

The Core Foundations Task Force invites proposals for pilot classes to be taught in the 2015–2016 academic year as part of an ongoing process to renew and strengthen the Boston College Core Curriculum. These courses will intentionally engage first-year students in foundational and integrative ways, connecting them to faculty expertise, life outside the classroom, and the distinctive qualities of Boston College as a Jesuit, Catholic university. Classes in the Renewed Core will contribute to the rigorous intellectual development and personal formation of our students by broadening their intellectual horizons, introducing them to the best of contemporary pedagogy, research, and teaching, promoting their integration of knowledge, beliefs, and actions, and preparing them for lives of freedom, integrity, intellectual engagement, leadership, and service.

Two kinds of courses involving interdisciplinary collaboration will be offered in the pilot phase (more detail follows below):

- *Complex Problems* courses are team-taught, six-credit classes of 75–100 students that address a contemporary problem.
- *Enduring Questions* courses are linked pairs of distinct three-credit classes of 25 students that meet separately, each taught by a faculty member from a different department. Both classes are connected by a common topic and set of questions and share some readings and assignments.

In both cases, each of the two faculty members represents one of eight existing Core subject areas (Arts, History, Literature, Mathematics, Natural Science, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Theology).

Both Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses will integrate structured reflection and activities outside normal class meeting times. Faculty will work with the offices of Mission and Ministry and of Student Affairs to develop programming that deepens academic study with opportunities for exploration and growth.

Because these labor-intensive classes reflect a dramatic shift in the way many of us teach, faculty who participate in this initial pilot phase will be required to participate in planning and pedagogical workshops in the spring and summer of 2015, for which they will receive a stipend of \$10,000. For each faculty member, the first offering of a Complex Problem class will count as two courses of his or her normal teaching load. Resources will be available if needed to assist with course coverage in departments where faculty members are offering pilot courses. Proposals not selected for the 2015–2016 academic year may be considered for 2016–2017.

Faculty are invited to submit proposals for either a Complex Problem or an Enduring Questions course. You may propose a class either as a two-person team or individually (in which case the Core Foundations Task Force will attempt to pair two proposals). Submissions are due by Monday, November 3, 2014 and can be sent to Gregory Kalscheur, S.J. Faculty will be notified by Monday, November 17, 2014.

Proposals should include the following information:

- For a Complex Problems course: the name(s), department or school affiliation(s), and contact information of the faculty member(s); the title and a one-paragraph course description of the class; a brief explanation of how the course will fulfill the characteristics of Complex Problems; and a brief statement of support from the department chair(s) of the faculty member(s).

- For an Enduring Questions course: the name(s), department or school affiliation(s), and contact information of the faculty member(s); the title and a brief description of the common topic; the title and one-paragraph course description of the distinctive class or classes; a brief explanation of how the course and class(es) will fulfill the characteristics of Enduring Questions; and a brief statement of support from the department chair(s) of the faculty member(s).

If you have questions while preparing your course proposal, you may contact Mary Crane or Julian Bourg.

Further Description

Background

The Boston College Core Curriculum was last revised in 1991 (*Task Force on the Core Curriculum Final Report*, June 1991). It is appropriate that in the second decade of the twenty-first century Boston College revisit and revise its basic undergraduate programs. In a first phase of Core Renewal in 2012–2013, faculty and administrators created an innovative plan of action (*Toward a Renewed Core*, May 2, 2013). In a second phase in 2014, an overall vision of the Core’s relationship to Boston College’s Jesuit, Catholic traditions and mission was articulated (*The Vision Animating the Boston College Core Curriculum*, August 2014). Guided by the descriptions of the Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses developed in *Toward a Renewed Core* and the August 2014 *Vision* statement, we have now reached a third phase of Core Renewal: it is time to build on the two previous steps by launching a small number of pilot classes that synthesize imaginative approaches to teaching with Jesuit educational principles. These pilot courses will make a key contribution to the shared goals of the Core Curriculum described in the new *Vision*: opening the mind and heart, encouraging character formation in service of the common good, deepening human sympathy, inspiring creativity, enriching understanding of human diversity, and stimulating clear thought and persuasive expression. As the new *Vision* states, “The Core Curriculum thus furthers the development of the intellectual, reflective, ethical, and creative habits of mind that will enable students to become lifelong learners, to seek meaning in their lives, and to work toward constructing a more just and human world.”

Course Structures

Complex Problems and Enduring Questions courses are structured differently. The following descriptions give a more complete picture of how the classes will be designed and organized.

