

# Complex Problem & Enduring Question Courses

FALL 2025 OFFERINGS FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS



EXPAND  
YOUR WORLD

EXPAND  
YOURSELF

BOSTON COLLEGE

The centerpiece of a Jesuit education has always been a common curriculum that emphasizes the study of defining works in the humanities, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the arts. The Boston College Core Curriculum is designed to provide a broad understanding of the forces that have shaped the world by challenging students to think across disciplines in order to make good decisions and to communicate effectively in an increasingly complex world.

To fulfill University Core requirements, each student must complete:

1 course in the Arts	
1 course in Cultural Diversity	
2 courses in History	1 course in History I 1 course in History II
1 course in Literature	
1 course in Mathematics	
2 courses in Natural Science	
2 courses in Philosophy	
2 courses in Social Science	
2 courses in Theology	1 course in Christian Theology 1 course in Sacred Texts and Traditions
1 course in Writing	

To view all courses that satisfy University Core requirements, visit [BC.EDU/CORE](https://bc.edu/core)

Student comments in this brochure taken from anonymous survey responses

COMPLEX PROBLEM COURSES

Complex Problem courses are six-credit courses of 76 students, team-taught by two professors from different disciplines. Students meet multiple days each week for lectures and once per week for labs. Students and faculty also gather for weekly Reflection sessions, which may involve group activities, guest speakers, or field trips off campus. Each Complex Problem course fulfills two University Core requirements. Some may fulfill an additional University Core requirement for Cultural Diversity through either Difference, Justice, and the Common Good (DJCG) or Engaging Difference and Justice (EDJ).

ENDURING QUESTION COURSES

Enduring Question courses are two linked three-credit courses taught by professors from different disciplines. The same 19 students take both courses. Four times during the semester, students and faculty gather for Reflection sessions, which may involve group activities, guest speakers, or field trips off campus. Each pair of Enduring Question courses fulfills two University Core requirements. Some may fulfill an additional University Core requirement for Cultural Diversity through either Difference, Justice, and the Common Good (DJCG) or Engaging Difference and Justice (EDJ).

If you have any questions about these courses or how to register, please e-mail [core@bc.edu](mailto:core@bc.edu).



Scan the QR code to learn more about the courses.



AS A MEMBER OF THE CLASS OF 2029, YOU ARE INVITED TO enroll in Boston College’s innovative Complex Problem and Enduring Question University Core courses. These courses are collaboratively taught by two faculty members from different fields and are designed to engage students in interdisciplinary explorations of topics of critical importance. These include areas such as ethics and engineering; climate change and urban planning; faith and virtue; the value of freedom; health and illness; and more.

Complex Problem and Enduring Question courses extend inquiry beyond the classroom to labs, Reflection sessions, conversations with outside speakers, and off-campus field trips, creating an intensive shared learning experience for both teachers and students. They exemplify Boston College’s distinctive approach to Core education by establishing a foundation for students’

intellectual development and preparing them to become engaged, effective world citizens.

You will have the opportunity to enroll in this fall’s Complex Problem and Enduring Question courses when you register during your summer Orientation session. In November, you will be eligible to register for Spring 2026 Complex Problem and Enduring Question courses; you will receive a spring brochure later this fall.

For more information, please visit [BC.EDU/COMPLEXENDURING](https://bc.edu/complexenduring)



Crisis and Storytelling in the Age of Climate Change

EESC1720 + ENGL1733

Hilary Palevsky, Earth and Environmental Sciences  
Min Song, English

Fulfills 1 Natural Science + Literature

The realities of a changing climate, including intensified extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and strengthening heat waves and droughts, are already being felt by frontline communities around the world. This course focuses both on hearing stories about climate change as told by climate writers, scientists, and members of impacted populations, and telling these stories ourselves. We will examine storytelling as it works across mediums and genres from literature to scientific data visualizations, and consider what it means to write an essay, produce a graph, create a podcast, or make a film. Students in the course will read, watch, and analyze examples of climate storytelling, broadly defined, and produce their own personal essays, infographics, podcasts, and/or films. Some questions we will foreground throughout the semester are: How do we communicate the science and the human impacts of the climate crisis? Whose ways of knowing and lived experiences do we privilege? How can the stories we tell move society toward just climate solutions?

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 3–4:15 p.m.

You must select one of the following lab sections with your registration:

- M 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- M 12–1:15 p.m.
- W 9–10:15 a.m.
- F 2–3:15 p.m.

Reflections will be held:

- Tu 6–7:15 p.m.

