

TOWARD A RENEWED CORE

October 30, 2013



PROLOGUE

A RENEWED CORE CURRICULUM AT BOSTON COLLEGE

At Boston College, a major research institution in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition, our overall goal for undergraduate education is the intellectual, social, and religious formation of students.

A Boston College liberal education has four key components: a core curriculum that establishes a common intellectual foundation for all undergraduates, a major that provides a curricular sequence for intense exploration of a particular discipline, electives that allow the pursuit of special interests outside of the core and the major, and campus community life that offers opportunities for religious, emotional, and social growth outside the classroom setting.

The renewed Core reaffirms our belief that the foundation of our students' education is based on the disciplines that constitute a broad liberal arts education. The Core has a special responsibility to educate students to make sure they receive the content and skills that will enable them to grow into adults who lead lives of meaningful consequence in the world.

The renewed Core places special emphasis on creating an intensive, rigorous, interdisciplinary learning experience in the first year. Interdisciplinary courses based on Enduring Questions and Complex Problems, respectively, will help students develop effective habits of mind, acquire necessary content, and reflect on important issues.

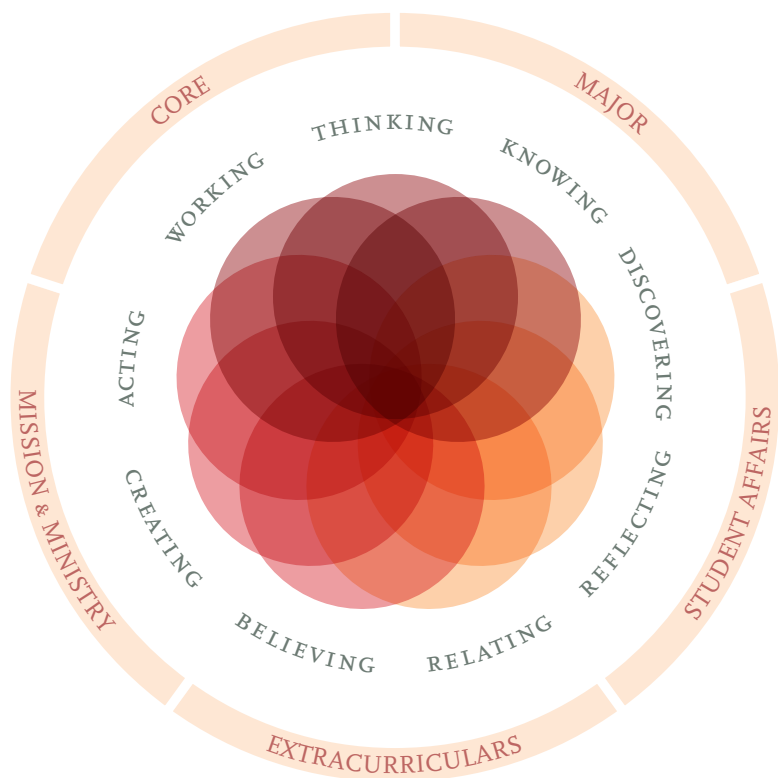
Beyond the Enduring Questions and Complex Problem courses, students will complete their Core requirements by taking discipline-based Exploration courses throughout their four years. There are two types of Exploration courses: Foundation and Immersion. Students will gain foundational knowledge of the disciplines with grounding in time, in relationship to other disciplines, and in relation to perennial questions. Students will also take Immersion courses that go into depth within the disciplines and build on foundational knowledge.

Throughout four years of the Core, we will create opportunities for Reflection that will encourage all students to integrate the various strands of their education and draw personal meaning from their Core courses and other elements of their lives.

The renewed Core has been developed through an intensive process of collaborative innovation, developing and then building on ideas contributed by faculty from throughout the university. The renewed Core also contains a new leadership structure that will ensure ongoing collaborative improvement and innovation into the future. The Core Renewal Committee will use the frameworks contained in this document and the spirit of collaboration that has emerged over the past six months to continue working with faculty and departments to foster ideas and experiments that will keep the Core vital, grounded in Boston College's Jesuit, Catholic mission.

