

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 which makes possible an integrated vision of physical, human and spiritual reality; it weighs propositions fundamental to personal identity, dignity, religious belief, and social responsibility, and examines moral issues facing individuals and communities. The Philosophy core teaches analytical and interpretive skills so that students develop an intellectual and moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value and significance, challenging them to translate philosophical principles into guides for life. Thus, the philosophy core reflects the Jesuit commitment to the advancement of 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) Develop the ability to analyze arguments in order to create a moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value
- 5) Consider the nature of notions like reason, evidence, belief, and certainty such that they are able to 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 2023-2024, our department recognized the need to review the Philosophy of the Person course in a comprehensive way, with an eye toward adding enrichment and diversity to the course's approach and 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 Phil Person 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 will be leading a committee to carry an extended study of Phil of the Person, working closely with the new DUS in philosophy, Prof Marius Stan.

To assist in this upcoming project, this year we asked instructors for Phil Person to answer five questions about (a) the syllabus for the course and (b) possible ways that Phil of the Person might be improved. Those questions are:

- (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.
 - (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).
 - (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?
 - (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?
 - (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?
- 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?)

We received 14 responses from instructors. Interpreting the evidence is primarily the responsibility of the (incoming) DUS, and all other faculty working on revitalizing Phil Person.

- 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?)

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.

- 6) **Date of the most recent program review.** (Your latest comprehensive departmental self-study and external review.) External review in 2009-2010

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE COLLECTED

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.

Marx/Engels, <i>Capital</i> , and Plato's <i>Dialogues</i> (required)
Essays from Amia Srinivasan's <i>The Right to Sex</i> (elective)
Students responded to and were most engaged with Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> , 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.
I was surprised to see how well they engaged with and understood Descartes' <i>Meditations</i> . We read all six meditations in our iteration of PHIL-1071. It set the stage for all of the other modern and postmodern thinkers to follow, and the students regularly make connections back to Descartes.
Plato: <i>Meno, Apology, Republic</i>
Aristotle: <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
Michael Sandel: <i>Justice</i>
I found that my students really responded to three authors: Marcus Aurelius, Soren Kierkegaard, and Frantz Fanon. A big part of this was that I worked hard to provide a context in which these authors sounded like contemporaries or at least were addressing specific problems that students might also have. I will certainly be using all three in future versions of the course.
The students enjoy Mill / Kant / Aristotle on moral phil.
Of the required texts, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 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 <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> and Hobbes' <i>Leviathan</i>
Dialectic of Enlightenment works the best. Science and technology ("Bacon's utopia" in Adorno's phrase) feel very oppressive. At least, every student I have waxes very eloquent on the topic.
The students loved Fanon's <i>WotE</i> Chapter 1 and Deleuze's <i>Postscript on Societies of Control</i> (after reading Foucault's <i>D&P</i>). Personally, I'm also glad I added a week on Mill's political philosophy (harm principle and free speech).
Daniel Star and Roger Crisp's <i>History of Ethics</i> (2019) is a great volume. It contains manageable (10-30) passages of an impressive array of foundational texts in Western Moral Philosophy. It also contains helpful 2-3 page summaries of each text, which students found helpful. Student particularly engaged with excerpts from Ross's <i>The Right and the Good</i> and Rawls's <i>A Theory of Justice</i> . I also provided many readings outside of the textbook, including Nussbaum, Anscombe, and de Beauvoir- students particularly liked reading excerpts from <i>The Ethics of Ambiguity</i> .

(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.

The easy answer is someone like Kant or Hegel. Students frankly did not care for their writing style. One that was surprising, though, was Nietzsche. Students did not care for the polemic nature of his writing. I think I spent too much time on Kant and Hegel and chose the wrong Nietzsche reading so I will find a way to alter those elements. But I think that Kant is essential if only for understanding what comes after him and Hegel on recognition is great especially when played off of Fanon.

It's blasphemy, but *The Republic* is a bit of a bore. There are more relevant texts in political philosophy. I've shifted to teaching portions of it, rather than the full text. But, the list of Phil Person texts is flexible -- I wouldn't recommend removing it from the list. Other instructors may do a better job of engaging students with the full text.

It's not required, but I never have success with *Ethics of Ambiguity* by de Beauvoir, and will be dropping it in future iterations of the course.

Plato's *Republic*, Descartes' *Meditations*, and Augustine's *Confessions*

I am not able to detect such a text/author.

