HCB

Medical Humanities,
Compassionate Care &
Bioethics

HCB 501: Compassionate Care,
Medical Humanities, and the Illness
Experience
This course will introduce students to major
interpretations of the illness experience,
to several classical biographical
and autobiographical accounts of illness, and to the
important dynamic of compassionate care in
the healing relationship. The patient-as-person
will be emphasized throughout, as well as the
ways in which respect for and empathy toward
the patient impacts diagnostic accuracy,
patient adherence, and patient and professional
satisfaction. Some emotional dynamics of the
illness experience will be addressed, such as
hope, through the work of eminent physician-
writers such as Jerome Groopman, MD. The
dynamics of medical mistakes and forgiveness
will be explored through psychiatrist Aaron
Lazarre's influential writings on effective
medical apologies. Some philosophical and
metaphysical aspects of personhood and self-
identity will be introduced.
Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 502: Landmark Cases in
Bioethics
What is a life worth living? How do we
decide, and who decides, when to use medical
technologies such as incubators, ventilators,
transplants and reproductive technologies?
This is an intensive introduction to some of
the cases in medical ethics that have changed
the ways that we are born, cared for, and
die in American hospitals. Examples of
topics include: vaccination and public health;
eugenics and human subjects research ethics;
the right of privacy and health care; end-of-
life planning and treatment; women's bodies
and fetal rights; disability rights; religious
beliefs and health care; triage and allocation of
scarce resources; mental illness and individual
rights; global clinical trials; and, bioethics and
culture.
Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 503: Traditions and Values in
Bioethical Conflicts
This course serves as an introduction to
Western moral and religious traditions and
to the positions about killing, saving, and
enhancing that these traditions have informed.
It explores the interface between religion
and biomedical ethics and then delves into
specific issues in health care in light of more
general normative concerns such as justice,
love, autonomy and rights, utilitarianism, self-
sacrifice, gender, virtue, and community. The
issues with which the course deals address
the plights of real people, in the concrete,
who come from particular backgrounds and
whose set of values may make them sometimes
recalcitrant to possibilities that technology has
made (or is just now making) available.
Offered
Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 504: Special Topic in
Biotechnology
Just because we can do it, does this mean
that we should do it? This course takes a
focused look at controversial practices in
health care settings, such as organ donation
and enhancements, which have been (and
are continuing to be) made available with
the advancement of technology. Ought we to
regard that which technology makes available
as uncontroversially good? If not, why not?
What sorts of new issues regarding distributive
justice, autonomy, utility, and compassion
are ours to consider carefully because of the
changing world in which we live?
Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A,
A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 510: Literature, Compassion,
and Medical Care
How does literature help us understand
the nature of human illness and suffering?
Can written works of art, ancient and
contemporary, that depict moments of
compassion and compassionate acts lay
bare the moral, spiritual, psychological, and
physical reality of suffering? There is a long
association between literature and medicine,
from the viewpoint of physician-writers,
such as Anton Chekov and William Carlos
Williams, whose literary skills have eclipsed
their medical backgrounds. Sherlock Holmes
and Doctor Watson were the creations of
a physician-writer, Arthur Conan Doyle.
Physicians portrayed in literature, such as Dr.
Bernard Rieux, in Albert Camus The Plague,
have also explored the relationship between
patient and doctor, the nature of healing.
This semester-long course will study these
relationships through reading of poetry, drama,
fiction, memoir, and essay and reflect on the
nature of suffering, the intrinsic human need
for compassion, and the implications for health
and healing.
Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-
B+, etc.)

HCB 511: Bioethics, Disability &
Community
Most people will experience disability at some
point in their lives, and for some it will shape
their social, personal, family, educational,
and employment experiences. Viewpoints
on disabilities which have emerged in policy
and the broader culture have been explicitly
challenged by emerging communities of
people with disabilities who seek to speak
for themselves and claim full inclusion in
society. In this context, bioethicists and
disability scholars have found points of
both common cause and stark disagreement
over issues such as neonatal and end-of-life
care, the value and values inherent medical
decisions and their outcomes. These bioethical
debates occur in the context of debates over
the rights of individuals with disabilities
to self-determination, accommodations for
work and schooling, and the potential for
people with disabilities to make unique
contributions because of--rather than despite--
their disabilities. This course will consider
major debates in bioethics in light of recent
scholarship in disability studies, drawing on
perspectives from philosophy, literature and
narrative, history, and sociology.
Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-
B+, etc.)