Real Estate and Urban Action: Transforming Communities and Increasing Access to Opportunity

ECON1704 + UNAS1725

Geoffrey Sanzenbacher, Economics  
Neil McCullagh, Carroll School of Management

Fulfills 2 Social Science + Cultural Diversity

This course explores concepts of social, economic, and racial inequality with a focus on the interaction between housing, labor markets, and the ultimate accumulation of wealth. Housing will be examined through a study of the history of affordable housing, an exploration of the transformation of Columbia Point Public Housing Development to Harbor Point, and an applied simulation. Labor markets will be explored at the theoretical level (e.g., labor supply/demand, human capital, discrimination) before diving into data and literature on how changes over the last 40 years have expanded inequality. The course will conclude with how the lack of both affordable housing and quality labor market opportunities can interact to restrict intergenerational wealth accumulation and opportunity. Through field projects, simulations, and a practical final project, the course will challenge students to explore and test solutions for transforming distressed communities into safe, desirable neighborhoods that produce better outcomes for all residents.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 12–1:15 p.m.

You must select one of the following lab sections with your registration:

- M 11 a.m.–12:15 p.m.
- M 1–2:15 p.m.
- F 11 a.m.–12:15 p.m.
- F 1–2:15 p.m.

Reflections will be held:

- W 6–7:15 p.m.

Making the Modern World: Design, Ethics, and Engineering

ENGR1801 + HIST1627

Kristen Conroy, Engineering  
Jenna Tonn, Engineering & History

Fulfills 1 Natural Science + History II + Cultural Diversity

Together we will consider how engineers and other stakeholders navigate risks related to industrial and environmental disasters, balance financial, technological, and regulatory pressures associated with complex socio-technical problems, and negotiate technical and political liabilities surrounding artificial intelligence, surveillance, and climate adaptation. Engineering systems present pressing technical, ethical, and moral problems that we must grapple with as engaged global citizens. Students will explore the social, cultural, and institutional history of engineering, learn foundational skills in quantitative analysis of real-world engineering designs, and understand the political, environmental, economic, and ethical tradeoffs associated with building the modern world. Students will also collaborate on group design projects based on human-centered engineering.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.

You must select one of the following lab sections with your registration:

- Tu 12–1:50 p.m.
- Tu 3–4:50 p.m.
- F 10–11:50 a.m.
- F 3–4:50 p.m.

Reflections will be held:

- Th 6–7:15 p.m.



“I learned about new topics  
and concepts  
for the first time.”



**Exploring the Mystery of God: A Philosophical Perspective** PHIL1726

**Exploring the Mystery of God: A Theological Perspective** THEO1726

Deborah De Chiara-Quenzer, Philosophy  
L. Matthew Petillo, Theology

► **Fulfills 1 Philosophy + 1 Theology (Christian Theology)**

**What is the relationship between human beings and God?**

These paired courses explore conceptions of the divine that have been a fundamental part of Western civilization as well as the relationships that human beings have with the divine. The Philosophy course will examine how the Greeks viewed their gods in their literature and philosophy. The Theology course will explore various perspectives on God in ancient, medieval, and contemporary theological writings. There will be many intersections and divergences on the divine between the two courses.

These course lectures meet:

- MWF 9–9:50 a.m.
- MWF 10–10:50 a.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- M 6–7:50 p.m.

**Aesthetic Exercises: Empathy, Engagement, Ethics** MUSA1701

**Spiritual Exercises: Empathy, Engagement, Ethics** THEO1701

Daniel Callahan, Music  
Brian Robinette, Theology

► **Fulfills Arts + 1 Theology (Christian Theology)**

**How might we train for encounters with beauty and the sacred?**

One objective of these linked courses is to help students realize that their own personal experiences can be the departing point for—and even the subject of—scholarly inquiry; that theology, the arts, and philosophy are not mere disciplines to be learned but practices that are indispensable to being alive and serving the common good. Another aim is for students to realize that deeply meaningful experiences—whether of the true, the beautiful, and the good, or the divine in the world and in one’s self—often do not just happen. Instead, such experiences are usually the result of being situated in the right place and time with the right preparation and mindset; in other words, they are usually the result of a certain type of exercise.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 12–1:15 p.m.
- TTh 1:30–2:45 p.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- Tu 6–7:50 p.m.

