the 2017–2018 academic year may be considered in the future. Courses may be repeated.
Faculty are invited to submit proposals for either a Complex Problem or an Enduring Questions course. You may propose a class either as a two-person team or individually (in which case the University Core Renewal Committee will attempt to pair two proposals). To facilitate team formation, there will be a Core Town Hall on Wednesday, September 7, and a reception on Tuesday, September 20.

Proposals should include the following information:
- Faculty name(s), department or school affiliation(s), and contact information
- A title and one-paragraph description of the proposed class
- A brief explanation of how the proposed course will fulfill the characteristics of either Complex Problems courses or Enduring Questions courses (see detailed descriptions below or online at www.bc.edu/core/core-renewal)
- A brief statement of support from the department chair(s) of the faculty member(s): For Complex Problems courses, Departments will need to work with the Office of the Associate Dean for the Core to nominate graduate students or in some cases lecturers who will staff the Complex Problems course labs.

Note:
- The University Core Renewal Committee will review all proposals on October 24, 2016; applicants will be informed of decisions shortly thereafter.
- Faculty whose proposals are selected for 2017–2018 will meet briefly in December 2016 and then again in spring 2017 for a series of pedagogical workshops. Colleagues receive their stipend at the end of the spring upon completion of their syllabi for the following year.
- Because this is a pilot project, we are trying to learn what students are learning. Faculty will be requested to include at least one assignment that can generate knowledge about the skills and abilities students are learning in the course.

Proposals must be emailed to the office of the Associate Dean for the Core (core@bc.edu) by October 14, 2016.

If you have any questions while preparing your course proposal, please contact the Associate Dean for the Core, Julian Bourg (julian.bourg@bc.edu), or the Assistant Director of the Core, Charles Keenan (charles.keenan@bc.edu).
Additional Information on Core Renewal Pilot Courses at Boston College
This information is also available online at: www.bc.edu/core/core-renewal

I. Background on Core Renewal
II. Course Structures and Characteristics: Complex Problems and Enduring Questions
III. Reflection Sessions
IV. Examples of Previous Core Renewal Pilot Courses

I) Background
The Boston College Core Curriculum was last revised in 1991 (Task Force on the Core Curriculum Final Report, June 1991). It is appropriate that in the second decade of the twenty-first century Boston College revisit and revise its basic undergraduate programs. In a first phase of Core Renewal in 2012–2013, faculty and administrators created an innovative plan of action (Toward a Renewed Core, May 2, 2013). In a second phase in 2014, an overall vision of the Core’s relationship to Boston College’s Jesuit, Catholic traditions and mission was articulated (The Vision Animating the Boston College Core Curriculum, August 2014). Guided by the descriptions of the Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses developed in Toward a Renewed Core and the August 2014 Vision statement, we have now reached a third phase of Core Renewal: it is time to build on the two previous steps by launching a number of pilot classes that synthesize imaginative approaches to teaching with Jesuit educational principles. These pilot courses will make a key contribution to the shared goals of the Core Curriculum described in the new Vision: opening the mind and heart, encouraging character formation in service of the common good, deepening human sympathy, inspiring creativity, enriching understanding of human diversity, and stimulating clear thought and persuasive expression. As the new Vision states, “The Core Curriculum thus furthers the development of the intellectual, reflective, ethical, and creative habits of mind that will enable students to become lifelong learners, to seek meaning in their lives, and to work toward constructing a more just and human world.”

II) Course Structures and Characteristics
Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses are structured differently. The following descriptions give a more complete picture of how the classes will be designed and organized.

Complex Problems
In these six-credit courses, students examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance. Classes might understand one global challenge from multiple viewpoints, considering historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions. By studying cultural, economic, historical, political, religious, scientific, and/or social currents in relation to their own experience, students foster habits of mind that are alert to global connections, differences, or comparisons. They will be asked to put themselves into the equation: How are
they implicated in what they study? How does it affect who they are? What future courses do they want to take? What sort of lives do they want to lead?

