Complex Problems & Enduring Questions

SPRING 2021 COURSES 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, natural sciences, and social sciences. 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 the disciplines in order to make good decisions, and to communicate effectively in an increasingly complex world.

To fulfill Core requirements, each student must complete:

1 course in Arts:  
Art, Art History, Film, Music, Theatre

1 course in Cultural Diversity

2 courses in History:  
1 course in History I
1 course in History II

1 course in Literature:  
Classics; English; Romance Languages and Literatures; Eastern, Slavic, and German Studies

1 course in Mathematics

2 courses in Natural Science:  
Biology, Chemistry, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Physics

2 courses in Philosophy

2 courses in Social Science:  
Economics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology

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 Core requirements, visit:  
BC.EDU/CORE

Complex Problems Courses

Each of these six-credit courses, team-taught by professors from different disciplines, satisfies at least two Core requirements. Complex Problems courses consist of lectures and weekly lab sessions, along with a weekly meeting during the evening for reflection.

Enduring Questions Courses

These linked pairs of courses are taught by professors from different disciplines, who collaborate on exploring a single, long-standing question for students to address throughout the semester. The same group of 19 students takes each class. Four evening reflection sections will be scheduled over the course of the semester. Taken together, the courses are worth six credits and fulfill at least two Core requirements.

Student comments in this brochure taken from anonymous survey responses
As a member of the Class of 2024, you are invited to enroll in Boston College’s innovative, team-taught Core courses: Complex Problems and Enduring Questions. Each one is collaboratively taught by two faculty members from different academic departments, and each is designed to engage students in interdisciplinary explorations of topics of critical importance. These include areas such as oceans and climate change; race and violence; neuroscience and religion; economics and social inequality; coming of age; animals in art and philosophy; and more.

Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses extend inquiry beyond the classroom to labs, reflection sessions, conversations with outside speakers, and off-campus field visits, creating an intensive shared learning experience for both instructors and students. They exemplify Boston College’s innovative approach to Core education by establishing a foundation for students’ intellectual development and preparing them to become engaged, ethically minded world citizens.

You will have the opportunity to enroll in Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses when you register for spring courses this November. Both are worth six credits and fulfill at least two of the University’s Core requirements.

To view faculty members describing their courses and for more information, visit BC.EDU/COMPLEXENDURING
Understanding Race, Gender, and Violence
HIST150301 + SOCY150301

Marilynn Johnson, History
Shawn McGuffey, Sociology
Lab Instructor: Daniel Millán, Core Fellow (Sociology)

► Fulfills 1 History II + 1 Social Science + Cultural Diversity through Engaging Difference & Justice

This course explores pressing problems of modern race- and gender-based violence across the globe, applying historical and sociological perspectives to the examination of domestic violence, youth gangs, police violence, sexual assault, and genocide. We will explore 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. In the lab for the course, students will collaborate with anti-violence projects and organize in the Boston area.

This course meets: Lecture M W F 2:00–2:50 p.m. and Reflection Tuesday 6–7:50 p.m.

Students must also select one of the following lab sections:
- HIST150401 Tues. 9:00–10:15 a.m.
- HIST150401 Tues. 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- SOCY150401 Thurs. 1:30–2:45 p.m.
- SOCY150401 Thurs. 3:00–4:15 p.m.

HIST151301 + EESC150701

John Ebel, Earth and Environmental Sciences
Conevery Valencius, History
Lab Instructor: Jonathan Krones, Core Fellow (Environmental Studies)

► Fulfills 1 History II + 1 Natural Science

This course explores U.S. energy. From the perspectives of history, culture, technology, engineering, and foreign policy, we ask how we created and distributed energy in the past, how energy systems function in the present, and how they may evolve. We investigate energy production, distribution, and use—coal, oil, nuclear power, hydropower, wind, and solar power—along with cables, pipelines, and transmission systems. Through hands-on exercises and field trips, students learn how past technological and economic choices shaped current U.S. energy systems, how energy systems affect the environment, and how sustainable energy systems will be in the future.

This course meets: Lecture T TH 3:00–4:15 p.m. and Reflection Tuesday 6–7:25 p.m.

Students must also select one of the following lab sections:
- EESC150801 Mon. 1:00–2:50 p.m.
- EESC150801 Mon. 3:00–4:50 p.m.
- HIST151401 Fri. 9:00–10:50 a.m.
- HIST151401 Fri. 11:00 a.m.–12:50 p.m.