**The Rule of Law and the Meaning of Justice** UNAS1719

**Law, Literature, and the Meaning of Justice** ENGL1729

R. Michael Cassidy, BC Law School  
Marla De Rosa, English

► **Fulfills 1 Social Science + Literature + Cultural Diversity**

**What is justice?**

In these paired courses, we will consider the role that lawyers and authors play in illuminating the complex issues underlying the concept of justice. Through the study of works of philosophers, political scientists, novelists, and dramatists, we will explore how societies define justice as well as an individual’s responsibility when they confront injustice in society.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- TTh 12–1:15 p.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.

**From Hiroshima to K-Pop: Historical Perspectives** UNAS1716

**From Hiroshima to K-Pop: Filmmakers’ Perspectives** UNAS1717

Ingu Hwang, International Studies  
Christina Klein, English

► **Fulfills History II + Arts + Cultural Diversity**

**What is the relationship between politics and popular culture?**

How did East Asia emerge from the wreckage of the Second World War to become the dominant political, economic, and cultural force it is in the world today? What is the relationship between politics and popular culture? Since 1945, East Asia has experienced the Cold War, civil war, communist revolution, modernization, capitalism,

democratization, and economic booms and busts. It has also become a powerhouse producer of popular and art cinema. In these paired courses, students will explore the relationship between politics and culture as they learn how historians and filmmakers have grappled with the tumultuous events of the past 75 years.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 12–1:15 p.m.
- TTh 1:30–2:45 p.m.

Film screenings will be held:

- M 7–8:50 p.m.

**The Self and Its Limits: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives** PHIL1727

**The Self and Its Limits: Greco-Roman Slavery** CLAS1706

Dermot Moran, Philosophy  
Thomas Sapsford, Classical Studies

► **Fulfills 1 Philosophy + Literature + Cultural Diversity**

**What is the relationship between the individual self and its social roles?**

These paired courses examine what factors make us free individuals and how that freedom has historically been removed from certain people. One course will explore the nature of the self in historical and contemporary perspectives from East and West to look at the nature of self-consciousness and personhood. The other will investigate how ancient Greeks and Romans justified the enslavement of individuals for material gain and how ancient slavery influenced American society both in terms of its use of slave-labor and in the arguments made for abolition.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 9–10:15 a.m.
- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- T 6–7:50 p.m.





**Memory and Representation: The Science of Remembering** PSYC1701

**Memory and Representation: The Literature of Remembering** ENGL1736

Elizabeth Kensinger, Psychology and Neuroscience  
Amy Boesky, English

► **Fulfills 1 Natural Science + Literature**

**What is memory, and why does it matter?**

These paired courses explore complex and fascinating aspects of human memory through two disciplines: neuroscience and literature. In five short modules, we will consider enduring and emerging questions about memory: how it works (both scientifically and literarily); how it can be distorted or misrepresented; how it intersects with cultural values and beliefs; how stress or trauma can change or damage memory; and how monuments (built and literary) help us both to remember and to heal. Shared texts will include Maya Lin’s *Boundaries*, Christopher Nolan’s 2001 film *Memento* and the short story “Memento Mori” by Nolan’s brother Jonathan, and essays by Oliver Sacks.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 1:30–2:45 p.m.
- TTh 3–4:15 p.m.

**Reflections will be held four times during the semester:**

- T 6–7:50 p.m.



“Small class size,  
passionate professors,  
and engaging  
discussions.”

**Breaking Bread: Food, Fiction, and Identity** ENGL1743

**Breaking Bread: Food, Fellowship, and Faith** THEO1730

Deanna Danforth, English  
Liam Bergin, Theology

► **Fulfills Literature + 1 Theology (Christian Theology) + Cultural Diversity**

**What is the role of food in shaping identity and building community?**

More than daily acts that provide physical nourishment, eating and drinking are primordial human experiences that inform our relationships with others. The food we choose to eat and the gatherings at which we partake in these meals have social, cultural, environmental, religious, political, and ethical dimensions. These paired courses examine the deeper meanings of food encountered in literary forms and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Discussions will be enriched by opportunities to cook and eat together.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- TTh 12–1:15 p.m.

**Reflections will be held four times during the semester:**

- T 6–7:50 p.m.





**Creative Women: Women in the Art World During the Renaissance** ARTH1715

**Creative Women: Women in Society and Culture During the Renaissance** HIST1731

Stephanie Leone, Art History

Sarah Ross, History

► **Fulfills Arts + History I**

**How do women shape culture and society?**

In 1971, Linda Nochlin posed the trailblazing question, “Why are there no great women artists?” A few years later, in 1976, medievalist Joan Kelly similarly inquired, “Did women have a Renaissance?” Prior to that time, women scarcely appeared in the pages of history and art history books. Since then, scholars have unearthed abundant evidence of women’s productivity beyond the domestic sphere. These paired courses examine how women made significant contributions in political, intellectual, creative, and artisanal work during the long Renaissance (1400–1650), and explore connections with creative women in our own time.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 9–10:15 a.m.
- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.