The students thought Foucault's *D&P* was a tough read because of the torture in the beginning. I might actually skip the first chapter in the future.

I do not think any texts were complete losses, but only a few students were interested in Ayer's logical positivism (from the Star & Crisp textbook). The same goes for excerpts from Plotinus and St. Augustine; the students who were 'into it' were really into it, but many students didn't seem to engage as much with these texts. I can gauge what students liked/didn't like in terms of what they wrote their papers on- very few students wrote on St. Augustine or Ayer (though a few did).

(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 Philosophy of the Person* 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.

It would be great to have a list of interesting articles or books about the most resurgent topics, like artificial intelligence, new forms of racism, question of tolerance, and cultural Marxism, which we could integrate into our teaching or assignments. Based on my teaching experience, students like topics that are connected with their lives.

My specialty area is Phenomenology and Latin American Philosophy so I am biased towards more of those texts. I think a piece by Enrique Dussel should be included or something from Frantz Fanon. That said, what came to mind for me a lot this past semester was MLK Jr.'s "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." Not only is it one of the great American essays, I think it is a profound piece of historical and philosophical writing that is as powerful now as it was at the time of its writing. I think every student should have to read it at some point.

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.

Honestly, my concern is less about adding/subtracting texts than about redesigning the structure of Philosophy of the Person (PP). There are simply too many classics in this course, and it is impossible to expect students to navigate all of them (or selections of them) in their first philosophy class. It would be helpful to center PP1 and PP2 on selected topics in EITHER epistemology/phil of mind/metaphysics OR ethics/religion/political philosophy. This way, instructors could spend proper time reading and discussing just two or even three classics per semester, integrating them with other texts of their choice revolving on those topics (for example, Plato & Aristotle on metaphysics OR ethics, and selected texts related to them from medieval or modern or contemporary phil, or Thomas & Augustine on metaphysics and religion, or Locke, Rousseau & Hobbes on politics and epistemology, or Kant & Mill on politics and ethics, or Descartes & Hume on epistemology and metaphysics, always integrated by other related texts). Thus, students and instructors wouldn't have to run a marathon across so many different classics and diverse fields of inquiry. I can't imagine anyone teaching the whole Republic in Person 1 (or going through major portions of it so quickly), and it is a pity that Descartes is thrown in the midst of Person 2, where the majority of readings concern political philosophy. This is just a thought that would require much more discussion, but I'd like it to be taken seriously. I am aware that we are expected to teach the big questions of the big books without going into much detail, but this is too vague as an indication. Some texts require at least two classes just for students to familiarize with the language. In my experience, it takes at least three weeks to teach Descartes' Meditations (not even all of them), and it is one of the shortest texts on the syllabus. Besides, I think there should be more specific indications of what we expect students to learn by coming across so many different texts.

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.

No, I think the flexibility of the course allows for a more holistic syllabus creation. Something I struggled with during Phil Person 1 syllabus creation was making a coherent theme beyond "history of philosophical thought," but this was not a problem in Phil Person 2 because there was much more freedom. I was able to theme the course around differing views of the self (individually-created selves vs. socially-constructed selves) which worked very well. If there were more required readings, I would have a harder time with this.

I think that intuitionism (Sidgwick, Moore, Ross, etc) is overlooked on many syllabi, though I am not sure I would go as far as to say that it ought to be required. After looking at 19th-20th century challenges to 'ideal moral theory', or the dominant Utilitarian/Kantian paradigm (e.g. Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, the broadly existentialist tradition), intuitionism gained traction with students (particularly Sidgwick and Ross).

(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. I appreciate the relative freedom from oversight that we have with the courses. If a good amount of diversity with syllabi can be maintained, a director could be helpful for instructors to get a general sense of how others are teaching and could help track broad trends among the students

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.

Having a dedicated director is an excellent idea; the program would greatly benefit from this. I know some of the instructors are the PhD candidates, which is an amazing experience for them. At the same time, instructors fluctuate, which makes our program constantly adapt, change, and experiment. Having a program director would create a stable reference point for our conversations and sharing, as well as stronger integration of this program into the core curriculum and Philosophy Department.