“This is one of the best classes you could ever take while at Boston College. There is no better way to engage in scholarly research and debate than through this class.”
Consumer Culture: Past, Present, and the Fate of the Planet SOCY171401 + HIST171701

Juliet Schor, Sociology
Robin Fleming, History
Lab Instructor: Carlos Zúñiga Nieto, Core Fellow (History)

▶ Fulfills 1 Social Science + 1 History II

Although we are increasingly aware that our habits of consumption affect the environment, it is hard to imagine that consuming patterns are capable of being changed. In this class, students will learn that practices of consumption are both socially and historically constructed, that they change dramatically over time, and that there are (and always have been) urgent moral issues connected to practices of consumption. We will explore the global, social, and environmental dimensions of consumption, paying special attention to food, fashion, and housing, and thinking through the impact of global pandemics and climate crises on our supply chains and current consumption practices.

This course meets: Lecture M W F 10:00–10:50 a.m. and Reflection Thursdays 6–7:25 p.m.

Students must also select one of the following labs:
- [SOCY172001 Tues. 12:00–1:50 p.m.]
- [UNAS171201 Tues. 12:00–1:50 p.m.]
- [THEO171201 Thurs. 9:00–10:50 a.m.]
- [THEO171201 Thurs. 11:30 a.m.–1:20 p.m.]

Neuroscience and Religion: Conflict, Coexistence or Collaboration UNAS171101 + THEO171101

Jessica Black, School of Social Work
Melissa Kelley, School of Theology & Ministry
Lab Instructor: Russ Powell, Core Fellow (Theology)

▶ Fulfills 1 Natural Science + 1 Theology (Christian Theology)

This course will give students the opportunity to reflect on and analyze evidence of how theology and neuroscience may operate with helpful synergy rather than in opposition. Over the course of the semester, we will explore the “developing brain” and how the brain changes with age, and the implications that has for faith formation and spiritual development. We will then look at the “loving brain” and the importance of social relationships for brain development and religious identity. Finally, we will study the “giving brain” and the importance of reciprocity and empathy in brain development and spiritual formation.

This course meets: Lecture M W F 11:00–11:50 a.m. and Reflection Tuesdays 6–7:50 p.m.

Students must also select one of the following labs:
- [SOCY172001 Tues. 12:00–1:50 p.m.]
- [UNAS171201 Tues. 2:30–4:20 p.m.]
- [THEO171201 Thurs. 9:00–10:50 a.m.]
- [THEO171201 Thurs. 11:30 a.m.–1:20 p.m.]

Understanding & Protecting Our Oceans in the Wake of Climate Change BIOL170601 + ENVS107501

Heather Olins, Biology
Yasmin Zaerpoor, Core Fellow (Environmental Studies)
Lab Instructor: John Brooks, Core Fellow (English)

▶ Fulfills 1 Natural Science + 1 Social Science

The ocean, which covers more than 70 percent of the Earth’s surface, is vital to human societies. Yet, we have better maps of Mars than our own sea floor. This course introduces students to what we know and don’t know about marine biodiversity and ecosystem services. It then describes the effects of climate change on the ocean—including rising temperatures, acidification, and sea level rise—and the resulting impact on life within and outside of the ocean. We end discussing the importance of effective governance and explore innovative ways in which people are working to repair and protect the ocean.

This course meets: Lecture T TH 10:30–11:45 a.m. and Reflection Tuesday 6–7:25 p.m.

Students must also select one of the following labs:
- [BIOL170701 Wed. 9:00–10:50 a.m.]
- [BIOL170701 Wed. 11:30 a.m.–1:20 p.m.]
- [ENVS107601 Fri. 11:00 a.m.–12:50 p.m.]
- [ENVS1017601 Fri. 1:30–3:20 p.m.]
The American Divide: The Economics of Inequality  ECON170301
The American Divide: The Philosophy of Inequality  PHIL171101

Geoffrey Sanzenbacher, Economics
Cherie McGill, Philosophy

▶ Fulfills 1 Philosophy + 1 Social Science + Cultural Diversity through Engaging Difference & Justice

How should we interpret our nation’s persistent inequalities when our founding documents assert the equality of all?

Concern over inequality in the U.S. has shown itself in movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Fight for a Fifteen Dollar Minimum Wage, and Black Lives Matter. These courses will examine the meaning, causes, and consequences of inequality from the perspectives of philosophy and economics. Providing a broad picture of the current state of the U.S. economy and analyzing the role of economic policy in determining opportunities and outcomes, the courses will prepare students to develop their own views about how past economic choices shaped current economic realities, and how we might create a more equitable future.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question:

These courses meet:
- ECON170301  M W F 12:00–12:50 p.m.
- PHIL171101  M W F 1:00–1:50 p.m.