“The opportunity to build lasting friendships with classmates and relationships with professors is extremely special.”



**Masking to Unmask: Strategies of Representation in Visual Art** ARTS1702

**Masking to Unmask: Strategies of Representation in Media Texts** COMM2299

Greer Muldowney, Art

Renée Pastel, Communication

► **Fulfills Arts + Literature + Cultural Diversity**

**How do artists and authors unmask the human condition?**

In a culture hungry for authenticity, we often forget how masking through code switching, using social media filters, and conforming to popular brands and media can be a form of self-expression and/or an act of safety, especially for members of marginalized groups. This course considers the ways in which artists use various forms, ranging from poetry and short essays to photography and collage to film and television, in order to approach questions of truth, identity, and, often, our own humanity.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 3–4:15 p.m.
- TTh 4:30–5:45 p.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.

**Self, Health, and Illness: Biological Perspectives** UNAS1739

**Self, Health, and Illness: Societal Perspectives** SOCY1133

Andrew Dwyer, Connell School of Nursing

Latrica Best, Sociology

► **Fulfills 1 Natural Science + 1 Social Science + Cultural Diversity**

**How does our biology and the larger society shape our understanding of ourselves, health, and illness?**

These paired courses address enduring questions about nature and nurture by exploring fundamental human experiences of health and illness from both biological and sociological perspectives. One aim is to examine the concept of self in relation to genomics, the microbiome, and society. Another aim is to critically appraise human difference from biological, social, and environmental perspectives. Using examples from biomedical discovery and precision healthcare, students will examine their values and discuss how we as a society can manage the ethical, legal, and societal implications of the rapidly changing healthcare landscape.

**These course lectures meet:**

- MWF 10–10:50 a.m.
- MWF 11–11:50 a.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- T 6–7:50 p.m.

**The Good Life: Literary Perspectives** CLAS1707

**The Good Life: Theological Perspectives** THEO1731

Thomas Epstein, Classical Studies

Jeremy Wilkins, Theology

► **Fulfills Literature + 1 Theology (Christian Theology)**

**What is the good life?**

These paired courses explore the question of the good life from a variety of perspectives and from two disciplines: literature/literary analysis and theology. What constitutes a good life? How can I know it? What must I do? In what shall I believe? Grounded in careful reading of great works of literature by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekov, along with theology and the Bible, each course will center on discussion, reflection, and writing about the great questions of life as expressed both by others (in the texts we read) and by ourselves. Reflection sessions will seek to deepen our understanding and our commitments by meeting with people outside the Boston College community and engaging in dialogue among ourselves.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 3–4:15 p.m.
- TTh 4:30–5:45 p.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- T 6–7:50 p.m.

“I seriously wish I could take these courses all four years but they are specially offered for freshmen!”



“The professors approach their disciplines in really creative ways.”

**Folk Wisdom: History and Anthropology** HIST1732

**Folk Wisdom: Literature and Environment**  
ENGL1744

Guy Beiner, History  
Colleen Taylor, English

► **Fulfills History II + Literature + Cultural Diversity**

**What is the value of tradition in the modern world?**

What insights can we find in local vernacular knowledge that address global concerns about excesses of scientific-technological innovation, postcolonial injustices, geopolitical conflicts, and environmental crises? These paired courses uncover the many ways in which traditional knowledge and oral storytelling continue to inform and contribute to our understanding of the past and the present. Bringing history and anthropology in dialogue with literature and environmental humanities, these courses critically examine traditions and customs from around the world, with a special interest in the folklore of Ireland.

These course lectures meet:

- TTh 9–10:15 a.m.
- TTh 10:30–11:45 a.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.



**Where We Are: Reading in Place** ENGL1745

**Where We Are: Writing in Place** ENGL1746

Christy Pottroff, English  
Rebekah Mitsein, English

► **Fulfills Literature + Writing + Cultural Diversity**

**What is the relationship between where we are and who we are?**

Where we are shapes our being, enables our thinking, inspires creativity, and facilitates connection. In these paired courses, students will think about where we are on a range of scales, from the local (What does it mean to be at BC?) to the historical (How are we part of the story of Boston?) to the global (What does the far-away have to do with us?). Students will cultivate a mindful and ethical relationship to place by bridging the imaginative possibilities that literary analysis facilitates with the sense of empowerment and personal agency that writing affords.

