Proposed Common Course
A&S Core Curriculum

I. Proposed Course Title: Introduction to Logic or Critical Thinking

II. Credit Hours: 3 hours

III. Course Level (1000-4000): 1000

IV. Department or Departments responsible for teaching course: Department of Philosophy

V. Proposed Description (1 to 2 sentences): An Introduction to a variety of useful strategies for thinking well, for avoiding common errors in reasoning, and for composing and evaluating deductive and non-deductive arguments. The emphasis will be on acquiring proficiency in identifying, interpreting, (re)-constructing and evaluating both categorical and non-categorical arguments.

VI. Core Curriculum Objectives (list 2-4):

1. As a common course for all students, Introduction to Logic/Critical Thinking will provide students a common set of skills, techniques and vocabulary which will enable them to be better at reasoning, especially with respect to identifying, constructing, and evaluating arguments.

2. Mastery of the course material in this common course will enable students to succeed in a variety of academic disciplines, majors, careers or professions.

3. Mastery of the course material in this common course will enable students to identify, construct, and evaluate arguments encountered in civic and religious discourse, popular and sophisticated discourse and texts, in historical, philosophical, scientific and theological inquiry, and in one’s ordinary efforts to make sense of one’s experience.

4. Arguably, the capacity or power to reason well is one of humankind’s distinctive gifts. It enables students to perfect or fulfill a distinctively human capacity – tracking truth by inferential reasoning. Moreover, to fulfill the human capacity to reason honors God and fulfills a distinctive aspect of human nature. Thus, it is a needed resource for our shared human effort to live well – good human lives.
5. Mastery of good reasoning is an essential aspect of a liberal education, helping to distinguish free men and women from a servile or slavish devotion to self or to a dehumanizing culture or state, its false gods, and the tyrannies of human making.

VII. Justification for course from A&S Core Curriculum Vision

1. From Preamble: “Further, the Arts and Sciences core curriculum supports and builds upon the General Education Outcomes – clear communication, critical thinking, civic responsibility and Christian perspective. Justification: (a) Critical thinking is identified as one of the four core General Education Outcomes; (b) one form clear communication takes is a well-reasoned argument, which is expressed orally or in written form. If it is well-reasoned, it will have true premises and it will be either deductively valid or non-deductively strong; (c) In a democracy, civic responsibility requires good reasoning from its citizens; (d) The Christian faith affirms an harmonious relationship between faith (at its best) and reason (at its best), when reason is one way in which God’s human creatures gain access to the truth. So, in gratitude for our rational capacities, we are obligated to develop these powers in an excellent fashion.

2. From Preamble: “The College of Arts and Sciences core curriculum is the foundation for a degree from Baylor University; it serves to educate men and women to become informed and productive citizens of a democracy and servant leaders of faith communities.” Justification: To become informed and productive citizens of our faith communities, our local and national democratic communities, and to take our global responsibilities seriously, one needs to be able to reason well, both deductively and non-deductively, and to be sensitive to the many ways our points of view are biased and non-critical. So, good reasoning skills (and self-reflective skills) are essential to achieving this aim.

3. From Vision Statement for the Core Curriculum: “Functionally, the Arts and Sciences core curriculum, taught within a community of Christian Scholars, enables men and women to acquire the knowledge, skills, and virtues needed to uncover and recognize truth . . . “ Justification: Narrowly speaking, critical thinking is based upon reason’s capacity to grasp the truth by the construction of good inferences. The acquisition of deductive and non-deductive reasoning skills, techniques, vocabulary and associated intellectual virtues are necessary conditions of uncovering and recognizing the truth (unless all the truths we need are grasped directly, without reasoning inferentially, which is plainly false).

4. From Vision Statement for the Core Curriculum (B): “Students will develop the skill of critical thinking in many ways, including problem-solving, composing
essays, and writing lab reports. In doing so, the core curriculum will encourage students to cultivate patience and intellectual humility in the search for truth.”

**Justification:** An argumentative essay is one very important kind of essay that students need to acquire the capacity to write and write well. (Having such a capacity should enable students to present orally a good argumentative essay, though there are some rhetorically valuable speaking skills that are typically not attended to in a logic class.) The primary component of such an essay is a well-reasoned argument. It will be a well-reasoned essay only if it meets the standards of good deductive or good non-deductive reasoning.

5. From Vision Statement for the Core Curriculum (B): “Critical reasoning stands at the core of the liberal arts tradition and is common to all disciplines.”

**Justification:** If critical reasoning is common to all disciplines and stands at the core of the liberal arts tradition, then enabling our students to become good at critical reasoning should a primary goal of the core curriculum. Either its essential components can be identified and taught in one or two required courses or they can identified and taught by a mixture of required and distribution requirements. Introduction to Logic or Critical Thinking, two courses presently offered in the department of philosophy, is an efficient way to accomplish the goal of enabling our students to become good at critical reasoning. The core of the liberal arts traditions is a great conversation about humankind’s largest, most urgent questions. This conversation synthesizes all human inquiry and traverse all disciplines. Finally, the ability to reason well enables students to take a stand in these ongoing conversations with confidence and competence.

VIII. **Principal author(s) of the proposal:** Dr. Michael Beaty, Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy

IX. **Subcommittee supporting recommendation:**

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1 References to Baylor University’s General Education requirements may also be included here.