MH MAGAZINE
MEDICAL HUMANITIES PROGRAM AT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

WITH MEDICINE IN MIND AND HEALTHCARE AT HEART

Blanca Macareno
Medical Missions
El Salvador
Dear friends,

When asked to explain, I usually describe Medical Humanities as a bridge between the art and science of medicine. I’ll often point out that the Medical Humanities Program at Baylor University is the first of its kind in the United States—an innovative approach to premedical and pre-health education that represents the best of a liberal arts background with a particular focus on medicine.

Still, I find myself reaching for ways to explain the significance of this amazing program and now realize that nothing is more powerful than the voices of the students themselves. So we are delighted to bring you the first edition of MH Magazine with stories about the impact the Medical Humanities Program has had, is having and continues to have in the lives of Baylor students as they enter the field of healthcare.

This year has seen important advances in our program, including the launch of a new website, our most successful Medical Humanities retreat ever, another $500,000 investment by the DeBakey Foundation in a scholarship fund for our students, a cadre of outstanding students, a stronger relationship with student organizations, and closer connections with our alumni.

The stories that are coming out of Medical Humanities are stories of transformational education—stories in the spirit of Pro Futuris, and stories that are shaping the next generation of healthcare professionals who are called to medicine. We are grateful to be a part of this important work at the intersection of the art and science of medicine—where Baylor University belongs.

Sincerely,

Lauren Barron, MD
Associate Director, Medical Humanities Program
Baylor University

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What is Medical Humanities?

According to the professors who teach it

“Medical humanities represents a pedagogical effort to balance the technical training involved in medicine with the human dimension of caring.”
- Dr. James Marcum

“While medicine and technology have always determined each other’s course, increasingly medicine is becoming simply the monetized distribution of technological therapies. The reintroduction of medical humanities (by way of researches into literature, history, music, philosophy and theology as the queen of the sciences) into this course holds out the promise (and demand) that medicine might be more than this. Medical humanities calls medicine to its better self.”
- Dr. Jonathan Tran

“Medical humanities is the best of a liberal arts education with a focus on medicine. It is a bridge between the arts and sciences.”
- Dr. Lauren Barron

“Medical humanities is a creative blending of the arts and humanities to ‘rehumanize’ medicine. What medical humanities does, I believe, is take typically cognitively-focused scientists and help them think deeply about not just the facts but the human stories behind ‘the facts.’”
- Dr. Bill Hoy

WELL-ROUNDED STETHOSCOPES:
Exploring a few of the courses offered to Baylor Medical Humanities students

By Ashtyn Mathews

“Hats off to the Baylor Medical Humanities program — the phrase ‘humane medical care’ is finally breathing into life.
It is no surprise what this entails: new degree? New courses.
With the development of this innovative and exploratory major comes a unique set of courses to help students blend the fields of medicine and humanities, a list that is fresh and full of intrigue.
FOUNDATION: MH 4325, PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON MEDICINE
A source of life for the installation of the medical humanities program, this course examines literature dealing with illness, disease, pain, and death in order to understand better how societal perceptions and values of the caregiver affect the patient. Students are able to examine literary, philosophical and medical works, discussing the issues that arise within each area.

“Philosophical and Literary Perspectives on Medicine was started by Kay Toombs and is the seed from which this entire program has grown,” says Dr. Lauren Barron, Associate Program Director and professor of the course.

Like many of the courses offered under the MH heading, this class allows students to press into the areas of medicine that might be neglected by the departments of standard biology or chemistry and further their knowledge base in areas outside of science.

“I know that going into med school I will have a better grasp on the ethics of medicine,” says medical humanities major, Taylor Derr. “Courses like these? They force me to stop myself from being dehumanized in the field. Being a doctor doesn’t make me purely a scientist.”

GOING DEEPER: MH 4330, DEATH AND DYING
One course found more commonly on the tips of the tongues of Baylor students is cross-listed sociology course, Death and Dying.

Sound morbid? Not so fast.
Death and Dying is designed to decrease this fearful reaction; death awareness is crucial to the medical field and to all of humankind in general.

“This class is one of my favorites,” says Derr. “I’ve never had any firsthand experience with death, and D&D is teaching me that it isn’t so ‘taboo.’”

When enrolled, students will explore the process of death entirely — specifically the interactions between the dying individual, family, friends and professionals.

“My class is an end-of-life and bereavement course,” says Dr. William Hoy. “We are trying to help pre-med type students think about the fact that death is a part of life and how to come alongside patients and families when death is coming or when death has already arrived.”

