

## Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

### Department/Program: Perspectives Program

- 1) **Have formal learning outcomes for the department's Core courses been developed? What are they?** (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students completing its Core courses to have acquired?)

As an interdisciplinary program providing core credit in philosophy, theology, arts, literature, social science and natural science, the learning outcomes of the Perspectives Program are developed by the departments in those core areas.

However, each of the four Perspectives courses adapts these core learning outcomes to the Perspectives mission of

- providing a humanist context for professional and scientific education;
- educating the whole person and forming students who are intelligent, responsible, reasonable, and attentive;
- aiding students in the developing the skills of critical thinking and practical living; and
- bringing faculty and students into conversation with the ancient, modern, and contemporary thinkers who have shaped our intellectual and spiritual heritage

- 2) **Where are these learning outcomes published? Be specific.** (Where are the department's expected learning outcomes for its Core courses accessible: on the web, in the catalog, or in your department handouts?)

The learning outcomes of the various core areas served by Perspectives can be found at the Core Requirements and Courses web page, as well as the web sites of the relevant departments. The mission of Perspectives, as well as narrative descriptions of the contents of the four Perspectives courses, can be found at the Perspectives Program web site (<https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/philosophy/undergraduate/perspectives-program.html>). Descriptions of the Perspectives Program are also included in Core Office documentation connected to "Schedules of Distinction" 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?)

Most of the evidence we use is of a qualitative, narrative nature. Some of this evidence arises on an *ad hoc* and irregular basis, while some are produced by more well-established mechanisms of “quality control.”

The Perspectives Program continues to focus on faculty development and faculty collaboration as the most effective way to ensure student learning. At the center of this endeavor is our annual year-end workshop. In 2024 our year-end workshops were held May 15 & 16. The four sessions were as follows:

1. Colleagues from the Center for Digital Innovation and Learning, in partnership with Prof. Tim Muldoon from Perspectives, addressed the challenges of integrating AI in the classroom (we want to play offense). This will be followed by workshops during AY 2024-5
2. Mary Frohlich, RSCJ, *Introducing First Year Students to Mysticism*. Interestingly, questions about the appropriateness of introducing first-year students to mysticism surfaced, not in a scholarly context, but a formational one.
3. Perspectives instructors Andrew Barrette (philosophy) and Henry Shea, SJ (theology) facilitated a wide-ranging discussion on basic curricular issues, including the themes of shared texts, approaches to modern theology, and our more general responsibility for the theology core.
4. Perspectives instructor Chris Constan led a workshop on using Plato’s *Euthyphro* to help students learn Plato’s philosophy

We also held a workshop on AI on October 25, 2023. Like many such meetings in the Fall across campus, it was mainly a reality-check that confirmed: This is a big deal and we’d better somehow get out in front of it.

The Director and Associate Director frequently consult with program instructors about specific students who are failing to meet learning goals. We also sometimes hear from students who believe that their personal learning outcomes are not being achieved because of their instructor. This typically results in an inquiry to determine if the learning outcome is not being met, and if it is not, the degrees of causality attributable to the structure of the course, the instructor, and the student.

That we are educating the whole person (or trying to) may be inferred from the fact that many of our instructors participate in course-based (Cornerstone) advising, as well as summer advising, and are often found teaching in other formational programs.

Student demand for spots in *Perspectives on Western Culture I-II* is always high, as is the mid-year retention rate for the course.

Finally, the Perspectives Program is well-known for creating philosophy majors and minors (in fact, the Program’s suite of courses serves as a major concentration), which we take as data that at least some desired outcomes are being met.

In terms of more objective data, given the multiple sections and the nature of some of the outcomes, it is difficult to provide any quantitative data that would be useful in determining whether learning goals are being met. The director of the program is not given access to course evaluations (due to their

sensitive nature), so the program must rely on any “red flags” being identified by the chair and DUS in the Philosophy and Theology departments. In this context, the Theology department has begun to gather core-specific course evaluation data for *Perspectives on Western Culture I-II*, as has the Office of the University Core. The Philosophy Department is currently investigating ways to contribute to this process.

- 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?)

Most of the evidence indicated above is interpreted by the Director (Chris Constas) and Associate Director (Kerry Cronin), sometimes in consultation with the chairs of Philosophy (Jeff Bloechl) and Theology (Andrea Vicini, SJ). Their interpretations, such as they are, are shared with Perspectives Program faculty and other stakeholders as needed.

- 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?)

Across more than two dozen sections taught by 18 instructors, *Perspectives on Western Culture I-II* continues to be effective in meeting the above stated learning outcomes, and others besides. We have a high degree of confidence that when the learning outcomes are not met, the student is the main cause.

No changes are planned or anticipated.

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

Our year-end workshop amounts to an annual self-study.

Perspectives was last externally reviewed as part of the Philosophy department review undertaken in Spring 2010.