Tuesday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester

Who Are You? The Science of Self  HIST172501
Who Are You? The Sociology of Self  SOCY172501

Jenna Tonn, Core Fellow (History)
Nora Gross, Core Fellow (Sociology)

▶ Fulfills 1 History II and 1 Social Science

How do people understand themselves and their roles in society?

How do you answer the question of who you are? Are you your body, your IQ, your race, your gender, your personality, your social roles or relationships (e.g., student, sibling), where you grew up? These courses explore the science and sociology of the self. We will examine how the modern sciences have understood the self since the nineteenth century.

Scientific knowledge has been used to quantify and compare human traits and make recommendations about how best to live, work, and play. It has also been deployed to reinforce social inequalities and stigmatize minority groups. Similarly, sociologists have theorized the ways people define themselves in relation to others, sort themselves into groups and construct social boundaries, and perform their identities. Sociological thinking also examines the role of institutions (like colleges) in both reproducing and disrupting unequal outcomes for various social groups. Course topics will include racial and sexual science, the social construction of deviant identities, the self in relation to college life, and the self in the age of social media, self-care, and quarantine.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses. There are two sections to this course available, choose one.

- SOCY172501  M W F 9:00–9:50 a.m.
- HIST172501  M W F 10:00–10:50 a.m.

Thursday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester

Or

- SOCY172502  M W F 10:00–11:50 a.m.
- HIST172502  M W F 11:00–11:50 a.m.

Thursday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester

Social Inequality in America  SOCY171101
Rhetoric of Social Inequality in America  COMM170301

Eve Spangler, Sociology
Celeste Wells, Communication

▶ Fulfills 1 Social Science + 1 Literature + Cultural Diversity through Engaging Difference & Justice

How do rhetoric and social structures contribute to the creation of entrenched social barriers, which maintain persistent social inequality, and how can we address them?
“I believe this course is great in helping students to learn how to draw connections between different disciplines.”
These independent courses explore enduring questions regarding social inequality, social justice, and the social representations of both in America. Both courses take for granted that inequality is embedded in the American experience, but will explore this inequality from different perspectives: one takes a perspective rooted in examining the lived human experience (sociological), and the other takes a perspective rooted in examining the language and resulting creation of human experience (rhetorical). Issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality are explored in both classes.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question.

**These courses meet:**
- SOCY171101 T TH 12:00–1:15 p.m.
- COMM170301 T TH 1:30–2:45 p.m.

**Tuesday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester**

**Death in Russian Literature: Heroes, Cowards, Humans** SLAV116401

**Death in Ancient Greece: Achilles to Alexander the Great** CLAS170101

Thomas Epstein, Classical Studies
Hanne Eisenfeld, Classical Studies

► Fulfills 1 History + 1 Literature

**How does grappling with death, individually and as a community, inform the way we live?**

What does death mean to the living? How do different cultures, eras, and people understand death? How is death represented in ways that are meaningful in the present and that retain meaning in future generations? How do we participate in this process? Our paired courses will seek answers to those universal questions in two very different cultures, ancient Greece and modern Russia. Through the lens of two disciplines, history and literature, we will examine how engagements with death, from the battlefield to street corner, religious ritual to poetic imagination, resonated in their own time and how they might resonate differently with us today.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question:

**These courses meet:**
- SLAV116401 T TH 12:00–1:15 p.m.
- CLAS170101 M W 3:00–4:15 p.m.

**Tuesday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester**

**Coming of Age: Literature** UNAS170801

**Coming of Age: Film** FILM170101

Eileen Donovan Kranz, English
Susan Michalczyk, Honors

► Fulfills 1 Arts + 1 Literature

We ask whether the depiction of coming of age experiences provides readers/viewers with ways to navigate and contextualize concepts of self and community within the complex social, political, religious, and psychological forces that create the worlds in which we live.

When do we come of age? What influences our actions and reactions throughout our journey into adulthood? How do these experiences affect the lives we choose to lead? From times of crisis to moments of calm, childhood memories cover a range of experiences, from the mundane to the transformational. Literature and film adaptations can capture both the individual and collective experience of these critical years of development and memorialize a common experience of both private and public struggles. In both courses, students will analyze approaches used by authors and directors to connect these individual moments to current social concerns.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question.

**These courses meet:**
- UNAS170801 T TH 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- FILM170101 T TH 12:00–1:15 p.m.

**Thursday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester**
Animals in the Moral Imagination: Art and Empathy ARTH172001
Animals in the Moral Imagination: Beyond Human Justice PHIL172001

Jennifer Burns, Art History
Melissa Fitzpatrick, Carroll School of Management

▶ Fulfills 1 Philosophy + 1 Arts

In modern Western philosophy and art, how has human nature been pictured as an essence that departs from and is defined against animal existence?