RENEWED CORE VISION

EDUCATING THE WHOLE PERSON



Boston College seeks to prepare students to chart a life of meaning and impact by integrating the intellectual, the social, and the spiritual. Through this integration, each student will develop as a whole person, prepared for citizenship, service, and leadership in a global society.¹ Academics, Mission & Ministry, Student Affairs, and extracurriculars each contribute to this goal. Our research shows that university leadership, faculty, students, and alumni share this goal, which is rooted in the Jesuit, Catholic tradition. Further, we find they share a common articulation of what we are calling the nine aspects that characterize the educated whole person. These nine aspects, illustrated to the left, offer a more detailed definition of integrated development and a useful way to define our shared outcome.

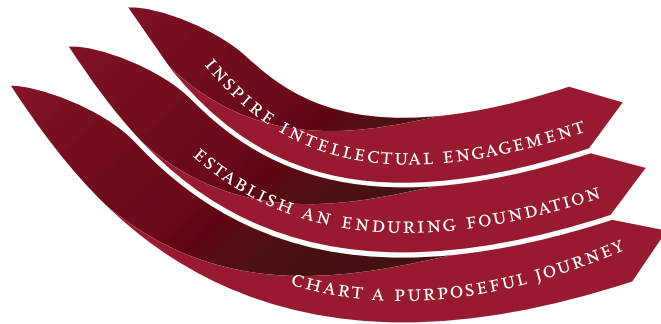
¹ From "The Mission of Boston College," May 31, 1996.

AT A GLANCE

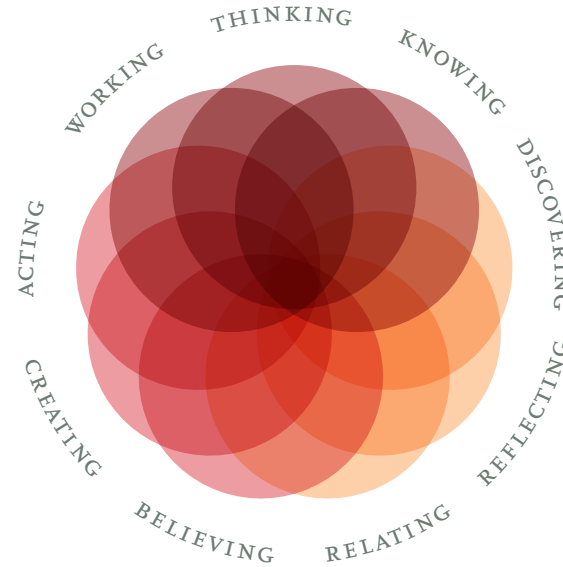
VISION FOR THE RENEWED CORE

At the heart of the Boston College experience, the Core will unify and inspire the BC community in a shared intellectual endeavor. It will play a central role in each student's education as a whole person, preparing them for citizenship, service, and leadership in a global society. The Core will inspire intellectual engagement, establish an enduring foundation, and chart a purposeful journey.

THE CORE



WHOLE PERSON



AT A GLANCE

THE RENEWED CORE

The renewed Core consists of 3 components: Communities of Inquiry, Exploration, and Reflection. These fulfill a total of 42 credits, spanning the following disciplines:

ARTS
(3 credits)

**GLOBAL DIFFERENCES/
SOCIAL JUSTICE**

HISTORY
(6 credits)

LITERATURE
(3 credits)

MATHEMATICS
(3 credits)

NATURAL SCIENCES
(6 credits)

PHILOSOPHY
(6 credits)

SOCIAL SCIENCES
(6 credits)

THEOLOGY
(6 credits)

WRITING
(3 credits)

**Note on Global Differences/Social Justice: All students will satisfy this requirement, at a minimum, in their Complex Problem course. Exploration courses may also examine issues of Global Differences/Social Justice.*

***Students may not AP out of Communities of Inquiry. Students may fulfill Exploration courses with appropriate AP credits.*

Communities of Inquiry *(12 credits during the first year)*

Communities of Inquiry are courses taken in the first year, where students come together to engage in intensive multidisciplinary study of fundamental questions and global challenges. Each Community of Inquiry is a group of roughly 225 students. One of these is called Enduring Questions, the other Complex Problems. Through Communities of Inquiry, students are immersed in a shared intellectual undertaking.

