Greetings from Medical Humanities

Holiday greetings from the Medical Humanities Program! It’s exciting to bring you the latest news at the close of another wonderful year. Let me begin by saying what a privilege it is to have inherited the directorship of the Medical Humanities Program from Dr. Jim Marcum. Dr. Marcum succeeded Dr. Mike Attas, and it is because of their outstanding leadership and the vision of the deans from the College of Arts and Sciences that Baylor University’s Medical Humanities Program has been so outstanding. I am deeply grateful and honored to continue their work.

Currently we have over 250 majors and over 30 faculty from departments across the university teaching in our program. The DeBakey Foundation has just made another $500,000 award to support our programming, and we continue to attract outstanding nationally-known speakers who come to Baylor to share their expertise with us and who leave knowing more about our program, through them our reputation for excellence continues to expand.

Highlights of this semester included our first ever Medical Humanities Symposium, a fabulous Homecoming Celebration with Dr. Bill Hillis as the guest of honor, and another terrific group of students serving on our Honors Council. We’re happy to welcome back Drs. Bill Hoy and Lisa Baker, back to Baylor after serving as the faculty advisors for Baylor Abroad in Maastricht.

Many thanks to Maggie O’Brien for her able assistance in bringing these stories to you--stories we share in the spirit of thanking you for your support in countless ways. We wish you the very best of the season and a happy new year!

With medicine in mind and healthcare at heart,

Dr. Lauren Barron
First Annual Medical Humanities Symposium
Maggie O’Brien

This fall the Medical Humanities Program hosted the very first annual Medical Humanities Symposium. The event was a joint effort of the students of the Medical Humanities Honor Council and the program, who worked together to bring in guests and lecturers from institutions across the state. The result was a special day where educators, clinicians, undergraduate and graduate students, and a patient came together to talk about the true meaning of medicine. It was an excellent example of the power of the humanities to make sense of the complicated and sterilized world of medicine. Each lecturer brought a unique perspective to the symposium, illuminating the depth and breadth of topics housed under the umbrella of medical humanities. This diversity was also reflected in the presentation styles of the speakers.

This was true from the very first lecture, in which Dr. Tom Cole, the Director of the McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics at McGovern Medical School, started the day by showing his documentary, “Still Life: The Humanity of Anatomy”. He addressed the disparity between the sense of violation medical students feel during gross anatomy dissections, and the wishes and intent of the human donor. His film and lecture following aimed to close this gap to bring healing to generations of medical students.

Other lecturers include Baylor University’s own Dr. Dan Samples of the Biology Department and Dr. Alan Schultz of the Anthropology Department. Their lectures shed light on the historical inaccuracies of anatomical imagery and global health respectively. Rebecca Lunstroth, the Assistant Director of the McGovern Center at McGovern Medical School, spoke on the convolution and delicacy of research ethics. Her insightful lecture left the group with much to discuss over lunch.

Dr. Jackson Griggs, a family medicine physician in Waco and the Associate Program Director of the Family Medicine Residency Program, spoke about literature and medicine. Andrew Taylor, a graduate student at the Institute for Medical Humanities at the University of Texas Medical Branch, enjoyed that Dr. Griggs’ lecture emphasized the use of literature “in helping the moral agent, who happens to be a medical professional, deepen his appreciation for the lived experience of the patient. This is one of the key projects of the medical humanities.”

Dr. Lauren Barron, Director of the Medical Humanities program, ended the day with an open and honest conversation with one of her patients, Ms. Brandi Winemiller. “I knew I was in the presence of someone special, someone I could learn a lot from,” Dr. Barron said when describing meeting Ms. Winemiller for the first time.
Ms. Winemiller courageously spoke about the difficulties the chronically ill face every day and challenged the physicians in the room, both current and future, to “always be an encouragement to your patients” and to “get on the same level with your patients.” She gave examples of doctors who went above and beyond, who didn’t “have a problem learning from the patient” and those who didn’t measure up - who became frustrated with her complex conditions and took that frustration out on her instead. She ended the day on an inspiring note, saying “my wish is that you will find an area of interest that you like, my wish is that you will take that on will so much excitement.”

Ms. Winemiller’s words and the words of the other speakers sent the symposium attendees out into the world enlightened and encouraged, ensuring that the symposium will be a great fixture in the program for many years to come.

Class Spotlight: Supervised Clinical Medicine

Omar Sahibzada

Medical Humanities is often described as the bridge between the art and science of medicine. Through their curriculum, students are exposed to an interdisciplinary study of the humanities and how they function within medicine and the healthcare field. Meanwhile, prehealth curriculum creates the necessary foundation in biomedical sciences necessary for success in medical training. While the medical humanities are meant to connect these academic disciplines together, questions and desires regarding how this idea is incorporated into the clinical practice of medicine still may remain. Enter Supervised Clinical Medicine, a three-hour medical humanities class designed for pre health students studying medical humanities to gain valuable clinical experience in different medical settings.

Over the course of the semester, students rotate through 12 different clinical experiences with some of the best physicians and medical professionals in the Waco community. These rotations include, but are not limited to, emergency medicine, oncology, pediatrics, and an elective rotation in which students are allowed the opportunity to explore a medical interest of their choice. These experiences provide valuable insight into not only diverse medical specialties, but also into the sanctity of the patient-physician relationship and communication dynamic. Students witness firsthand how caregivers interact with their patients, and how these medical professionals embrace and
overcome the various conflicts and challenges that arise in this interaction. The clinical experience has a reflective component as well, as students are encouraged to remain pensive about the unique highs and lows of medicine they will bear witness to. From the bearing of bad news to the birth of new life, students have the chance to witness firsthand the wonders and challenges of medicine in its clinical practice.