HCB 512: Altruism and Bioethics
What is altruism, and what are its evolutionary
roots as a moral dynamic? What impact does
altruistic action have on the human agent?
Does it impact flourishing and health? When
is it experienced as overwhelming by medical
professionals? Where does altruism fit within
medical and nursing professionalism? How
is it related to compassionate care? What
about the duty to treat in time of epidemic,
auto-experimentation, pro-bono medical
treatment, high-risk provision of healthcare in
time of conflict, healthcare activism, and the
commitment to the patient's good as a guiding
professional ideal? How does the practitioner
strike a balance between the care of patients
and the care of the nearest and dearest or the
care of the self? How does altruism correlate
with pro-social behavior, happiness, and
health?
Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-
B+, etc.)

HCB 513: Disease and Society
What is disease? How do the beliefs, politics,
and economies of particular societies shape
how diseases are defined, experienced,
treated? In this seminar, students will
explore these questions by analyzing historical
documents, scientific reports, and historical
scholarship. We will look at disease from
multiple perspectives as a biological process,
clinical entity, population phenomenon,
historical actor, and personal experience. We will pay special attention to how diseases have been recognized, diagnosed, named, classified and counted in different times, places, cultures, and settings based on different environmental and social conditions, medical ideas, diagnostic technologies, and available treatments. The course will begin with a review of major approaches to understanding the manifold relationships between disease and society. The remainder of the course will view disease and society relationships through the lens of specific issues, such as epidemic disease, consumption and affluence, globalization, and risk.

Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 514: Global Bioethics

Bioethics is an American invention. Ideas about medicine and morality, of course, go back to antiquity and are documented as medical ethics in Europe, medical morality in China, and under many other names in cultures around the world. Recently, the process of globalization of ideas, medical practices, clinical trials, and migration of patients has led to clashes of culture around issues such as the appropriate standards and control groups for clinical trials, organ transplantation, brain death, and end-of-life care. Issues of religion, morality, public policy, disability rights and policy, and health system structure and payment all shape how particular societies decide to manage divisive issues such as the beginning and end of life. This course will draw on a growing literature on global and transnational cases, policies, and traditions in the ethics of health, public health, and health care.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 515: Health Policy, History & Ethics

Who gets sick? Who gets health care, what kind, and in what setting? This course covers the major health policy issues of the United States today, including the health status of the U.S. as a whole, the social and economic determinants of health, the role of personal and public health services in affecting health, the organization and financing of health services, and the multiple factors affecting health policies. We will explore the evolution of the US health care system in the past century, and debates about rights to health care or lack thereof, health disparities, conflicts of interest, and the ethics of health policy and practice.

Offered in Fall, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 516: Ethical Issues in Human Reproduction

New technologies have modified human reproduction in numerous ways, raising profound questions about the moral status of human life and the nature of parental and sibling obligations. This course will investigate the values that attach to different relationships, both familial and general. It will cover questions around the treatment of infertility, surrogate mothering, the commodification of the body, and the elevated expectations of familial obligations that correspond to new reproductive technologies.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 517: The Problem of Evil: Philosophical, Biological, and Social Dimensions

What is the nature of evil? Can it be the result of brain malfunction, something that is genetically predetermined? Or, is evil something which is part of or at least necessary to know the good? Alternatively, is evil an arbitrary designation, a perspective from which we can wrest ourselves given the right sort of reinvention? In this class, we shall address the problem of evil from scientific, social-scientific, and philosophical perspectives, using fiction and non-fictional sources. Examples of medical evil, such as the Nazi doctors or Tuskegee, can be introduced as case studies.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 518: Empirical Bioethics