Enduring Questions:

Enduring Questions is a six-credit program consisting of two linked courses from different disciplines connected by content, theme, and syllabi. Each pair of courses focuses on perennial questions united by a common topic. Students also participate in shared learning experiences outside of class, and end-of-term presentations.

Complex Problems:

Each Complex Problem is a six-credit interdisciplinary course focusing on one contemporary, global challenge. Students learn about the problem through three weekly team-taught lectures, experiential, problem-based labs, shared learning experiences outside of class, and end-of-term presentations.

Exploration *(30 credits over the course of four years)*

During their four years at Boston College, students take 10 Exploration courses across the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Exploration courses satisfy a renewed set of characteristics, which ensure students gain a rigorous education in the liberal arts while enabling intellectual engagement and exploration. Characterized as Foundations or Immersions, these courses range in level of breadth or depth, class size, and pedagogical approach.

Reflection *(over the course of four years)*

The Core invites each student to take knowledge gained about the world and turn with that knowledge back to oneself. New opportunities for reflection inside and outside the classroom will help students discern the meaning, significance, and value of the work taking place in their disciplinary studies and lives outside of class. The Core program in Reflection will involve Mission & Ministry, Student Affairs, and participating faculty.

THE RENEWED CORE

ENDURING QUESTIONS | COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY (6 credits)

In Enduring Questions, first-year students critically examine and reflect upon fundamental human concerns through a pair of linked courses. These courses provide students with a foundation in the influential thinkers, writers, and artists who have wrestled with perennial questions across discipline, space, and time. 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.

Each Enduring Questions Community of Inquiry focuses on one overarching topic, such as “Self and Society,” “Humanity and Nature,” or “Understanding the Past” and is comprised of a cohort of roughly 225 freshman. This cohort is subdivided into pairs of linked courses, each taught by faculty from different departments. Within each topic, faculty agree on three enduring questions to examine in their courses. In addition to the linked courses, the 225 students participate in shared learning experiences and end-of-term presentations.

LINKED COURSES

Faculty from two disciplines co-develop and teach a pair of linked courses. Each instructor teaches his or her own course individually, with the two courses connected through content, theme, and syllabi.

Each pair of linked courses has an average size of ~32 students. Larger sections may be necessary based on departmental and course needs, and linked sections of First-Year Writing Seminar (FWS) will be capped at 16 students.

Writing Fellows will be available to assist faculty as desired.

**The Associate Dean for the Core, and the Director of Academic Advising will be present at summer orientation sessions in order to make accommodations for students whose freshman schedule would be too crowded if they took the Communities of Inquiry courses.*

2 EXAMPLES OF ENDURING QUESTIONS

UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

*How do we know what we know?
How does the past shape the future?
How has religious belief influenced society?*

Paired courses might include:

Lost Civilizations
(Classics and History)

The City of Rome
(History and Fine Arts)

Memory and Trauma
(Literature and Psychology)

Boston's Past
(Literature and History)

History of the Book
(Fine Arts and Literature)

INHABITING SPACE

*How do imagination and reality intersect?
How do spaces shape (or are shaped by)
human behavior?
What is the role of beauty?*

Paired courses might include:

**Houses, Landscapes, Places
in American Literature and Culture**
(Fine Arts and Literature)

**Imagined Spaces and
Utopian Societies**
(Literature and History)

Borders and Liminal Spaces
(Literature and Sociology)

COMMUNITY ACADEMY: A FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

The 1599 Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* requires that students be grouped into “Academies,” to give public presentations of what they have learned, including disputations, lectures, recitations of poetry, and other exercises. Working individually or in small teams, BC students will prepare projects related to their Enduring Questions course, that they present to a larger audience during the final week of the semester. Projects may include research presentations, debates, performances, exhibits, films, or other creative works.