Two faculty members share the same classroom for the normal three hours of weekly instructional time. In addition, students attend smaller weekly 75-minute lab sessions led by graduate students or lecturers in which they learn by doing, working in teams to apply knowledge to real-world issues. Often these involve an audience beyond the students in the classroom. Examples of lab sections from previous Core Pilot classes include:

- Developing anti-violence programs working with the Hispanic Black Gay Coalition and Women’s Resource Center (for a class on Race, Gender, and Violence)
- Working with the Boston Climate Action Plan Office on projects to address climate change in specific neighborhoods (for a class on Human Impacts on the Planet)
- Prototype, development, and presentation of a new product (for a class on Creativity and Innovation)
- Creation of a group film project (for a class on Social Problems on the Silver Screen)

Finally, weekly one-hour evening sessions provide additional possibilities for shared learning experiences and reflection (see below for more details).

In the pilot phase, Complex Problems classes have target enrollments between 75 and 150 students. Lab session enrollments will be capped at 19 students.

**Enduring Questions**
In these linked pairs of three-credit classes, students critically examine and reflect upon fundamental human concerns. Faculty provide them with a foundation in the questions that have long concerned reflective people and that transcend particular disciplines, spaces, and times. As students grapple with the approaches they encounter, they reflect upon their own perspectives, strive to articulate their own opinions and beliefs, and continue to define a core set of values. A new generation learns that they are part of a larger, ongoing conversation: the human search for meaning in all its changes and continuities, diversity and abundance.

Two faculty from different departments teach independent classes connected by a common overarching topic. Faculty agree on enduring questions to examine in their courses, and they collaborate on some shared readings and assignments. The same students take both classes. In addition to the two linked courses, students participate in periodic shared learning experiences and opportunities for reflection throughout the semester (see more below). In the pilot phase these classes will be limited to 19 first-year students, though in the future they may be larger.

****
Faculty should also consider the Course Characteristics below as they formulate their proposals.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex Problems Courses</th>
<th>Enduring Questions Courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance.</td>
<td>Ask students to reflect upon issues and values related to fundamental concerns of human life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider its historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions in a rigorous way.</td>
<td>Introduce students to influential thinkers, writers, or artists who have wrestled with the questions across discipline, time, and space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address global connections, differences, or comparisons; consider ethical implications and issues of justice.</td>
<td>Introduce the methods your discipline uses to approach a question, text, or object cultivating analytical and creative thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an attached lab that provides hands-on problem-solving activities for students involving multiple media.</td>
<td>Engage in a dialogue with the methods of the disciplinary approach of the other instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduce students to various disciplinary approaches to the problem, and to the ways in which they might intersect, cultivating appropriate analytical and creative skills.</td>
<td>Offer some common readings or assignments across the paired sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work intensively with students to improve their writing (with help from writing fellows if desired).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Enduring Questions and Complex Problems classes will: Incorporate opportunities for reflection on values and experiences that will promote students’ integration of what they learn with the principles that guide their lives: e.g., Why does studying this material contribute to my better understanding of what it is to be a person? Who am I becoming as I engage this material? How does my study of this material contribute to my better understanding of the world in its wholeness?

Finally, faculty should consider the Core Curriculum Learning Outcomes articulated in *The Vision Animating the Boston College Core Curriculum* as they prepare their proposals. A proposed course need not contribute to every Learning Outcome, but it should strive to contribute to a majority of them:

Students completing the Boston College Core Curriculum will:

1. Demonstrate the critical, mathematical, informational, analytic, expressive, and creative skills that are essential tools of the educated person well-prepared for a meaningful life and vocation.
2. Understand the major ideas and methods of inquiry of the scholarly disciplines that comprise the university and be able to use those methods of inquiry as beginning practitioners to address complex contemporary problems.