The aim of medical humanities curriculum according to Hoy is to use the arts — literature, sociology, drama, religious studies and music — curriculums to weld the sciences to the arts.

“Our goal is to make Death and Dying into a course that really addresses the needs of health care professionals,” says Hoy. “That way, when we send them off to medical school they are better equipped to think holistically about the human body and the human person, and how we work.”

There are other departments on campus that offer similar courses focused on death education. Both health education and sociology departments explore similar ideas only more tailored towards their respective fields.

“We talk more about empirical data of hospice and why it works, about epidemiology, what causes death in America, more appropriate for physicians and nurses,” says Derr. “It’s absolutely going to benefit me in the future.”
JADEN SCHUPP, a senior from Evergreen, Colo., is a biochemistry major minoring in medical humanities. She chose the medical humanities program as her minor to help her delve deeper into the patient-physician relationship. “With biochemistry, you learn all of the very basic molecular things that are going on in the person’s body,” Schupp said, “but there is so much more to being a good physician that encompasses the human side of a person.”

During her freshman year, Schupp took her first medical humanities course with Dr. Barron, medicine meaning and the patient-physician relationship, which laid the foundation for her next four years at Baylor.

“We read a couple of great books and had some awesome discussions of what is it like to live a life as a doctor and what does it mean to bear the weight of the responsibility for a patient’s life?” Schupp said. “How do you relate with a patient? How do you communicate with a patient and what does that mean for you as person? It was a really great class.”

A unique aspect of the medical humanities program is that students have the opportunity to shadow a variety of hospital staff positions for an entire semester. “It was really eye opening in understanding the importance of each player in the team and the importance of every person’s role in caring for the different sides of patients,” Schupp said.

Studying in the medical humanities program allowed Schupp to explore subjects she is truly passionate about. She is even considering pursuing a master’s degree in epidemiology. “With epidemiology, you are looking at health from a population perspective in using quantifiable, statistical analysis, to understand who is getting sick, where they are getting sick and who is most at risk for a certain disease,” Schupp said.

Overall, Schupp has learned more about her career in medicine by coupling medical humanities with biochemistry. “Medical humanities integrates that [biochemistry] with who is a person as a human being, who they are in society and how do they understand themselves?” Schupp said. “How does that play into their relationship as a doctor? I think the medical humanities classes take science, and give a more social perspective to them, and take it from being very basic to how does it play out in the big picture?”
ANN DYER, a junior from Abilene, Texas, is majoring in biology and minoring in medical humanities.

She transferred to Baylor during the second semester of her freshman year and was introduced to the medical humanities program during a freshman seminar. A medical humanities professor spoke about one of the classes in the program—cross-cultural communications of medicine—and Dyer was instantly hooked.

This first class introduced Dyer to the opportunities that the medical humanities field provides. “I have always had more of a humanities tendency,” Dyer said. “I love literature and having classes that aren’t so cut and dry, that involve philosophical thinking.”

Dyer explained that a balance between science and humanities courses allows students to excel in their field. “You cannot be a healthcare provider without knowing the facts—the ins and outs of science,” Dyer said, “but you also cannot ignore the fact that there is a whole other social, emotional, spiritual and philosophical aspect to medicine—the practicality of what is addressed in this major. It’s two completely different factors. I don’t really believe one can exist without the other, successfully.”

Dyer also appreciates the outstanding professors in the program. She believes that their passion and dedication makes the medical humanities program special.

“I feel like my attitude about medicine has developed a lot,” Dyer said. “Dr. Barron alone can give us tons of experience and that’s incredibly unique. It has developed my theories and ideas of what I would like to do and helped me formulate an idea of who I would like to be as a medical professional.”

CONNOR SMITH, a senior from Benbrook, Texas, switched his major from biology to medical humanities his junior year.

“I was looking for something to get more of a taste of medicine before I go to medical school,” Smith said, “I heard about medical humanities… and I saw that there was so much that I knew I wouldn’t get in medical school and in biology classes with regards to the ethics and economics aspect of it.”

Surprisingly, Smith was not initially interested in the humanities side of the program; however, he knew that he needed to explore a different area of medicine to be successful as a physician.

“I changed because I wanted to be more well-rounded and I wanted to put myself out of my comfort zone,” Smith said. “Rather than taking 90 hours of science classes, I wanted to take these different classes to push myself to learn more about society and patients, and how they are feeling.”
Baylor University, well known for its mission trips, further solidified its international presence in March 2013. During spring break, Dr. Lauren Barron, joined by Dr. Elaine Lambert, a Baylor alumna who practices rheumatology in California, and Carlos Colón, who recently began a full-time position with the Baylor Spiritual Life Center, accompanied 19 medically inclined students to San Salvador, El Salvador.