THE RENEWED CORE

COMPLEX PROBLEMS | COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY (6 credits)

In a Complex Problem Community of Inquiry, students examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance. Through a team-taught lecture, students gain an understanding of the problem from multiple viewpoints, considering historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions. A complementary lab engages students to learn by doing, working in small teams to apply knowledge to real-world issues. 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.

Each Complex Problem Community of Inquiry focuses on one global challenge. This Community is made up of ~225 freshmen, who come together for weekly lectures, and are subdivided into 12 lab sections of ~19 students each. The semester culminates in a week of student presentations. Each Complex Problem counts as a double course for each faculty member, with six credits per student credited to each instructor.

TEAM-TAUGHT LECTURES

Lectures are developed and team-taught by two faculty from different disciplines. Three times per week, the entire cohort of 225 students comes together for these lectures.

COMPLEX PROBLEM LABS

Once per week, the cohort breaks into smaller groups of ~19 students for a 90-minute lab. These may include research, discussion, case studies, problem-based learning modules, projects, and/or off-campus experiences. Faculty teaching Complex Problems will also be responsible for designing and directing the labs, which will be run by post-docs or graduate students, with assistance from two upperclass students.

2 EXAMPLES OF COMPLEX PROBLEMS

MIGRATION & IMMIGRATION

Hypothetical Lab assignment:

Students conduct archival research on immigrant narratives from an earlier period of US history. The class curates an annotated compilation, comparing and contrasting the historical and contemporary immigrant narratives across groups.

ACCESS TO WATER

Hypothetical Lab assignment:

Students conduct research and calculations on their hometown watersheds in order to draw conclusions about their hometown water use. Students gain experience documenting and analyzing research methods and results.

SHARED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Over the course of the semester, students participate in periodic lectures, presentations, screenings, excursions, and/or opportunities for reflection related to their Complex Problem.

COMMUNITY ACADEMY: A FESTIVAL OF IDEAS

The 1599 Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* requires that students be grouped into “Academies,” to give public presentations of what they have learned, including disputations, lectures, recitations of poetry, and other exercises. In the final week of the semester, BC students will present projects related to their Complex Problem to a larger audience. Working in small teams, they select and work on these presentations during the final month of the Complex Problem Lab. Projects may include research presentations, debates, performances, exhibits, films, or other creative works.

THE RENEWED CORE

EXPLORATION (30 credits)

WHAT ARE EXPLORATION COURSES?

In addition to the courses within Communities of Inquiry, students take 30 credits of Exploration courses to fulfill Core requirements. Through Exploration, students gain a foundation in a wide range of liberal arts disciplines.

HOW DO EXPLORATION COURSES WORK?

Each department will offer a portfolio of Exploration courses, including foundational courses in the discipline (Foundations) and more topic-based courses (Immersion). Departmental Exploration offerings will range in class size, pedagogical approach, and course level. All Exploration Courses will incorporate the six principles of the renewed Core, expressed through four characteristics shared by all Exploration courses and a choice of three further characteristics chosen from a list of six. Departments may choose to offer Foundations, Immersions, or both. *NOTE: further detail on characteristics can be found in the appendix.*

FOUNDATIONS

Foundation courses provide students with the necessary foundation in a discipline and will address both methodology and content. Foundation courses will help students understand how the discipline approaches significant issues, texts, or artifacts, and will introduce students to discipline-specific modes and genres of communication.

IMMERSIONS

Immersion courses build on an established foundation of disciplinary knowledge, and address more focused questions, themes, content, or topics. These courses lead students to a deep engagement with critical questions in the field, providing opportunities for transformative learning while continuing to develop discipline-specific communication and writing skills.

