

Form E-1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

5/8/24

Department/Program: THEOLOGY

- 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?)

Students enrolled in theology core courses are:

1. engaging the quest for truth and meaning that generate theological insight in Christianity and other religious traditions;
2. exploring the fundamental texts and practices that shape Christian theology;
3. understanding the dynamic relationship between religious truth-claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal;
4. engaging the various disciplinary methods required for theological reflection, including textual, historical, social, and cultural analysis; and
5. relating theological inquiry to the enduring questions animating the broader liberal arts tradition.

- 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 for all core sequences are posted on the Theology Department website. <https://www.bc.edu/content/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/theology/undergraduate/core-in-theology.html> Additional learning outcomes specific to each course sequence are printed on course syllabi.

- 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?)

Beginning in F22, the Theology Undergraduate Program Assessment Committee (TUPAC) collects indirect data derived from the following customized student feedback questions which are administered at the end of each semester to all undergraduates enrolled in Theology core courses via the University's course evaluation system; the items directly address the Theology core goals:

1. This course has helped me understand the fundamental texts and practices that shape Christian theology.
2. This course has helped me understand the relationship between religious truth claims and their moral implications, both personal and societal.
3. This course has familiarized me with the scholarly exploration of religious faith.
4. This course has helped me understand how faith and reason are related in the search for truth.
5. This Core Theology course has helped me relate theological inquiry to the enduring questions animating the broader liberal arts tradition.¹

¹ The DUS added this final fifth question directly addressing the Theology core learning goals on all Theology core F23 student feedback forms.

Students respond to each of these statements by assigning them a number on a 1-5 scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. (Note: for the results of this year's survey, see section 5, below.)

In addition to these indirect data, the TUPAC acquires direct evidence by collecting and scoring student work, focusing on both specific sections and types of standard core theology courses on the one hand, and specific theology core learning goals on the other. For example, during AY2022-23, ca., 100 papers from STT core courses were collected and were scored by TUPAC using a committee-designed rubric in order to assess student learning on theology learning goals #1 and #4. It is the intent of the TUPAC to conduct such large-scale assessment projects involving student work every two years or so, since such undertakings are excessively time-consuming and are not feasible on a yearly basis.

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?)

The Theology Undergraduate Program Assessment Committee (TUPAC), led by the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) constructs a process for assessing the individual learning goals, then interprets the data collected. The TUPAC drafts recommendations based on these data and analysis, and the DUS presents these to the chair and department executive committee before presenting them to the department as a whole. This collation of data, analysis, and recommendation from the previous Spring and Fall semesters, takes place in the Spring Semester every year or, if necessary, in the following Fall.

The current TUPAC members are:

Jeffrey L. Cooley (DUS, *ex officio* chair)

Fr. Liam Bergin (2-year term ending F2024)

Natana DeLong-Bas (2-year term ending F2024)

Mary Ann Hinsdale (1-year term ending S2024)

Matthew Petillo (2-year term, ending F2025)

Matthew Kruger (*ad hoc* member, assisting in S24 for training for assuming the DUS position beginning in S25)

At the conclusion of a TUPAC member's term, a new member is elected by the department. (Note: the path to membership on the TUPAC is being reconsidered by the department; see discussion below in section 5.)

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?)

Since during AY2022-23, the TUPAC conducted two major assessment tasks, this year's activities were focused on a small scale project regarding THEO Major learning goals, rather than THEO core learning goals.² Nonetheless, the results of F23's student feedback surveys were presented to the department for discussion (for the survey's core questions, see description in section 3, above):

² See E1A Theology Major 2024, submitted to the MCAS Dean's Office.

F23 Theology Core Student Feed Summary³



Description of Table Data:

Perspectives = THEO1088

PULSE = 1090

STT = Sacred Texts and Traditions:

THEO1420-1422 Bible survey courses

THEO1430-1434 X and Christianity in Dialogue courses

THEO17XX STT-designated EQ/CP courses

CT = Christian Theology:

THEO1401 Engaging Catholicism

THEO1402 God, Self, and Society

THEO17XX CT-designated EQ/CP courses

Numbers beneath each course type indicate the range of the number of students in each class type responding to the questions.