The Baylor group connected with students and faculty from Universidade Evangélica de El Salvador (UEES), “an evangelical Christian university [that is] very unabashedly Christian in its approach to education and its sense of mission in the world,” according to Dr. Barron.

Because the trip focused on not just immediate medical treatments, but also on educating local healthcare providers, the success of the trip was not intended to be short-term.

The medical humanities group was able to bring medical instruments that have and will continue to make a sizable difference in the level of care provided to the community of San Salvador, but, more importantly, the local medical providers were taught how to use these tools correctly.

“We were also able to take stethoscopes, thermometers, blood pressure cuffs and other instruments that will not only be used in direct patient care but will be used to train medical students and residents, thus multiplying the effect of the supplies we were able to carry over,” Dr. Barron explained.

In addition, the team provided thousands of dollars worth of medical textbooks that will further improve the education of local medical students. This action is expected to dramatically improve general healthcare in the community.

“For Baylor to be able to provide them with the support and resources they need—not only to see individual patients—but also to help in terms of medical education multiplies every dollar and every hour spent!” exclaimed Dr. Barron.

A prominent medical concern in the country is renal failure, or failure of the kidneys. Because of the lack of supplies and technology in San Salvador, an overwhelming number of cases end in death. In addition, research has not yet revealed a source of the epidemic, therefore leaving the country without a cure.

“We are hopeful that we can facilitate introductions to researchers at Baylor who will be able to help them in terms of much needed resources for basic science research,” Dr. Barron said.

It is for reasons like these that collaboration with UEES is so important; by working together there is more hope in finding the source and the cure. “My hope is that it will be the first of a long tradition of medical mission that are a partnership between Baylor Missions and the

Medical Humanities Program,” said Dr. Barron.

However, the mission trip affected more than just the local community. The Baylor students were able to get hands on experience and to see the remarkable difference healthcare providers really make.

“Being able to see healthcare and medicine in another country certainly made a profound impact as to how I see myself being a physician and the difference I may make in someone’s life simply by greeting them well and listening,” said Baylor junior Blanca Macareno.

According to the medical humanities major, her time in El Salvador has proved to be invaluable. Pre-med student with a Spanish minor, Macareno came home from the trip with many unique experiences, especially those gained while working with the UEES students and faculty.

“I immensely appreciate being introduced to UEES because we saw the intensity of being a pre-med student compared to us in the United States; for instance, how much they are expected to know starting in their first
The organization’s purpose is to promote academic and spiritual growth and knowledge in the study of medical humanities and ethics. Through guest speakers and student discussion, undergraduate students will be encouraged to promote the study of Medical Ethics and to integrate it into their lives and occupations.
He discussed the pros and cons of mechanizing certain aspects of the healthcare process, like using electronic databases instead of paper records. According to Dr. Schneider it’s been found that people are afraid to lose the personal aspect of a hospital visit, but it is cheaper and more efficient.

Wilson began the March 5 meeting by announcing upcoming events and opportunities, all of which allow students to use and observe the issues discussed during their meetings. BU MEDS students will have a chance to experience real world situations healthcare practitioners face through a job-shadowing program.

In addition, the organization’s officers have been working on creating a journal that will allow students to write articles pertaining to healthcare issues and have them published.

Because of opportunities such as these, BU MEDS secretary Hillary Villarreal believes the organization is a great place for anyone interested in the medical field.

“I would definitely recommend BU MEDS not only to other medical humanities majors, but to anyone interested in pursuing a career in healthcare,” she said. “It really gives you a broader perspective by exposing you to ethical situations and allowing you to hear first hand from professionals about the challenges they have faced in medicine and how they overcame them.”

Each meeting alternates between speakers and discussion. During discussions, students form small groups in order to discuss topics that vary from the new healthcare bill, to technology’s place in the medical field.

Technology, a current issue in healthcare was also the topic discussed by guest speaker Dr. Joseph H. Schneider, who serves as the Baylor Health Care System (BHCS) vice president. He spoke about the problems and challenges of health information technology at the March 5 meeting.

Cesar Davila-Chapa, BU MEDS vice president of public relations, agrees.

“In BU MEDS medical humanities majors would feel right at home because we offer them an opportunity to express what is learned in medical humanities classes during our ethical discussion meetings, out on in the real world at service events, and also the opportunity to be published in our new journal,” he said.