The formal study of bioethics attempts to define ethical courses of action in a world ever increasing in complexity. But in day to day practice, ethical outcomes are expressed through the individual decisions and resulting actions--of human agents. How do individuals form these judgments? How do people become motivated to engage in behaviors that are designed to benefit someone else? We will explore current scientific approaches to these questions with several areas of emphasis, including a) the neuroscience of compassionate care and altruism, b) cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to understanding judgment and decision making in ethical domains, and c) empirical approaches to quantifying the effects of ethically based policy decisions.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 519: Public Health Law

This course is a survey of legal and policy issues that have special relevance for public health professionals. Topics may vary, but typically will include many of the following: structure of the U.S. legal system; power of state and federal governments in matters affecting health care; governmental power and the right to privacy; constitutional issues in social welfare benefits; governmental regulation of health care providers and payers; the scope and discretion of administrative agencies in health care; the antitrust laws; the fraud and abuse laws; and negligence in the delivery and financing of health care. The course is taught primarily by Socratic method.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 520: Bioethics and Film

Film and television, both fiction and nonfiction, capture man of the human tragedies, challenges, and possibilities that are debated in bioethics books, articles, newspapers, on hospital ethics committees, and in daily clinical care. This course will explore themes of birth, death, hope, faith, finitude, and ethics in daily practice, ethical outcomes are expressed through the individual decisions and resulting actions--of human agents. How do individuals form these judgments? How do people become motivated to engage in behaviors that are designed to benefit someone else? We will explore current scientific approaches to these questions with several areas of emphasis, including a) the neuroscience of compassionate care and altruism, b) cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to understanding judgment and decision making in ethical domains, and c) empirical approaches to quantifying the effects of ethically based policy decisions.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 521: Clinical Ethics Practicum

As difficult as settling abstract ethical issues in medicine may be, the delivery of ethical care presents its own set of difficulties. This course aims to introduce students to the practices hospitals employ to ensure the care they deliver meets the relevant legal and moral requirements. At the end of this course, students will have been exposed to many basic, and some advanced, aspects of clinical ethics theory and practice. They will be able to identify, describe, and analyze ethical dilemmas in clinical cases, and will develop an appreciation for the complexity and multi-disciplinary nature of ethical dilemmas in clinical medicine and will be able to apply what they have learned to assess ethical, social, and legal aspects of cases.

3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 522: The Role of Virtue Ethics in Medicine

Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics and the role of virtue ethics are central to many religious traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, and the philosophical traditions. Key virtues include honesty, courage,
generosity, prudence, justice, compassion, benevolence, loyalty, and hospitality. This course explores the real and potential role of virtue on the development of virtuous physicians. The course's texts offer two diametrically opposed views on the role of virtue in medicine, i.e., one is that virtue can be channeled into the training of medical professionals, whereas the other is that bioethics has extracted virtue from medicine. Through readings, documentaries, dialogue and active leadership of sessions by students, the course will interrogate the claims as well as possibilities for a role of virtue in medicine.

3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)

HCB 523: Special Topics in Medical Humanities

As with all multidisciplinary pursuits, the medical humanities project is characterized by an ongoing negotiation among its practitioners over methods, scope and goals. This course will examine, in detail, one of the latest debates within the field.

3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)
May be repeated 2 times FOR credit.

HCB 524: Special Topics in Bioethics

Bioethicists are frequently asked to consider the ethical ramifications of new research findings and emerging technologies as they arise. This course will examine one such issue in close detail.

3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)
May be repeated 3 times FOR credit.

HCB 598: Independent Study

3 Credits, ABCF Grading

0-4 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)
May be repeated 2 times FOR credit.

HCB 599: Special Projects Capstone Course

This course, to be offered in the second (spring) semester, is designed to satisfy the special projects requirement of our program. The first part of the course will be devoted to readings and discussions that further illuminate the methodologies of the interdisciplinary field of medical humanities, compassionate care, and bioethics. Students will develop an appreciation for the standards of high quality scholarship and research through review of carefully selected readings. This will prepare them for the second part of the course, where they pursue and present their own research based on the existing literature. This capstone course will be highly collaborative, entail substantial peer review, and be organized around the development of significant student projects which are intended to represent the beginnings of publishable papers. Our entire faculty will be involved in these projects according to their specific areas of expertise.

Offered in Spring, 3 credits, Letter graded (A, A-, B+, etc.)