

# MEDICAL HUMANITIES AND ETHICS AREA OF CONCENTRATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR BIOETHICS AND HEALTH LAW (CBHL), offers an Area of Concentration (AOC) in Medical Humanities and Ethics. Students work with a mentor to tailor the content of their AOC to fulfill their interests and to apply what they learn within clinical contexts. Students typically join the AOC in their first or second years and are encouraged to complete their Scholarly Project as part of the AOC. Many students choose the AOC to pursue interests in the humanities and social sciences that they may miss from their college studies.

Just as medical science draws from a number of sciences to understand and address disease and disability, the interdisciplinary field of medical humanities draws from the humanities to enable physicians to provide more humane, sensitive care to diverse patients. Moreover, while the medical sciences provide many tools to diagnose, treat, or prevent medical conditions, the medical humanities provide intellectual and emotional resources for physicians when they face health care issues that seem to have “no good solution,” perhaps because of limited knowledge or resources, or because of a clash of values or cultures between their patients and what medicine can offer.

## CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION AND CONTINUATION IN THE AOC

Students will be admitted based upon their interest and background as demonstrated in the AOC application. Applications are available on Navigator. For additional information, students may contact one of the AOC Directors:

- Lisa S. Parker, Ph.D. (ethics) [lisap@pitt.edu](mailto:lisap@pitt.edu)
- Gaetan Sgro, M.D. (humanities) [gaetan.sgro@va.gov](mailto:gaetan.sgro@va.gov)
- Andrew Thurston, M.D. (palliative care) [thurstonal@upmc.edu](mailto:thurstonal@upmc.edu)

Continued membership in the AOC depends on the student’s timely completion of AOC milestones and quarterly meetings or communication with the chosen mentor and AOC director.

## REQUIREMENTS

Requirements are designed to expose students to the breadth and depth of the medical humanities, to allow them to pursue their own areas of interest, and to help them become members of the local and national communities of those interested in the medical humanities. Students may focus within the AOC on particular interests, such as creative writing, disability studies, gender issues, history, literature, or visual arts, effectively tailoring the requirements to create their own individualized tracks within the AOC. Students are asked to choose an area of emphasis within the AOC: medical humanities, ethics, or palliative care. They then meet regularly with the AOC mentor for their chosen emphasis area.

To receive a certificate for completing this Area of Concentration, students must accumulate **20 credits** while fulfilling the requirements detailed below:

University Activities: Students attend lectures, colloquia, and other activities, including those listed on the calendar at the Center for Bioethics and Health Law website (<http://bioethics.pitt.edu/events>). Events sponsored by the *Palliative Care, Ethics, and Literature and Medicine* student interest groups also count towards the AOC requirements. Students are expected to maintain a record of their participation to be reviewed by their faculty mentor.

***Each activity is worth 1 credit.***

Third- and Fourth-Year Electives: Students ***are required*** to take two electives from the following list. With permission from their AOC mentor, students may also choose to integrate an AOC-relevant activity into one of their clinical rotations in lieu of one elective.

- Bioethics Conference and Readings (FM 5815)
- Cultural Competency (FM 5485)
- Narrative, Literature and the Experience of Illness (MED 5910)
- Palliative/Hospice Care (MED 5565)
- Ethical Issues in Clinical Practice (MSELC 5854)

***Each activity is worth 3 credits.***

Graduate Courses in Arts & Sciences: Students ***are required*** to take one or more graduate courses relevant to their interests (and may petition to substitute upper-level undergraduate course). Course listings are found at: <http://www.courses.as.pitt.edu/>. Students' course selections must be approved by their AOC mentors.

***Each activity is worth 3 credits.***

Professional Development / Conference Activities: Students attend a national or regional meeting relevant to their interests (examples include: meetings of the American Society for Bioethics & Humanities, Annual Assembly of Hospice & Palliative Care, Association for Practical & Professional Ethics, or conferences sponsored by the Center for Bioethics & Health Law, Cleveland Clinic, Consortium Ethics Program, or Hiram College).

***Each activity is worth 5 credits.***

### **EMPHASIS AREAS**

**Humanities**: Just as medical science draws from a number of sciences to understand and address disease and disability, the interdisciplinary field of medical humanities draws from the diverse domains of anthropology, cultural studies, ethics, film studies, history, law, literature, philosophy, religion, sociology, art, writing, and gender studies to equip physicians to provide more humane, sensitive care to diverse patients. Moreover, while the medical sciences provide many tools to diagnose, treat, or prevent medical conditions, the medical humanities provide intellectual and emotional resources for physicians when they face health care issues that seem to have "no good solution," perhaps because of limited knowledge or resources, or because of a clash of values or cultures between their patients and what medicine can offer. Through this AOC emphasis, students gain an enriched appreciation of the social context in which biomedical interventions and debates take place. Students explore how medicine and culture interact to shape provider and patient identities, healthcare practices, and healthcare institutions.

**Ethics:** A major field of study within the medical humanities focuses on ethical issues as they arise in the clinical setting, as well as at institutional and social policy levels. In addition, they gain critical analytical skills needed to participate in the broader public conversation about the ethical and policy questions arising in health care and research. This emphasis enables students to explore these ethical issues, analyze empirical bioethical research, read classic texts in bioethics, and develop frameworks for thinking about the ethical issues and conflicts that arise in the practice of medicine.

**Palliative Care:** Palliative care is a clinical specialty focused on “the study and management of patients with active, progressive, far-advanced disease for whom the prognosis is limited and the focus of care is quality of life” (Oxford Textbook of Palliative Medicine, 1993). It integrates physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of patient care in order to help patients live as actively as possible until death and to help family members cope during their loved one's illness and in bereavement. Palliative care thus employs in the clinical setting approaches and topics taught under the headings of clinical ethics and medical humanities with an emphasis on end-of-life decision-making and the spiritual and value-based needs of patients.

#### **CENTER FOR BIOETHICS & HEALTH LAW**

Founded in 1986, the Center has become renowned for pioneering empirical research in bioethics, developing clinical ethics training programs and round-the-clock ethics consultation services, and drafting innovative bioethical policy. In addition to administering the University's Master of Arts in Bioethics Program, faculty of the Center coordinate and staff the Clinical Ethics Training Program to train medical students and residents; offer training in research ethics to graduate and post-graduate students, residents, and faculty; and provide a range of continuing education in ethics to the University community and representatives of regional hospitals.

Center faculty engage in research on a wide range of issues, including aging, behavioral and psychiatric research, clinical communication and informed consent, end-of-life decision-making, issues of gender, race, and class in health care, human subjects research, information technologies in health care, long-term care, organ and tissue procurement and transplantation, palliative care, privacy, public health, and reproductive health.

#### **AOC DIRECTORS**

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