Like other Baylor organizations, BU MEDS volunteers in the Waco community. “I have really enjoyed service events like Stepping Out, Bluebonnet Hospice and World Hunger Relief where I have been able to make a difference in the local Waco community.”

However, Villarreal and Davila-Chapa believe BU MEDS stands out from other medical organizations on campus.

“BU MEDS is unique in that it focuses on cultivating compassion and bringing the human side back to medicine,” said Villarreal. “As a member you are given more opportunities outside of class to discuss medical ethics.”

Davila-Chapa believes BU MEDS is the best choice for students wishing to be in the medical field because “it is the most well rounded pre-health organization on campus.

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A VISITOR FOR THE DAY:

David Windler, Medical Humanities Alumnus

By Maxcey Kite

Photography by Katy Allred
“Sitting in the medical humanities classes changes your perspective on what it is to be a doctor, about what your goals are. You’re still focused on taking care of the disease and doing whatever you can to make the patient as healthy as possible, but on top of that you’re also very focused on trying to be as caring as possible for the patient. You’re focusing on their needs as a person as well as their needs as a human being.”

Though he had heard of the medical humanities program, when David Windler first declared his major as a freshman at Baylor in 2007, he thought to himself, “I’m a science person. I’m going to be a doctor. So I’m going to be a bio major.” Sound like any other freshmen you know?

However, during his first semester, Windler made a friend in his introductory biology class who, as he says, “had already been brilliant enough to start off as a medical humanities major.” After learning more about the program from his friend, Windler decided to take a risk and switch majors. “Since then it’s been amazing,” he affirms.

As a medical humanities major, Windler took many of the same classes as his friends who were following the more traditional biology and chemistry pre-med routes, but it was his electives that really made him stand apart. “While all of my pre-med peers were learning a whole bunch of brilliant basic science… I was getting this amazing insider perspective into what it means to be a doctor, what it means to be in a moment of suffering with a patient, what it means to survive in the sometimes amazing, sometimes draining role of a doctor, physician, healer.”

Baylor is the only university in the nation that offers an undergraduate degree in medical humanities. Now in medical school at Louisiana State University, Windler has really taken notice of this unique background from which he has come. In his Christian Spirituality and Healthcare class at Baylor, a team-taught class between the medical humanities and religion departments, Windler and his classmates learned about surviving as a physician without being beaten down every day.

As a second-year medical student, it seems to Windler that not many of his fellow doctors-to-be have considered this aspect of the job. “It’s not something we’re taught about [at medical school],” he admits. “Every now and then you’ll have a physician who alludes to the trials of the job, but it’s kind of a ‘hush hush’ topic in the hospital. People kind of just don’t want to talk about it. But we got to when we were in college.”

And it’s not just the medical humanities classes that Windler found valuable in his undergraduate experience. The faculty and staff of the medical humanities program are as unique as its courses. “They all just poured their hearts into the program and into our classes and started a fire in all of us to make us want to be, not only good doctors, but good people,” Windler claims fondly.

The effect that his professors had on him became even more evident to Windler after his graduation from Baylor. During his very first week at LSU, Windler and his fellow med-students were instructed to go into the hospital and find a random patient from whom to gather a social history. “Social histories are long and invasive and awkward. You have to ask people about their sexual partners and drug use and alcohol use and all of these really personal questions that you wouldn’t just ask a stranger,” Windler explains.

However, Windler felt prepared. “It wasn’t because of anything we had learned in [medical] school yet because we had just finished orientation so all we knew how to do was check our email at that point,” he laughs. Instead, it was Windler’s background in medical humanities that had prepared him for this moment. His discussions on the patient-physician encounter and the compassion and tact that accompany that relationship during his time at Baylor made this experience “fun!”

The influence of Windler’s medical humanities background continues to display itself as he dives deeper into medical school. Recently, he and his classmates were given a lecture on how to give bad news to a patient. After the lecture, Windler was chosen to be one of a handful of students to actually give bad news to a standardized patient, an actor very convincingly pretending to be a patient, while the med-students were videotaped. Although he knew the woman he was giving the diagnosis to would be an actress, Windler also knew that she would be good at her job, and he had to tell her that she had metastatic lung cancer in her brain and that the condition was inoperable.

“I had to go into a room and have that conversation with a woman who cried and told me how she just wanted to live to see her grandchildren grow up. And it was heartbreaking,” recalls Windler. But, again, Windler’s undergraduate studies in medical humanities had prepared him for this moment. “We had talked about that. We had thought about how you would want someone to approach that issue with you if you were the one to receive the diagnosis.”