3. Be able to identify and articulate the strengths and limitations of the disciplines and the relationship of the disciplines to one another, and demonstrate an understanding of the breadth and diversity of human knowledge as well as its openness to integration in more comprehensive wholes.

4. Be conversant with and able to discuss intelligently enduring questions and issues that are fundamental to human inquiry and that have shaped the traditions from which the university has emerged.

5. Demonstrate the ability to apply more than one disciplinary perspective to the same enduring question or complex contemporary problem.

6. Be familiar with the scholarly exploration of religious faith and understand how faith and reason are related in the search for truth.

7. Demonstrate the ability to examine their values and experiences and integrate what they learn with the principles that guide their lives.

8. Be prepared and disposed to use their talents and education as engaged global citizens and responsible leaders in service of the common good.

III) Reflection Sessions

Reflection can mean many things. In some sense, reflection typically happens in the classes we teach, since developing knowledge involves more than digesting information. Core Pilot reflection sessions deliberately and self-consciously build on this aspect of good teaching by creating dedicated experiences that ask students to integrate experience inside the classroom with who they are outside of it. To be sure, the ideal of developing students as “whole persons” draws on the traditions of Jesuit education. And research has shown that students attain a deeper and more lasting understanding of course content when invited to pause and reflect on it, asking how it affects other areas of their lives.

In these reflection sessions, which take place weekly in Complex Problems courses and four times per semester in Enduring Questions courses, faculty may consider working with non-academic offices within Boston College -- such as the Office of Mission and Ministry and Student Affairs -- or making use of the city of Boston and its surrounding environment. Each pair of pilot course faculty will have a $1,000 budget to help facilitate co-curricular activities, and the Office of the Associate Dean for the Core will work with faculty to organize logistical details.

Examples of Reflection Sessions from previous Core Renewal Pilot Courses include:
I) Examples of Previous Core Renewal Pilot Courses

- Organizing a trip to Walden Pond (for paired courses on humans and nature)
- Inviting a speaker from Counseling Services to discuss mental illness on BC’s campus (for paired courses on human disease and society)
- Going to see the film *The Martian* (for paired courses on the material world)
- Visiting the Museum of Fine Arts for students to examine works of art in person (for paired courses on love, gender, and marriage)
- Bringing in guest speakers to discuss meditation and mindfulness (for a course on climate change) as well as a stand-up comic (for a course on creativity and innovation)

IV) Examples of Previous Core Renewal Pilot Courses

*Complex Problems*

Course: SOCY1501/EESC1501 Global Implications of Climate Change.
Prof(s): Gareau (Earth and Environmental Sciences) & Gareau (Sociology)
Description: Climate change is one of the defining issues of our time. Decisive and swift action to mitigate carbon emissions is needed in order to prevent catastrophic events and unhealthy environments for future generations. Societies worldwide will need to adapt to a new environmental reality. However, the causes, effects, and costs of climate change are not equally distributed, which raises questions about responsibility and justice. This course will encourage critical engagement with and personal reflection on these important issues, covering the science behind climate change, the use of different energy sources and their impact on carbon emissions, and the different roles of governments, businesses, religious communities, and individuals for enacting (and preventing) ambitious solutions to climate change.

---

Prof(s): Johnson (History) & McGuffey (Sociology)
Description: This course explores pressing problems of modern race and gender-based violence across the globe, including domestic violence, youth gangs, police violence, sexual assault, and genocide. Using both historical and sociological perspectives, we will examine the roots of such violence, the ways in which it has been expressed, the meanings attached to it, and its implications for society—particularly for racial/ethnic minorities, women, and LGBT people. The lab for the course will involve students in collaborative work with local anti-violence projects and organizations in the Boston area.

---

Course: THTR1501/SOCY1507 Can Creativity Save the World?
Prof(s): Tiala (Theatre) & Harrison (CSOM)
Description: The world is riddled with complex problems and perhaps the biggest one of all is how will human beings solve them? What are the tools we need to develop within ourselves to be capable of adapting and innovating our way into a new and better world? In this class we'll apply
the best thinking from Business and the Arts to understand what creativity is. We'll use activities, experiments, readings, reflections to develop the skills and confidence to create a community where we can practice creativity together. Can creativity save the world? We hope you will be part of the answer.