Complex Problems

In these six-credit courses, students examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance. Classes might understand one global challenge from multiple viewpoints, considering

historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions. By studying cultural, economic, historical, political, religious, scientific, and/or social currents in relation to their own experience, students foster habits of mind that are alert to global connections, differences, or comparisons. They will be asked to put themselves into the equation: How are they implicated in what they study? How does it affect who they are? What future courses do they want to take? What sort of lives do they want to lead?

Two faculty members share the same classroom for the normal three hours of weekly instructional time. In addition, students attend smaller weekly 90-minute lab sessions led by graduate students in which they learn by doing, working in teams to apply knowledge to real-world issues. Finally, weekly one-hour evening sessions provide additional possibilities for shared learning experiences and reflection. In the pilot phase, these classes will be limited to 75–100 first-year students, although in the future they may be larger. Lab session enrollments will be capped at 19 students.

Enduring Questions

In these linked pairs of three-credit classes, students critically examine and reflect upon fundamental human concerns. Faculty provide them with a foundation in the influential thinkers, writers, and artists who have wrestled with questions that have long concerned reflective people and that transcend particular disciplines, spaces, and times. As students grapple with the approaches they encounter, they reflect upon their own perspective, strive to articulate their own opinions and beliefs, and continue to define a core set of values. A new generation learns that they are part of a larger, ongoing conversation: the human search for meaning in all its changes and continuities, diversity and abundance.

Two faculty from different departments teach independent classes connected by a common overarching topic. Faculty agree on three enduring questions to examine in their courses, and they collaborate on some shared readings and assignments. The same students take both classes. In addition to the two linked courses, students participate in periodic shared learning experiences and opportunities for reflection throughout the semester. In the pilot phase, these classes will be limited to 25 first-year students, although in the future they may be larger.

Course Characteristics

Faculty should consider the Course Characteristics below as they formulate their proposals.

<i>Complex Problems Courses</i>	<i>Enduring Questions Courses</i>
Examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance.	Ask students to reflect upon issues and values related to fundamental concerns of human life.
Consider its historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions in a rigorous way.	Introduce students to influential thinkers, writers, or artists who have wrestled with the questions across discipline, time, and space.
Address global connections, differences, or	Introduce the methods your discipline uses to

comparisons; consider ethical implications and issues of justice.	approach a question, text, or object cultivating analytical and creative thinking.
Develop an attached lab that provides hands-on problem-solving activities for students involving multiple media.	Engage in a dialogue with the methods of the disciplinary approach of the other instructor.
Introduce students to various disciplinary approaches to the problem, and to the ways in which they might intersect, cultivating appropriate analytical and creative skills.	Offer some common readings or assignments across the paired sections.
	Work intensively with students to improve their writing (with help from writing fellows if desired).
<u>Both Enduring Questions and Complex Problems classes will:</u> Incorporate opportunities for reflection on values and experiences that will promote students' integration of what they learn with the principles that guide their lives: E.g., <i>Why</i> does studying this material contribute to my better understanding of what it is to be a person? <i>Who am I becoming</i> as I engage this material? <i>How</i> does my study of this material contribute to my better understanding of the world in its wholeness?	

Faculty should also consider the *Vision* document's Core Curriculum Learning Outcomes as they formulate their proposals. A proposed course need not contribute to every Learning Outcome, but it should strive to contribute to a working majority of them:

Students completing the Boston College Core Curriculum will:

1. Demonstrate the critical, mathematical, informational, analytic, expressive, and creative skills that are essential tools of the educated person well-prepared for a meaningful life and vocation.
2. Understand the major ideas and methods of inquiry of the scholarly disciplines that comprise the university and be able to use those methods of inquiry as beginning practitioners to address complex contemporary problems.
3. Be able to identify and articulate the strengths and limitations of the disciplines and the relationship of the disciplines to one another, and demonstrate an understanding of the breadth and diversity of human knowledge as well as its openness to integration in more comprehensive wholes.
4. Be conversant with and able to discuss intelligently enduring questions and issues that are fundamental to human inquiry and that have shaped the traditions from which the university has emerged.
5. Demonstrate the ability to apply more than one disciplinary perspective to the same enduring question or complex contemporary problem.
6. Be familiar with the scholarly exploration of religious faith and understand how faith and reason are related in the search for truth.
7. Demonstrate the ability to examine their values and experiences and integrate what they learn with the principles that guide their lives.
8. Be prepared and disposed to use their talents and education as engaged global citizens and responsible leaders in service of the common good.