

Harnessing a Research Strength: Building a Medical Humanities Program at UTK

The University of Tennessee possesses a unique array of faculty research expertise in the medical humanities that, if harnessed and provided with adequate structure and external partners, can become a distinguishing asset to the University. Currently, the University employs multiple scholars working at the top of their fields in subjects related to the medical humanities; however, they are dispersed across disparate departments and colleges with few mechanisms for focused conversation and collaboration with one another or with members of the community at large. We propose to build a medical humanities program that will bring together faculty strengths and local resources and to develop curriculum and programming in the medical humanities that will draw scholars and students to the University in pursuit of this distinctive research concentration and opportunities for engaged conversation.

Goals:

- Develop an interdisciplinary research and teaching focus that brings together professors and practitioners from campus and the community who are working in health, healing, and the medical humanities.
- Core undergraduate training, practical experience, and research that uses humanistic analysis to intervene in and resolve current national and global health issues.
- Public programming on humanistic and historic approaches to health and healing.
- Partnerships with local health care providers.

What makes UTK unique:

- Critical mass of productive faculty pursuing research in fields integral to the medical humanities (see below) with ability to collaborate with both external and internal partners.
- The fact that UTK does not have a medical school is an advantage in that we are able to develop analytical thinking in undergraduates prior to specialization in medical schools, public health programs, social work, the health care industry, and other professional and graduate programs.

What we are asking for:

- Points of formal contact with administrators and resourced external partners such as hospital staff and medical clinics.
- Facilitation of conversations across departments and colleges in a collaborative effort to envision a public-facing medical humanities program.

- Administrative leadership and support for strategic planning and any budgetary needs that arise from planning.

Why a Medical Humanities program at UT is essential now:

- Medical schools are increasingly requiring immersion in the humanities, including narrative competence, critical thinking, textual analysis and interpretation, and empathy; a medical humanities concentration will help us to attract potential pre-professional health students and their parents.
- Medical Humanities is an inherently interdisciplinary area of study that is fundamental to resolving some of our most urgent national and global problems. For example, as health care treatments become increasingly automated, human critical capacity, oversight, narrativization, and historicization are required for ethical decision making, surveying social and economic advantages and disadvantages of treatment methods, and generating just public policy.

Plans already in place, 2017-2019:

- Ongoing, 2017-2018: monthly faculty-led conversations across the disciplines about shared readings and research.
- Dec. 17, 2017: Campus visit and discussion with OSU faculty, James Phelan. We will discuss Medical Humanities initiatives and programs and will begin the work of envisioning a program here at UTK.
- July, 2018: apply to UTHI for a Medical Humanities Seminar.
- October, 2018: Campus visit and discussion with Princeton University faculty in anthropology and director of the Princeton Program for Global Health and Health Policy, João Biehl. We will continue and refine our discussion of Medical Humanities initiatives and programs.
- Fall 2019: We will host a Medical Humanities Conference showcasing student and faculty research, partnering with local practitioners, and open to the public.

Faculty and areas of specialization:

Religion & Medicine:

History:

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Religious Studies:

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Death & Disease:**Anthropology:**

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History:

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Disability Studies:**Art History:**

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Medical Ethics:**Philosophy:**

Annette Mendola, mendola@utk.edu

Narrative Medicine:**English:**

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Humanities Center:

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Visiting Guests:

Julia Cummiskey, Julia-cummiskey@utc.edu (UT Chattanooga)

Howard Brody, hbrody13@gmail.com (Emeritus, Michigan State University; medical ethics and Director of Institute for Medical Humanities at University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston).