Annotated Form E-1-A for Boston College CORE courses

Program: CORE COURSES: Philosophy of the Person I and II (yearlong course)
Please note that this form only covers Philosophy of the Person since PULSE and Perspectives, our two other core classes, have their own program heads.

1) Have formal learning outcomes been developed? What are they? (What specific sets of skills and knowledge does the department expect students taking the 2 core Philosophy requirements to have acquired before they graduate?)

In light of the Core Renewal project at BC, the Philosophy department re

Philosophy has a permanent and central place in Jesuit higher education and is an important part of the Boston College Core Curriculum. 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 critical and analytical 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. All Core offerings in philosophy bring students to reflect critically on the kinds of claims made in different disciplines from the natural sciences to theology by considering questions about the nature of reason, evidence, belief, and certainty. The two (2) sequential three-credit courses in the Philosophy core aim to teach students that the philosophical habit of mind is part of a well-lived life, providing the perspective and tools for critical evaluation of and engagement with contemporary problems and questions. 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

- Understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground and are questioned in contemporary culture
- Reflect on their individual, social, and religious identities and relationships
- Examine their values in light of their reflection on philosophical views
- Develop the ability to analyze arguments in order to create a moral framework for considering questions of ultimate value
- 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
- Critically engage w/ 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 learning expectations accessible to potential majors: on the web or in the catalog or in your department’s major handouts?)
These principles are posted on the Philosophy Department Core web site.

3) **Other than GPA, what data/evidence is used to determine whether graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree? (What evidence and analytical approaches do you use to assess which of the student learning outcomes are being achieved more or less well?)**

We have assessed our core courses using both indirect evidence (directly asking students how well they thought the course achieved specific core objectives) and direct evidence (student work). We also conducted a program review involving faculty meetings and input.

**Indirect evidence:** Students in the Philosophy of the Person course were asked in the spring semester to answer the following questions on a 5 point scale with 1 as strongly disagree, 2 as disagree, 3 as neither agree or disagree, 4 as agree, and 5 as strongly agree. The mean scores for student answers to these questions is listed immediately after each of the named questions (in parentheses). All students in Philosophy of the Person II were surveyed as part of their year end course evaluations. The number of students surveyed was 1048.

1. This course helped me to understand the historical origins of some of the values and principles that ground and/or are being questioned by contemporary culture. (4.45)

2. This course prompted me to examine some of my values and integrate some of what I have learned into those values. (4.46)

3. This course helped me to locate and analyze arguments and increase my ability to argue for and support my views. (4.41)

**Student Work:** A second way that the Philosophy of the Person course is being evaluated in spring 2016 is to have a sample of papers collected from the course that were prepared for blind review by professors. Between 50 and 60 papers have been collected. Each paper will be given a rating according to the evaluation sheet, attached as Appendix A. We also invite the professors giving the evaluation to offer qualitative comments with suggestions for improvement of the core program. These evaluations have not been completed yet this year, as we had a change in the director of the undergraduate program and a new version of the core goals.

Last year, the sample sets did not clearly indicate whether students were being given the opportunity to “understand the historical development of the values and principles that guide their lives and reflect critically on these values and principles as they apply to their personal situation,” and in the revised core goals, a version of this goal still exists, now separated into 2 goals (see the evaluation questions above). We see from the construction of the assignments we have collected that students are not being as explicitly prompted to make this connection explicit in their written work, though we know from class visits and reports from teachers on their group work in class that this connection is being made. We must still do the evaluation of
the papers we collected, but we will recommend that the Teaching Seminar present to novice teachers ways that teachers can address this goal in teaching the course, through the use of specific assignments that help students to connect theory to personal experience, and so that we can use these assignments to evaluate this goal in the future.

Within the past 2 years we have introduced standard texts to be covered in all sections of this course and it would be worthwhile to evaluate whether students’ sense of being introduced to major historical figures and ideas will strengthen, and this is another thing we will be looking for in the papers we have collected this spring.

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 director of undergraduate studies along with the undergraduate studies committee conducts the evaluative work. The director of undergraduate studies arranged for the Provost’s office to add the indirect evidence questions to the student end of the year evaluations. The director of undergraduate studies also solicited paper assignments from professors of the course and administrative staff prepared the papers for blind review (no professors’ names or students’ names). Data was collected by the Provost’s office on the survey questions and sent to the director of undergraduate studied and departmental chair. Undergraduate committee members will review student sample work, fill out the forms, and offer qualitative analysis, which will then be passed on to the director of undergraduate studies along with specific suggestions for improvement.
Appendix A

Student Assignment Assessment

Please note that not all assignments need to address all of the goals below simultaneously. For example, one assignment that the committee looks at may ask students to explain their understandings of a particular classic philosophical problem and a particular philosopher’s solution, while another may ask students to connect a philosopher’s thinking to his or her own personal life. Few papers will do both. For this reason, the aim in each year of assessment is to get a few different assignments that can be assessed with respect to different goals. Therefore, for each question below, we have provided a “not applicable” option.

The work shows a capacity to articulate a fundamental philosophical question and one or more perspectives from which that question has been addressed by major philosophers.

_____ Very well
_____ Somewhat well
_____ Somewhat poorly
_____ Poorly
_____ Not applicable to this assignment

The work shows an awareness of some dimension of social or political dimensions of human nature or human existence.

_____ Very well
_____ Somewhat well
_____ Somewhat poorly
_____ Poorly
_____ Not applicable to this assignment

The work shows the student’s ability to understand values and principles that guide student lives and/or to reflect critically on these values as they apply to his or her personal situation.

_____ Very well
_____ Somewhat well
_____ Somewhat poorly
_____ Poorly
The student showed an understanding of the major ideas and methods of inquiry of philosophy and demonstrates an ability to use those methods of inquiry as a beginning practitioner addressing concrete issues and problems.

_____ Very well
_____ Somewhat well
_____ Somewhat poorly
_____ Poorly
_____ Not applicable to this assignment

_____ Not applicable to this assignment