THE RENEWED CORE

REFLECTION

Reflection on the meaning, significance, and value of the work of the disciplines is an important component of Core courses. In addition, we are committed to developing and piloting new programs and experiences that encourage faculty and students to reflect on the purposes of a liberal arts education at a Jesuit, Catholic university. As an integral part of the renewed Core, students will be invited to develop skills for effective and purposeful reflection, and to employ those skills in exploring their relation to God and faith, developing as “men and women for others” through service, integrating the varied intellectual experiences of their Core courses and major, and furthering their vocational goals. Through Reflection, the Core aims to build habits of discernment that enable each student to chart a purposeful journey during their time at Boston College and throughout their lives. The Core Renewal Committee will work with faculty, Mission and Ministry, and Student Affairs to develop enhanced opportunities for reflection in three primary ways:

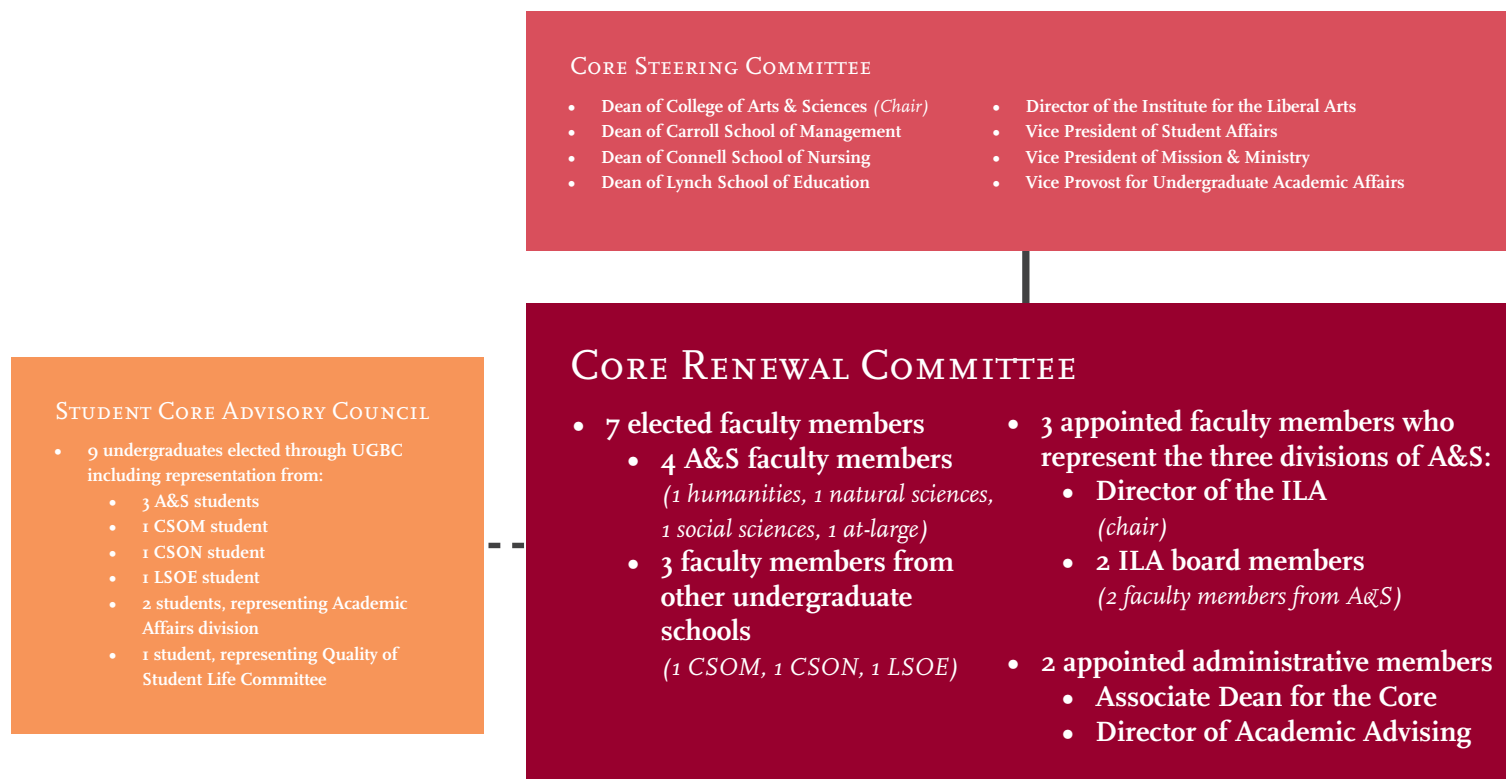
- Boston College already provides many opportunities for students to learn about and practice reflection, especially through programs offered by Mission and Ministry and Student Affairs. The CRC will work with these offices to develop ways to ensure all students are aware of these opportunities and encouraged to participate in them. Faculty participating in each Community of Inquiry will be partnered with colleagues from Mission & Ministry and Student Affairs who will help introduce all students to the concept, usefulness, and purpose of reflection.
- Advising enables opportunities for sustained reflection. The Core Renewal Committee will work to strengthen advising, especially during the first year. The Director of the Academic Advising Center, as a member of the Core Renewal Committee, will help develop relationships with Student Affairs and Mission and Ministry to foster more robust reflection in advising.
- Beginning with the Communities of Inquiry courses, new opportunities for reflection will be made available to students inside and outside the classroom. Working with Mission and Ministry, Student Affairs, the AHANA office, the Career Center, and other groups, Boston College will develop programs related to the enduring questions and complex problems being discussed. For example, some students might attend a retreat in Dover to reflect on the personal implications of their enduring questions or complex problem, or on the career possibilities afforded by it. Presentations by alumni, faculty, and administrators to the Communities of Inquiry can encourage a reflective approach to life.