**Enduring Questions**

**Course: ENGL1701 Truth-telling in Literature**  
**Prof(s):** Adair (English)  
**Description:** This course investigates how experience and imagination combine to produce compelling stories. We will question automatic distinctions between fact and fiction, examining written work instead on a spectrum of truth: from first-hand accounts and historical records to confessional poetry, historical fiction, and literary reportage, to parallel novels and even fantasy. Do literary techniques reveal truth, or do they obscure it? Can the imagination ever produce truth? We will consider the challenges of reliable and unreliable narration, cross-cultural translation, and embedded commentary in experimental poetry and metafiction. Authors include Tim O’Brien, Amitav Ghosh, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Plato, Emily Dickinson, Italo Calvino, and others.

**linked with**

**Course: HIST1701 Truth-telling in History**  
**Prof(s):** Sellers-Garcia (History)  
**Description:** “Truth telling in History” examines both the difficulties of finding “truth” in historical documents and the challenges of writing truth about the past. Do any primary sources tell the truth? Does the work of interpretation always result in distortion? Does history, however it may be built on fact, become a form of fictionalizing? We will consider the dilemmas posed by oral history, the expectations for works of popular and scholarly histories, and the contrasting expectations for works of historical fiction. The final project will be a piece of historical fiction, a memoir, a popular history, or a similar creative project that wrestles with the issues raised through our readings.

**Course: ENGL1703 Humans, Nature, and Creativity**  
**Prof(s):** Song (English)  
**Description:** While nature is routinely imagined as something apart from humans, there is also an age-old tradition of mixing them up. Nature has often taken on human qualities and humans have become naturalized. This course explores this collapsing with the help of literature from antiquity to the present. These include works by Virgil, Sophocles, Marvell, Shakespeare, Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and Emily St. John Mandel. In what contexts might we want to maintain this distinction? Can critiquing this distinction help us to think about pressing
environmental issues in insightful and original ways? What kind of balance can we strike between these categories?

linked with

Course: PHIL1703 Inquiring about Humans and Nature
Prof(s): Vandewall (Philosophy)
Description: This course examines the roots of the western philosophical distinction between humans and nature. Our human experience as rational individuals capable of abstract thought has set us apart from the rest of nature. But humans have found that we are not wholly outside of nature. We have an intimate and interdependent relationship with the rest of creation, a bond that we have stretched through art and technology and been drawn back into by desire and physical necessity. We must ask, then: What does it mean to be human? How do we define nature? What responsibilities do humans have to nature?

linked with

Course: BIOL1702 Human Disease: Plagues, Pathogens, and Chronic Disorders
Prof(s): Dunn (Biology)
Description: Much of biological discovery has been centered around human disease and our quest for health and longevity. From the earliest observations regarding the human body, to the discovery of germs and the eventual technology guiding current treatments, human beings have sought to understand the physiological and cellular parameters associated with health. This course will examine human disease and epidemics through the lens of pathogens, genetic predisposition and environmental influence. Students will learn basic concepts of cell structure, genetics, and evolution in the context of infectious diseases such as Tuberculosis and AIDS or physiological disorders such as Alzheimer’s Disease or diabetes.

linked with

Course: ECON1701 Human Disease: Health, the Economy, and Society
Prof(s): Richardson (Economics)
Description: About 9% of the world's economic resources (and 18% of the United States' resources) are devoted to health care--the prevention and treatment of human disease. This course will explore the social consequences of and responses to infectious and chronic diseases. Economics can provide insight into why researchers focus more on some diseases than others, why some health care systems work better than others, and how health care resources might be deployed more efficiently. Students will develop the ability to analyze the broader context and consequences of human disease, with a focus on the economics of health care policy.