

What is an “enduring question”?

An enduring question is what one might call a “big philosophical question”—something that human beings have wondered about throughout their time on Earth, that people will continue to contemplate for many years to come, or that people of today debate with each other. It is a topic that has no simple, quantifiable answer, but requires consideration of multiple perspectives and critical thinking. Lastly, it is of great importance to a person individually or to a community—searching for an answer or way of grappling with the question brings meaning.

It could be very broad, like many of the ones below, or rather narrow. For instance, you could choose the question “What is personal identity” (general) or “How does being a French speaker influence one’s identity?” (more narrow). In general, choose a question you are passionate about!

To help identify your enduring question, reflect on questions that you explored in your PEQ, IS, or other Core classes, topics that are related to your overall life passions and goals and that you enjoy discussing, researching, reading about, or thinking about in your free time.

Examples of enduring questions

1. Identity
 - What does it mean to be “me”? What is personal identity? What does it mean to be human? To what extent is my identity based on my society or culture? To what extent does identity come from something innate; does one have a natural temperament? Does identity change over time or does it stay the same? Is my body essential to me or am I primarily my memories and consciousness?
2. Love and Community
 - What does it mean to be a loving person? What is friendship? What is self-love, and how does it relate to loving others? What is family? What is the relationship between love and justice?
3. Health and Well-being
 - What is “well-being”? How can I promote my own and others’ health and well-being? To what extent is health related to one’s physical, mental, or spiritual life and habits? How does one address disparities in access to healthcare and debated issues in medicine today? Should we understand well-being more holistically?
4. Happiness
 - What is happiness? To what extent does happiness depend on external circumstances (e.g., money, health, and other people) rather than on internal states (e.g., one’s own character, values, habits, and knowledge)? How should society be shaped to promote happiness? What is the relationship between happiness and work as well as happiness and leisure?

5. Life, Suffering, and Meaning

-What is the meaning of life? How can one find meaning in life amidst suffering? Why do people and other living beings suffer? How does one understand the suffering that comes with loss, especially death of loved ones, chronic pain, loneliness, etc.? What traditions or structures have human beings developed to live well even in dark times?

6. Justice

-What is justice? How does one promote social justice? How is justice related to equity? How should we treat others? What are our duties and responsibilities to ourselves, those close to us, people in other countries, animals, or the Earth? What does it mean to be a just leader? What is the relationship between law, politics, and justice?

7. Technology

-To what extent has technology changed society? Is technology value-neutral or embedded with values into it? How does the use of technology change a person's identity? What are some benefits and concerns about emerging technologies, including AI?

8. Education

-What does it mean to be "educated"? What is the value and purpose of education? How can one cultivate a love of learning or be a life-long learner? How can one learn both inside and outside of the classroom? What are some of the most important life skills to learn? What does it mean to be a wise teacher or mentor? What is the value of critical thinking?

9. Art

-What makes something "art"? What is the purpose of art broadly speaking, including the visual arts, theatre, dance, music, and literature? What is the relationship between art and beauty? How do the arts contribute to society or one's own life?