LEADERSHIP AND ONGOING INNOVATION

THE RENEWED CORE

LEADERSHIP AND ONGOING INNOVATION

We recommend the creation of a new Core Renewal Committee (CRC) to spearhead ongoing innovation and oversight of the renewed Core. Housed within the ILA, the CRC will receive funding from the university to support Core course development and administration. The CRC will consult twice a year with the Core Steering Committee and the Student Advisory Council. The Core Steering Committee will be responsible for providing oversight, guidance and funding advocacy. They will also be responsible for overseeing an external Program Review every 8-10 years to assess the Core and recommend improvements. The following diagram illustrates the leadership structure of the renewed Core.



THE RENEWED CORE

LEADERSHIP AND ONGOING INNOVATION

To support excellence and creativity in Core teaching, the CRC will bring faculty from across the university together based on shared interests and research foci to develop and teach courses in the Core. Through this effort, the CRC will be committed to open dialogue, transparency, and collaboration with faculty and departments. The CRC will be responsible for the following:

COURSE DEVELOPMENT & PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT*

- Ensure that new Core courses reflect the six principles of the renewed Core
- Establish a process and tools for developing and approving Core Courses
- Oversee and enable new course development including funding and faculty development
- Maintain a balanced offering of courses that reflect the commitments of the renewed Core
- Work with departments and undergraduate schools to manage supply and demand
- Hold final authority to review courses for inclusion in the renewed Core

MANAGEMENT & OPERATIONS

- Manage day-to-day operations of the Core
- Liaise with schools and departments

ADVOCACY & PROMOTION

- Champion and communicate the value of the Core to incoming freshmen, students, faculty and alumni
- Recognize faculty for outstanding contribution to the Core
- Ensure that the Core is involved in annual university budget processes

ONGOING INNOVATION & ASSESSMENT

- Establish (and evolve) characteristics of Communities of Inquiry and Exploration courses
- Facilitate interdisciplinary engagement and awareness
- Establish and maintain a process for individual Core course renewal
- Provide faculty with tools, support and training to encourage experimentation with new technologies and methods (e.g. experiential learning)
- Provide a forum for inspiring continuous improvement through broad-based sharing of best practices and new ideas
- Assess Core courses for successful inclusion of the six principles of the renewed Core
- Maintain awareness of successful developments in liberal arts learning around the country
- Oversee outcomes-based assessment of the Core curriculum
- Establish ongoing course feedback and assessment process
- Monitor the review of grading practices