I worked as faculty at an institution where the intro to college course that all students took had a dedicated director. They were helpful when thinking about making sure that every faculty teaching had what they needed, that new faculty were getting the support and resources they needed to improve their pedagogy or deal with student issues, and provided general administrative aid. That said, those courses were all over the map in terms of their focus and disciplinary leanings making a course director necessary. With a class like PoP, I think it might not be necessary for non-student instructors but for grad students teaching in the program it could be very helpful.

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 don't really think there is a need for that.

Yes, absolutely. PP needs a director just like Perspectives and Pulse to address issues concerning course structure/design, but also to run surveys among the students and monitor the needs and challenges of this course. My impression is that PP is generally perceived and treated as a less relevant core course compared to Perspectives and Pulse. This attitude reflects negatively on how the students enrolling in PP1 and 2 approach the class and engage with the course material/instructor.

I do not think so, given my current knowledge.

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

I could see a director functioning well. I have heard (from my students and fellow part-time faculty) that there is substantial variability in how the course is taught. For instance, I know that some faculty members assign far fewer readings and engage through film. I think that having a standard of writing requirements, reading requirements, etc could help ensure a uniform experience. I have also heard that some part time faculty members do not encourage as much discussion (this is from students who transferred to my class). Since this is likely the first philosophy course for many of our students, ensuring that students are doing philosophy (e.g. participating, discussing, engaging in dialectic with each other) is key. I am not sure whether a centralized director could bring this about, but I could see benefits to some form of centralized pedagogical goal setting.

(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.

No. The department's Teaching Seminar already satisfies this for the graduate students. Additional events would create an unnecessary time commitment.

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.

Let us see and adopt the positive experiences from the Perspective program.

My wish is that we teach Philosophy as a “way of life”, i.e. not as an abstract reflection on past experiences, but as a genuine search for wisdom in our time. The abundance of information is not necessarily beneficial for young people in discovering and forming their own personalities. The present age of information is also an age of confusion and inability to think clearly, whether we talk about religion, politics, morality, authenticity and similar. Philosophy of the Person is an excellent opportunity to expose our students to a “philosophical” way of thinking, and by this, I mean helping them to understand better the key concepts: good and bad, freedom, tolerance, respect, dialogue, God, atheism, meaning.

Students have a lot going on already so I am hesitant to recommend more things for them to do. On the other hand, many of the events that the department puts on are (understandably) focused on majors and graduate student interests. Bringing in speakers or having department faculty talk about a subject they have interest and expertise in but with a specifically non-specialist, undergraduate audience in mind could be a fantastic way for the course to develop non-classroom educational experiences for students. For example, having someone speak about campus protest or dealing with anti-democratic forces, climate change, and/or mental health...this would be great for students to attend. Having two or three of these events throughout the semester/year that are required for all PoP courses along with lessons or discussion tools connecting the event to in-class discussions could be a great way of enhancing learning opportunities for students. I would also mention, beyond the

scope of these questions, that my full-time work is as a teaching and learning specialist at another institution and I love talking with other philosophers about how we teach these ideas and texts. I'm always happy to talk to pretty much anyone about what we can do to improve our courses and student learning.

I think so. It would help to share things like assessments, syllabus statements, etc.

Not particularly. Shared resources around teaching particular texts (angles, themes, exercises, etc.) could be helpful, or useful assignments.

Should a director be appointed for PP, it would be helpful to organize dedicated workshops for PP open to all instructors, including especially teaching fellows. These workshops should center on how to teach specific topics/texts in PP1 and PP2, and encourage discussion and conversation among all instructors. It wouldn't be the same as the teaching seminar, as attendants would be current teaching fellows and instructors, and there could be invited speakers from nearby universities to address philosophical topics more extensively and deeply. I am sure that these initiatives would foster more cohesion and communication among instructors, especially between TT/tenured faculty and part-timers. Also, PhD students would benefit enormously from such an environment.

Maybe a movie event?

One shared resource I think would be very valuable would be some sort of Philosophy of the Person specific writing tutors or writing philosophy argument guidelines for students. I try to give as many resources as I can to aid in philosophical writing, but they could use more. They seem to struggle most with the logical underpinning of philosophical arguments, which is not something I have enough lecture time to address in full while also trying to teach the course content.

Yes. I enjoyed our part-time faculty member meeting in the Fall of 2023. Other than meeting in the department during/around office hours, there is not much interaction. In terms of shared resources, perhaps a google drive where we post (anonymized) student exemplar papers, or examples of assignments, could be quite helpful. On the whole, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to teach our excellent Boston College undergraduates.