

# Form E1-A for Boston College Core Curriculum

## Department/Program Perspectives Program

- 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?)

As an interdisciplinary program providing credit in philosophy, theology, arts, literature, social science and natural science, the learning outcomes of the Perspectives Program are developed by departments in those core areas.

However, each of the four Perspectives courses adapts these learning outcomes to the Perspectives mission of

- x providing a humanist context for professional and scientific education;
- x educating the whole person and affirming students who are intelligent, responsible, reasonable, and attentive;
- x aiding students in the developing the skills of critical thinking and practical living; and
- x bringing faculty and students into conversation with the ancient, modern, and contemporary thinkers who have shaped our intellectual and spiritual heritage

- 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 of the various core areas served by Perspectives can be found at the Core Requirements and Courses web page, as well as the Core Descriptions

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of the Perspectives Program also included in Core Office documentation connected to "Schedules of Distinction" 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 or less well?)

Every year, Perspectives Program assessment is collaboratively undertaken by the Perspectives Program faculty interpretations in workshops organized by the Director and Associate Director of Perspectives. This year the workshops were held May 18 to May 20.

In addition, at the end of AY '22 faculty were asked by the Perspectives Program Director to contribute to a program assessment of Perspectives on Western (Perspectives I) by gathering a randomized selection of essays written during the second semester by three students. In order to provide a genuinely random selection of assignments, faculty were asked to

submit anonymized essays by students #5, 10 and 20 from their (ost some equally randomized group, depending on class size) accompanying assignment prompts were also requested. Assignments related to two core aims of the course were to be highlighted:

- xStudents will be able to understand the historical origins of values and principles that ground and are questioned in contemporary culture
- xStudents will be able to relate philosophical and theological inquiry to the enduring questions animating the broader liberal arts tradition.

The request for essays was sent in May of AY 22 to all twenty professors in Perspectives I in AY 21-22, consisting of full and part-time faculty from both Theology and Philosophy. Essays from five instructors, representing seven sections of the course (two instructors taught two sections; one instructor's second class was curtailed so did not submit a full complement of papers), were submitted for a total of 19 essays. The group of faculty who provided essays for the assessment included three members of the Theology Department and two members of the Philosophy Department, including two tenured or tenure-track faculty, two professors of the practice and one part-time faculty member. Essay prompts were provided by only four of the instructors, thus three essays were not connected to a specific paper prompt.

The 19 essays used for the assessment represent an array of assignment types and essay formats. Assignment types included 1) exposition or basic analysis of a text, 2) application of a course text or theme to analyze a contemporary ethical issue, 3) open research into the work of one author, using primary and secondary sources, and 4) exploration of a major course theme through the lens of a text or author. Essays varied in length from 2200-words (generally 3- or 6-8 pages essays).

- 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 (Chris Conostas) and Associate Director (Kerry Cronin) Perspectives reviewed the submitted assignments.

- 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)?

All the assignments were well-constructed instruments with respect to the identified learning goals. Student responses were variable in quality, of course, but all reflected at least a satisfactory understanding of the material.

The submitted essays all demonstrated the high level of engagement with texts and ideas we would expect to find in a rigorous, 12 credit course. It is clear that students were attempting to develop robust theses and sought to make clear use in essays of both overarching course themes and specific text references.

Most, though not all, students made regular and thoughtful use of texts to support their central arguments, illustrating clearly the course's goal that students "will be able to relate philosophical and theological inquiry to the enduring questions animating the broader liberal arts tradition." For instance, one essay engages Girard's scapegoating mechanism in an analysis of Jim Crow laws in the US and later Civil Rights activism:

While Girard doesn't speak of scapegoating in the context of the Civil Rights Movement, he does in regards to religion, stating "...the scapegoating mechanism was accepted and justified, on the basis that it remained unknown. It brought peace back to the community at the height of the chaotic mimetic crisis" (Girard, *Evolution and Conversion*, 83). Clearly, scapegoating was occurring through the subjugation of the Black population, but the reasons as to why it was occurring were not known by the Whites, a central need for scapegoating for it to work. The White leaders of the confederate states

should. Because of this view, Locke ~~changes~~ the notion that government improves upon the natural conception of justice.

Several prompts invited students to bring thinkers from the course into conversation, identifying interdisciplinary points of connection across eras. Student essays illustrated students' remarkable capacity for thinking flexibly through the curriculum:

In the following paragraphs, I will illustrate why Marx's communism is unsustainable ~~leading to~~ Freud's theory of the displaceability of the libido and Thanatos.

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According ~~ing~~ to philosopher Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature for humans is the state of war. Since humans are innately selfish, naturally humans will be against each other and will compete with one another. This overlaps with Girard's mimetic crisis in society ~~which~~ a state of distrust and a state of all against all will ensue. According to Hobbes, the state of nature consists of a violent competition where humans have the right to everything and they do not have to consider the interests of others. In this ~~so~~ society, the only way humans can peacefully coexist is if there is a common superior power that can control them all. This type of view regarding human nature is cynical yet realistic. As a result, adopting a Hobbesian mindset will result in a ~~more~~ effective solution than the scapegoat mechanism because it will prevent further scapegoating from emerging.

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Kierkegaard's thinking develops in opposition to that of Hegel: Hegel affirms the primacy of essence over existence: essence, concept and thought ~~are~~ primacy over concrete existence. The individual man has value only if he belongs to a whole: he is simply an instrument in the hands of the absolute spirit that guides history. For Kierkegaard the primacy belongs to the individual man: existence comes before essence, concept and thought. The individual is an end in itself, it has its own meaning regardless of belonging to a group, be it the state or history of men in general. Each man is a single, unique and unrepeatable who has value in himself. ~~Hegel's~~ philosophy sees history as necessary events: everything that happens ~~including~~ wars and crimes is necessary for the realization of a superior harmony (which also justifies evil). For Hegel what is real is als1.3(u)2.001 : inr

curiosity adds to the viciousness of the situation by deceiving the soul into thinking that there is no other alternative" (Lee 58). Augustine's own will betrays him in unknowingly seeking out God in the material world. The only way Augustine could overcome this harmful cycle is by developing