THE RENEWED CORE IMPLEMENTATION ROAD MAP

AY14 LAUNCH

A Core Working Group will:

- Coordinate the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of pilot first-year Enduring Question and Complex Problem course to be offered in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years
- Draft a foundational statement that grounds the vision and rationale of the Core Renewal proposal in the mission of the university and the Jesuit, Catholic tradition of education
- Promote continuing conversations among faculty, Mission and Ministry, and Student Affairs to develop and pilot new programs that encourage faculty and students both to reflect on the purposes of a liberal arts education at a Jesuit, Catholic university and to develop a reflective view of life
- Work with departments to promote a common understanding of the goals of the proposed renewed Core curriculum, develop discipline-specific guidelines for future renewed Core courses that will ensure that they promote the goals that will animate the Core curriculum, and assist departments and Core faculty in developing effective ways to reach those goals

Checkpoint for Provost and President:

- Report on discipline-specific course guidelines, collaboration with Mission & Ministry and Student Affairs, plans for pilot courses

AY15, 16, & 17 PILOTS

- First Enduring Questions and Complex Problem pilot courses offered in AY15
- Continued development of Enduring Questions, Complex Problems, and Exploration courses across all 3 years
- New Enduring Questions, Complex Problem, and Exploration courses offered
- Continued development of new reflection opportunities
- Intensive collaboration with Student Affairs and Mission & Ministry to develop pilots of new reflection opportunities
- Checkpoint for Provost and President each year: Report on assessment of pilots, collaboration with Mission & Ministry and Student Affairs, development of Exploration courses

AY18 FULL IMPLEMENTATION

- 10 Enduring Questions and 10 Complex Problem courses offered; all first year students required to complete 1 Enduring Questions course and 1 Complex Problem course
- Expanded roll-out of new Exploration courses
- New opportunities for reflection available
- Continued development of new opportunities for reflection
- As of June 1, 2017, all Core courses must follow renewed Core course characteristics
- Ongoing assessment of the renewed core

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SIX PRINCIPLES OF RENEWED CORE COURSES

Renewed Core Courses:

- A. are intentionally constructed to promote deep intellectual engagement and are rigorous and academically challenging.
- B. explicitly identify and educate students in the habits of mind particular to individual disciplines and where pertinent to interdisciplinary approaches.
- C. develop student eloquence in written, oral, and/or visual forms of communication.
- D. either introduce the foundational knowledge in a discipline or deepen foundational knowledge through focused immersion.
- E. emphasize critical thinking and encourage personal and ethical/moral reflection, incorporating culturally diverse perspectives, and discussion, where pertinent, of perennial questions.
- F. assist students in discovering their academic passions and, where pertinent, introduce resources for vocational discernment and career development.

APPENDIX

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS, COMMUNITIES OF INQUIRY

The Core Renewal Committee will work with each department to develop a portfolio of Core offerings. The balance of Enduring Questions, Complex Problem, Foundation, and Immersion courses will differ for each department, depending on the nature of the discipline and the most appropriate pedagogies for each course. The CRC will work with departments to create discipline-specific guidelines for each type of course based on the general templates listed below and on the following page.

ENDURING QUESTIONS COURSES:	COMPLEX PROBLEM COURSES:
Ask students to reflect upon issues and values related to fundamental concerns of human life (E, F)	Examine an issue of contemporary urgency and global significance (A, F)
Introduce students to influential thinkers, writers, or artists who have wrestled with the question across discipline, time, and space (D)	Consider its historical context, various interpretations, and attempted solutions in a rigorous way (D, E)
Introduce the methods your discipline uses to approach a question, text, or object cultivating analytical and creative thinking. (B)	Address global connections, differences, or comparisons; consider ethical implications and issues of justice (E)
Engage in a dialogue with the methods of the disciplinary approach of the other instructor (B)	Develop an attached lab that provides hands-on problem-solving activities for students involving multiple media (A, C, F)
Offer some common readings or assignments across the paired sections (A, B)	Introduce students to various disciplinary approaches to the problem, and to the ways in which they might intersect, cultivating appropriate analytical and creative skills (B)
Work intensively with students to improve their writing (with help from writing fellows if desired) (C)	