Supplementing the clinical experience is a classroom component, in which students read and reflect on various books and articles designed to supplement the clinical rotation experience. The classroom component is structured (as a seminar as opposed to a lecture) as students are encouraged to discuss their reflections, experiences, and ask questions of each other. Each student also makes a formal presentation and facilitates a discussion regarding a feature of medical professionalism, or an aspect of patient-physician communication that is based upon a clinical experience within the course. These presentations present the opportunity for the exploration of complex ethical or professional situations or dilemmas, and a discussion on the place of the medical humanities within these situations.

Supervised Clinical Medicine presents a rare and unique opportunity for prehealth students interested in further exploring the medical humanities. Students gain invaluable clinical experiences in which they are able to observe direct applications of the medical humanities through witnessing the patient-physician relationship dynamic firsthand. Similarly, seminar-style classroom sessions reinforce the clinical experience through meaningful discourse. As Dr. Barron describes it, “This course is everything I wish I had as a 20-year-old pre medical student”. Witnessing the application of the medical humanities to clinical medicine culminates in a true understanding of the bridging of the art and science of medicine.

LOOK FOR OUR NEW MEDICAL HUMANITIES T-SHIRTS AVAILABLE FOR SALE AFTER THE BREAK!
Congratulations Dr. Toombs!

Students of Dr. Barron’s Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on Medicine class were thrilled to welcome Dr. Kay Toombs back to speak on her book, Living at the Boundary. Her book was recently translated into Spanish with the help of Mariela Gutierrez, one of our very own senior Medical Humanities students!
Dr. Lauren Barron

This year’s Homecoming Brunch was bigger and better than ever, with current students, alumni, faculty and staff once again filling the atrium of the Baylor Science Building. The highlight of the morning was a presentation to Dr. Bill Hillis who was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award in Medical Humanities to celebrate his service to Baylor and the Medical Humanities Program.

Dr. Hillis’ dedication to research, teaching and the education of generations of premed and prehealth students at Baylor has been exemplary. After receiving a B.S. in Chemistry from Baylor University, Dr. Hillis received his M.D. and completed his residency training at Johns Hopkins, after which he spent time in Denmark, the Republic of the Congo and India doing medical research. Dr. Hillis returned to Baylor University under the presidency of Dr. Herbert Reynolds and shared his experiences with undergraduate students at Baylor for the next 30 years.

Shortly after his return to Baylor, and together with Dr. Kay Toombs (philosophy) and Ann Miller (English), Dr. Hillis led a multidisciplinary course entitled “Literary and Philosophical Perspective in Medicine.” This incredibly popular course—along with Dr. Hillis’ collaboration with physician, Dr. Mike Attas—was pivotal in the foundation of the Medical Humanities Program. Moreover, Dr. Hillis advocacy on behalf of our program to the DeBakey Foundation has resulted in gifts of well over one million dollars to support our students in scholarship and programming.

Dr. Hillis has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors. In 2015, the College of Arts & Sciences created The Hillis Scholars Program to provide select biomedical undergraduate students with mentorship, scholarship, and resources for research experiences to make Baylor students even more competitive for prestigious national and international academic awards.

When asked about his work at Baylor, Dr. Hillis put it this way: “I feel like my role in medicine became to prepare doctors to go out and live meaningful lives. I’ve tried to teach all of them that unto whom much has been given, much would be required.”

The Medical Humanities Program will always be deeply grateful to Dr. Hillis for his passion and tireless efforts in building the Medical Humanities Program. Congratulations, Dr. Hillis and thank you for your dedication, your visionary leadership, and your teaching excellence.
Congratulations December Graduates!

We are so proud of our students graduating this December! They have worked hard to obtain their degrees and have a bright future ahead. Our graduates this semester have plans ranging from nursing and medical school to Masters programs in Healthcare Administration to even employment as a special agent in the federal government. Before they left, we thought we’d ask them just one question…

What has medical humanities taught you?

“It’s easy to look at one aspect of medicine and be complacent, but to truly impact the field one must stand back and look at the whole picture.”
~Darrell Leggett

“Treat the patient, not the disease.”
~Arfa Ikram

“I have deeply learned the importance of stepping into another individual’s perspective in an effort to better understand how to best provide healing!”
~Bliss Corley

“One of the things I appreciate most about my MH education is actually the opportunity to learn a second language—Spanish. At first I viewed the four-semester requirement with dread, but my Spanish getting really good, close to fluent, and I'm now very grateful for the opportunity to learn a second language well.”
~Benjamin Schultz
Medical Humanities Welcomes Dr. Jackie Duffin

Dr. Lauren Barron

In October, Baylor’s History Department hosted the 39th Charles Edmondson Historical Lectures, which were delivered by Dr. Jacalyn Duffin, Hannah Chair in the History of Medicine at Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada. The Medical Humanities Program was thrilled to host a coffee in Dr. Duffin’s honor, giving our students and faculty a chance to meet her and have her sign our books! Dr. Duffin is the author of several extraordinary books, drawing not only on her expertise as a historian of medicine but also on her background as a hematologist. We have often used Dr. Duffin’s textbook on the history of medicine in our courses and cannot recommend her “History of Medicine: A Scandalously Short Introduction” highly enough. Dr. Duffin’s books about medical miracles are also fascinating, stemming from an experience in which she was consulted by none other than the Vatican for her opinion about a healing miracle attributed to the first Canadian saint.

Look for the newest edition of the Medical Humanities Magazine coming soon!