These course lectures meet:

- MWF 1–1:50 p.m.
- MWF 2–2:50 p.m.

Reflections will be held four times during the semester:

- T 6–7:50 p.m.

“One of the best ways  
to find community early on at BC.”





“I have never felt so  
intellectually engaged  
and challenged.”

**From Loneliness to Connection: The Literature of  
Human Connection** ENGL1747

**From Loneliness to Connection: The Literacy of  
Human Connection** ENGL1748

Jean Franzino, English  
Vincent Portillo, English

► **Fulfills Literature + Writing**

**How can we learn to overcome loneliness and foster  
connection?**

In recent years, a number of government officials have recognized loneliness as a public health crisis, with U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy describing loneliness as an epidemic, and the U.K. appointing an official Minister of Loneliness. Media has followed suit, with articles entitled, “Why Is the Loneliness Epidemic So Hard to Cure?” (*The New York Times*) and “How We Learned to Be Lonely” (*The Atlantic*). These paired courses will explore the causes, experience, and consequences of loneliness by thinking through its relationship to reading and writing. Further, they will explore how norms around literacy (reading and writing) have alienated certain populations while providing a mode of expression for others, and how reading, writing, and discussing literature may both elucidate and ameliorate the experience of loneliness.

**These course lectures meet:**

- TTh 3–4:15 p.m.
- TTh 4:30–5:45 p.m.

**Reflections will be held four times during the  
semester:**

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.

**Poverty and Progress: Critical Perspectives on  
Political Economy** UNAS1737

**Poverty and Progress: Literary Perspectives on  
Causes and Consequences** ENGL1742

Peter Giraudo, Core Fellow  
Gayathri Goel, Core Fellow

► **Fulfills 1 Social Science + Literature + Cultural  
Diversity**

**Why does poverty persist and how can we remedy it?**

In an individualistic society such as ours, poverty is often framed as a personal failing. In these paired courses, however, we will look at some of the systemic factors, notably capitalism, as mechanisms that create and sustain a poorer class of people. We will also consider how poverty complicates narratives of markets as fostering progress and individual freedom. If freedom for some requires the regimentation and exclusion of the many, is it genuine progress? By examining enduring accounts of poverty, we will explore its origins as a mass phenomenon, consequences for civic bonds, and influence on political participation. In addition to making poverty visible, literary texts will also demystify the complex nexus of factors that produce poverty and inhibit true progress. Understanding what causes poverty is the first step in alleviating the suffering of the poor, so that everyone has the right to a life of dignity and fulfillment.

**These course lectures meet:**

Section 01

- MWF 12–12:50 p.m.
- MWF 1–1:50 p.m.

**OR**

Section 02

- MWF 1–1:50 p.m.
- MWF 2–2:50 p.m.

**Reflections will be held four times during the  
semester:**

- Th 6–7:50 p.m.

**The State: Power, Legitimacy, and Society in  
Political Theory** UNAS1740

**The State: Power, Legitimacy, and Society in Latin  
American History** HIST1733

Ethan Tupelo, Core Fellow  
Evan Fernández, Core Fellow

► **Fulfills 1 Social Science + History II + Cultural  
Diversity**

**How and why is political power created, obeyed,  
and resisted?**

The state is the dominant political institution, claiming dominion over every speck of habitable land on the planet. Seemingly omnipresent, the modern state is a relatively new development in human affairs. These paired courses examine methods of state-making and state-breaking through an interdisciplinary approach of political theory and Latin American history, asking: What is the state? Where, when, and for whom did it originate, outcompete other political forms, and appear inevitable, in Latin America and beyond? How does it promote or undermine justice? How might the relationship between state power and society shape understandings of the common good?

**These course lectures meet:**

Section 01

- MWF 10–10:50 a.m.
- MWF 11–11:50 a.m.

**OR**

Section 02

- MWF 11–11:50 a.m.
- MWF 12–12:50 p.m.

**Reflections will be held four times during the  
semester:**

- T 6–7:50 p.m.





# BOSTON COLLEGE

## Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

### UNIVERSITY CORE CURRICULUM

STOKES HALL S260  
140 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE  
CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02467

Scan the QR code  
to learn more about  
the courses.



“I could not be  
more appreciative of that  
experience because it really  
set me up for a great  
four years here.”

**BC.EDU/CORE**