

Like other members of the Department of Theology at Boston College, I teach graduate and undergraduate courses. For the purposes of this consultation, it seems appropriate to describe my work in the PULSE Program.

Program Description and Objective:

The PULSE Program takes impetus from Aristotle's observation in the Nicomachean Ethics, "What we learn to do, we learn by doing." For more than thirty-five years, the Program has provided students with the opportunity *to combine supervised social service or social advocacy field work with the study of Philosophy and Theology*. In dialogue with pre-modern, modern, and contemporary philosophical and theological texts, PULSE students address the relationship of self and society, the nature of community, social suffering, and the practical difficulties encountered in pursuit of a just social order. Roughly 500 students in the University (mainly sophomores with a sprinkling of first-years, with no more than twenty-five to a section) enroll each year in the two-semester 12-credit course, "Person and Social Responsibility I & II."

In addition to conventional classroom work (i.e., lectures, required reading, writing assignments, film, discussion, presentations, and examinations), students take on *ten (10) hours of service or advocacy each week* in pre-selected field placements in youth work (mentoring and tutoring), the correctional system, emergency shelters, literacy, international refugee centers, domestic violence, suicide prevention, and HIV/AIDS services. Such service or advocacy work provides students with 'up close and personal' contact with the breakdowns in U. S. society and helps them to grasp the impact of social oppression, social injustice, and social indifference on the lives of concrete human persons. In formal discussion sections, students meet in small groups to interrogate and test their own and one another's values and commitments in the conditions posed by the service experience, to probe our collective entanglement in social systems that wound the poor and marginalized. Finally, the course aims to assist them in developing a *praxis of mind and will, hands and heart*, which not only support their own personal and existential flourishing, but that furthers the flourishing of others, of authentic human community [see, <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/pulse/about.html>].

Pedagogical Strategies:

While there is *no prescribed curriculum or set of readings* for the Program, faculty meet periodically during the academic year to discuss texts, pedagogical strategies, and, in particular, ways to assist students in grappling with the cognitive contradictions that the PULSE experience intentionally provokes. At the same time, the physical proximity of faculty offices in Philosophy and Theology along with shared facilities (i.e., a kitchen, photo-copy access) brings about frequent impromptu as well as pre-arranged discussions of these matters.

The course content treats systemic oppression, in particular, racism, sexism, class exploitation, white privilege. Pressing topical concerns including immigration, 'fighting words,' un-and-disemployment, war identify the newspaper as a resource in assisting students to develop skills of critical thinking, evaluation, and analysis as well as the formulation of considered opinions and arguments.

While not every faculty member takes on this exercise, my section works on a project in social analysis that focuses on the issue or problem that the students' service placements address. This project includes

(1) *definition* of the problem including historical factors that have shaped it; collecting data and raising questions about the data;

(2) *description* of the placement—geographic location, demographics of those served, roles and cooperations of agency employees, measures offered in addressing the social problem;

(3) *exposure* of uncritical, negative social assumptions and ideologies that impact the problem and the ways in which philosophy and theology reinforce and counter such uncriticality and negativity; and

(4) *articulation* of what social analysis has contributed to knowledge of the social problem as well as what service has contributed to the person the student is becoming—intellectually, morally, ethically, and religiously.