While several of the other students faltered about what to say or even lied to their patients about the severity of their diagnoses, Windler’s experiences kept him calm. At the end of the conversation, his “pretend” patient told him how glad she was to have him as her doctor and that she wanted him to look after her even though she was going to be referred to an oncologist.

As a medical humanities alum and now as a medical student, Windler does not believe that he is making any conscious decisions that are different than those his classmates would make. Instead, he simply feels that he has come from a different place that has provided him with a different perspective.

“Everything is filtered through the lens of medical humanities. It’s all about the patient-physician relationship and remembering the humanity of the person who’s sitting on the exam table and not just treating them like a specimen but remembering that they have their own life and you’re just a visitor for that day.”
The Baylor Medical Humanities department is a unique program that allows students to take science courses along with a mixture of literature, economics and religion classes – thereby giving the students a holistic and scientific understanding of medicine. Since the program is new to Baylor University and other colleges in the nation, a gift of $500,000 from the DeBakey Medical Foundation provided a catalyst for the program to grow in prominence and recognition.

Dr. Michael E. DeBakey is a renowned heart surgeon credited with transforming once dangerous cardiovascular surgeries, such as coronary artery bypass, into routine procedures performed over 10,000 times throughout the world. DeBakey’s connection to Baylor began when he joined the faculty at the Baylor University College of Medicine in Houston, now known as the Baylor College of Medicine, in 1948. In the following years, his name not only grew in reputation, but also, he paved the way for a new idea that incorporated the sciences and humanities. Along with his sisters, Lois and Selma, professors of scientific communication at Baylor University College of Medicine, DeBakey established a new concentration known as medical communications education. This curriculum teaches doctors the significance of concise and sincere communication with patients.

"Dr. Michael E. DeBakey was a great scholar and a great believer in this program that you have here at Baylor University," said Dr. George P. Noon, Foundation president and life-long colleague of DeBakey. "I started medical school about 50 years ago and all the information I have gathered over 50 years of on-the-job training, your students will be able to get in four years; so we are very happy and pleased to help fund this program."

The Michael E. DeBakey, Selma DeBakey and Lois DeBakey Endowed Scholarship was founded in 2009 after DeBakey’s death in 2008 at the age of 99. He died two years after the cardiovascular procedure he pioneered saved his life in a miraculous operation. DeBakey has received numerous prestigious awards throughout his lifetime, including: the Lasker Research Award in 1963, the Living Legend Award in 2000 from the Library of Congress, and the NASA Invent of the Year Award for the DeBakey Ventricular Assist Device in 2001.

The students awarded the medical humanities scholarships are coined “DeBakey Scholars.” The scholarships are based on student merit and are applicable to juniors and seniors in the medical humanities major.

"This generous gift from the DeBakey Medical Foundation will expand the good work already being done in conjunction with the DeBakey name, and we offer our deepest gratitude for the immediate and future impact of the Foundation’s generosity through this scholarship,” said Baylor University President Ken Starr.

Dr. Noon and Gayle Galloway, a 1952 graduate of Baylor University and DeBakey Medical Foundation trustee, presented the check to the medical humanities department at the Baylor Science Building on February 21, 2013.

"Such a generous gift will go a long way to help us in our mission to bridge the art and science of medicine and to prepare Baylor students who not only excel in the sciences, but who also understand medicine as a sacred vocation," noted Dr. Lauren A. Barron, lecturer and associate director of medical humanities at Baylor.

DeBakey Scholars were also on hand to witness this momentous event. Estela Rodrigues Alonso, a junior medical humanities major from Bergondo, Spain, was one of the scholars in attendance. Seeing the presentation of the check was a remarkable moment for Alonso, who left her home and family to study at Baylor.

"It's all for a greater cause," said Alfonso. She is confident that the holistic education she is receiving as a medical humanities major will further her goals of becoming an experienced yet compassionate doctor.

With this added donation, the Foundation has now invested $1 million since 2009. This gift has helped "a new generation of physicians begin their training here a Baylor University," said Dr. Barron. "There’s no question in my mind that Dr. DeBakey would be proud of what we’re doing at Baylor in answer to the challenges facing modern medicine."
Working on the MH Magazine has been such a joy. This is an incredible program full of truly amazing people. I hope that the work we have put into this magazine will succeed in showcasing medical humanities at Baylor for what it is - a program of both academic prestige and Christian compassion.

-Maxcey Kite, editor