Observations on F23 Theology Core Student Feed Summary: Over 2000 students submitted feedback in F23, representing a response rate of 83.7% of total students enrolled in THEO core courses in that semester. The TUPAC and the department consider the numbers to be very, very good – students by a wide margin perceive that *all* five of the THEO core learning goals are being well-addressed by *every*

³ For full but aggregated results, see “Theology Core F23 Student Feedback Custom Summary,” submitted to the Core Office together with this E1A.

mode of the core, whether it is Perspectives, PULSE, or the Standard Theology core (STT- plus CT-designated).

While there are definitely some minor differences (some of which might be statistically significant),⁴ those differences do not appear to be *practically* significant, since even the lowest score overall (being 4.35/5.0 on Q5 for Christian Theology/CT courses) shows **that, overwhelmingly, students believe that their THEO core classes are addressing all of the THEO core learning goals well.** Both the TUPAC and the larger Theology Department find this result unsurprising, since the THEO core learning goals were based on what the department designed the THEO core to address. Neither the TUPAC nor the Theology Department as a whole consider it necessary to change any element in the THEO core program at this time.

Though the THEO core program is not under consideration for alteration, the DUS is endeavoring to change both the size of the TUPAC as well as the path to participation on that committee. This is a result of the excessive number of additional hours required by the DUS and TUPAC members during the AY2022-23 assessment of learning outcomes in the STT core courses, exacerbated by the post-3rd year review of the new THEO core (which was implemented in 2019): TUPAC members reported anywhere from 40-80 hours of committee labor required, far in excess of what would be expected on any other departmental committee.

To alleviate this absurd burden, at the 4/17/24 Theology Department meeting, the DUS proposed to the Department a revision of section 7.7 of the *Theology Faculty Guidelines*, which defines the TUPAC, its mandate, and membership. Currently, membership on the TUPAC is comprised of four members elected to 2-year terms as well as the DUS. The DUS proposed to expand the number of *elected* members of the TUPAC – up to nine - in years in which a major THEO core assessment project is planned. The Theology Department, however, rejected this proposal in detail, though they were supportive in principle. The department was concerned that certain faculty members would be repeatedly elected to the TUPAC (in spite of certain safeguards included in the proposal) and, furthermore, wished to preclude tenure-track faculty from serving on it until they had obtained tenure. The department voted to have the DUS redraft the proposal, requiring committee membership of all non-exempt members of the department, rotating through the department in alphabetical order. The DUS will rewrite the proposal in light of these suggestions and will resubmit a new amended section 7.7 the *Theology Faculty Guidelines* for the Theology Department's approval at the first meeting of F24.

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

A full program review of the Theology Department was conducted in 2012.

In addition to that, in the summer of 2020 the department conducted a self-study of the new THEO core which was implemented in AY2019-20.

Furthermore, in AY2022-23, the TUPAC conducted a post-3rd year review of the new theology core which was implemented in AY2019-20.⁵

⁴ E.g., for the courses that are traditional-text intensive (i.e., Perspectives and the Sacred Texts and Traditions [STT] core courses) on Q1 and Q3 which address “fundamental texts” and “scholarly exploration” respectively.

⁵ As per the mandate in “Theology Core Revision” (April 23, 2018), 7: “The Chair, DUS, and Undergraduate Advisory Committee will conduct a more thorough assessment at the end of Year 3 in order to determine the impact of the implemented changes to the Theology Core. The means of assessment will include review of syllabi, targeted add-on questions to course evaluations, focused conversations with faculty, dialogue with Advising Services, and review of previous E1A reports. The Theology Department will communicate the results of its assessment to the UCRC.”