One strain of Western thought has rather emphatically decided that humans are to be understood in contradistinction to animals, whom we can ultimately choose to exploit or to protect. Recent scholarship has challenged this paradigm, stressing that humans are a part of nature, dwelling within a web of obligations among all living things. In this pair of courses, students will probe the boundaries between human and non-human animals by studying philosophical texts and artworks from the Renaissance to the present. How do we imagine human nature—and why?

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question:

These courses meet:
- ARTH172001 T TH 10:30–11:45 a.m.
- PHIL172001 T TH 12:00–1:15 p.m.

Building a Habitable Planet, Theological Perspectives THEO170301
Building a Habitable Planet, Geoscience Perspectives EESC170101

Natana Delong-Bas, Theology
Ethan Baxter, Earth and Environmental Sciences

▶ Fulfills 1 Natural Science + 1 Theology (Sacred Texts & Traditions)

How have religion and science shaped our understanding of the origins of the Earth, its evolution into a habitable planet, and our human relationship with it?

Providing both Christian and Islamic perspectives, this course explores our planet and the evolution of life. Students will also examine the scientific method and the tools of geology, geochemistry, and geophysics used to unlock the history of the Earth from its beginnings.

In order to register you must sign up for both courses for this Enduring Question:

These courses meet:
- THEO170301 M W F 11:00–11:50 a.m.
- EESC170101 M W F 12:00–12:50 p.m.

Monday 6:00–7:50 p.m. reserved for Reflection sessions, 4 times per semester

“This course got me and my peers talking about very touchy subjects that demand attention. It helped me develop language for topics I formerly did not know how to discuss and helped me understand the nuances of oppression in the US.”
### Arts
- Coming of Age: Film (FILM1701) paired with Literature (UNAS1708)
- Animals in the Moral Imagination: Art and Empathy (ARTH1720) paired with Philosophy (PHIL1720)

### Philosophy
- The American Divide: The Philosophy of Inequality (PHIL1711) paired with Social Science (ECON1703)
- Animals in the Moral Imagination: Beyond Human Justice (PHIL1720) paired with Arts (ARTH1720)

### History I
- Death in Ancient Greece: Achilles to Alexander the Great (CLAS1701) paired with Literature (SLAV1164)

### History II
- Understanding Race, Gender and Violence (HIST1503) paired with Social Science (SOCY1503)
- Powering America: The Past and Future of Energy, Technology and the Environment (HIST1513) paired with Natural Science (EESC1507)
- Who Are You? The Science of Self (HIST1725) paired with Social Science (SOCY1725)
- Consumer Culture: Past, Present and the Fate of the Planet (HIST1717) paired with Social Science (SOCY1714)

### Literature
- Social Inequality in America (SOCY1711) paired with Social Science (COMM1703)
- Coming of Age: Literature (UNAS1708) paired with Arts (FILM1701)
- Death in Russian Literature: Heroes, Cowards, Humans (SLAV1164) paired with History 1 (CLAS1701)

### Natural Science
- Understanding & Protecting Our Oceans in the Wake of Climate Change (BIOL1706) paired with Social Science (ENVS1075)
- Neuroscience and Religion: Conflict, Coexistence or Collaboration (THEO1711) paired with Natural Science (UNAS1711)
- Powering America: The Past and Future of Energy, Technology and the Environment (EESC1507)
- Building a Habitable Planet, Geoscience Perspectives (EESC1701) paired with Theology (Sacred Texts & Traditions) (THEO1703)

### Social Science
- Understanding Race, Gender and Violence (SOCY1503) paired with History II (HIST1503)
- Understanding & Protecting Our Oceans in the Wake of Climate Change (ENVS1075) paired with Natural Science (BIOL1706)
- Consumer Culture: Past, Present, and the Fate of the Planet (SOCY1714) paired with History II (HIST1717)
- The American Divide: The Economics of Inequality (ECON1703) paired with Philosophy (PHIL1711)
- Rhetoric of Social Inequality in America (COMM1703) paired with Literature (SOCY1711)
- Who Are You? The Sociology of Self (SOCY1725) paired with History II (HIST1725)

### Theology (Christian Theology)
- Neuroscience and Religion: Conflict, Coexistence or Collaboration (THEO1711) paired with Natural Science (UNAS1711)

### Theology (Sacred Texts & Traditions)
- Building a Habitable Planet, Theological Perspectives (THEO1703) paired with Natural Science (EESC1701)
“It’s the most diverse class I ever had at BC. It was the first class where I could talk about social justice in a very open setting.”
“It changed my life.”

BC.EDU/CORE