APPENDIX

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS, EXPLORATION

FOUNDATION COURSES:	IMMERSION COURSES:
Provide students with the necessary foundation in the discipline, addressing either methodology, or content, or both (B,D)	Build on an established foundation of disciplinary knowledge, addressing more focused questions, themes, content, or topics (B, D)
Help students understand how the discipline approaches significant issues, texts, or artifacts (B, D, E)	Lead students to a deep engagement with critical questions in the field (A, E)
Cultivate student interest in and excitement about the field (A)	Cultivate student interest in and excitement about the field (A)
Introduce students to discipline-specific modes and genres of communication (C)	Continue to develop discipline-specific communication and writing skills (C)

IN ADDITION, ALL EXPLORATION COURSES WILL CHOOSE AT LEAST 3 OF THE FOLLOWING 6:
Make explicit connections between traditional or historical materials and contemporary questions or issues (A, E, F)
Make explicit connections between the topic of the course and enduring questions of human life (E, F)
Incorporate the perspective or method of another discipline (A, B)
Global Differences or Social Justice: Foster an ethical awareness of global connections and inequities; consider impact on society and on different groups of people (E, F)
Address the role of the discipline in the human search for truth, including the relationship between faith and reason in that search (B, E, F)
Incorporate active, participatory learning experiences or focus on writing or quantitative reasoning in an intensive way (E, F)

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON RENEWED CORE COURSES

ENSURE ACADEMIC RIGOR

All Core courses will be academically rigorous. They will ask students to engage with complex concepts and challenging texts. Each Core course will require students to take on a significant workload (~6 hours per week of work outside of class on average over the semester). Core courses should require regular assignments and/or problems sets and should include mid-semester and final graded work. Core courses should aim for a median grade no higher than B+.

DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, BUILDING TOWARDS WRITTEN, ORAL, AND/OR VISUAL ELOQUENCE.

Communication, especially through writing, is by nature an active effort to organize and express ideas. Effective writing requires critical thinking skills as well as knowledge about the writing process, awareness of rhetorical situations and audience, and knowledge of the conventions of grammar, rhetoric, syntax, documentation, and genre. Courses will inevitably differ in the ways they incorporate different forms of communication. While many Core courses should contain a strong writing component, faculty may choose to incorporate other communication skills, considering written and oral eloquence and visual presentation across a variety of print and digital media.

Courses should incorporate multiple opportunities for students to practice and get feedback in the chosen form(s) of communication. There are many possibilities for incorporating writing: Written exams, term papers and shorter papers (especially if students are expected to revise them), journals, overnight position papers based on class discussion or reading assignments, in-class reflections designed to feed into discussion, free-writing exercises in class, even question-box submissions. Examples for other forms of communication include presentations, posters, talks, debates, wiki articles, and videos.

Enduring Question courses should incorporate multiple opportunities for students to practice and get feedback in the chosen form(s) of communication. To build writing skills, students will be required to write at least 2 papers in each of the linked Question courses, comprising ~25 pages total over the course of the semester. Students should receive ample feedback on their writing and have opportunity to revise. Writing fellows will be available to assist if faculty choose to work with them.

GLOBAL DIFFERENCES/SOCIAL JUSTICE: FOSTER AN ETHICAL AWARENESS OF GLOBAL CONNECTIONS AND INEQUITIES; CONSIDER IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND ON DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE

21st century society is both extremely diverse, at home and abroad, and more tightly connected as a global world. Preparing students to work and live collaboratively with people of different backgrounds and beliefs is crucial for their future success. To this end, students must develop an awareness of global connections and inequities, in order to understand their own place in relation to cultural, economic, historical, political, religious and social currents. Students should also consider the ways in which different groups – defined by region, nation, culture, religion, race, disability, class and/or gender – might perceive, interpret and feel the impact of the same topic differently based on their values, customs, and circumstances.