Proposal for a HEALTHCARE and SOCIETY Major

Rationale

As the name suggests, a Healthcare and Society (HCS) major would promote an interdisciplinary understanding of medicine and healthcare. It would enable students to appreciate the strengths and limits of the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities as they seek to better understand the myriad of complexities associated with disease, illness, care-giving, suffering and healing. Courses in the major would emphasize the role that ethical values and humanistic inquiry - the study of the human condition - play in defining problems as “medical.” They would also help students to grasp the nature of healthcare, especially how legal, political, corporate and social institutions influence the organization, finance and delivery of health services. Finally, a HCS major would help students develop the analytical skills necessary for clear thinking and writing about the inherent tradeoffs involved in healthcare.*

Rapid changes in the healthcare arena that place increasing demands on health care practitioners and other leaders in the health sector are requiring corresponding changes in the way health professionals are educated. New technologies that make genetic engineering and profiling possible, for example, also require increasingly frequent and difficult bioethical decision-making in areas such as reproductive medicine and critical care. Similarly, issues of cultural sensitivity and scarce health resources are growing as the diversity of the population increases. The combination of market pressures and environmental threats underscores the fact that good medicine requires an understanding of the whole person, as well as good science (i.e., the ethical, interpersonal, legal, business, and leadership issues in health care). Consequently, health profession schools seek candidates who have a solid understanding of science as well as an appreciation for humanistic inquiry and understanding. Colleges and universities are coming to realize that more of the preparation of skilled healthcare professionals must begin at the undergraduate level, where a broad understanding of the human condition can be fostered, as well as an appreciation for the public and social issues that underlie healthcare decision-making. As a liberal arts institution with a recently completed science initiative and an established Medical Humanities minor that includes classes taught by faculty representing seven departments within Arts and Sciences as well as the Business, Leadership, and Law Schools, we are well positioned to prepare our pre-health students with such an interdisciplinary foundation.

The Richmond Promise aims to provide our students with an integrated academic experience and facilitate student engagement in the surrounding community. The establishment of an HCS major would fit well within this framework. First, in completing this major, our students’ understanding of the business, legal, ethical, and sociopolitical aspects of our healthcare system would be guided by the expertise of our faculty in the Business School, the Law School, the Leadership School, and the School of Arts and Sciences. Cross-school collaborations among faculty will ensure that our students receive both an interdisciplinary and integrated academic experience. Second, all HCS majors would complete a community-based learning experience, through which they would engage the metro-Richmond area and/or wider communities while personally experiencing the inner workings of the healthcare system.

* This section borrows heavily from the description of Davidson College’s Medical Humanities program (http://www2.davidson.edu/academics/acad_depts/medhum/medhum_overview.asp).
The proposed major will strengthen existing ties among the School of Arts and Sciences, the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, the Robins School of Business, and the UR Law School and will facilitate the emergence of expanded health-related course offerings out of these relationships. While the Healthcare and Society program would maintain its home in the School of Arts and Sciences, the Jepson, Business, and Law schools are uniquely positioned to make special contributions to the undergraduate education of healthcare professionals. The Jepson School will provide our pre-health students with a framework of moral decision making and social responsibility that directly addresses such questions as how to effect change in medical settings, how to articulate the needs of patients and institutions in increasingly complex environments, and how the professions of medicine themselves are to be held accountable. The Business School will provide our pre-health students with an understanding of the delivery, support, and financing of healthcare services as well as the management skills that are needed to successfully run health services organizations. Finally, Law School faculty will ensure that our majors have a firm foundation in the fundamental legal and practical aspects of medical liability litigation and other areas of medical jurisprudence including state and federal healthcare regulation.

In summary, a HCS major would complement the science-intensive pre-health curriculum by providing future healthcare practitioners with a firm foundation in the interpersonal, cultural, bioethical, legal, economic, social and political facets of medicine. By combining a mastery of the sciences with an enhanced understanding of the humanistic aspects of medicine and illness, our students will be well equipped to navigate the realities of their future work as healthcare professionals.

Track Record and Student Interest

In 2006, the Claude Moore Charitable Foundation funded a University grant entitled “Preparing for Responsible Leadership in Health Care”. This grant, a collaborative effort between the Arts and Sciences and Leadership Schools allowed the University to develop a Medical Humanities minor, which was subsequently approved by the Arts and Sciences faculty. The minor was first offered in the fall semester of 2007.

Since its debut at the University, the Medical Humanities minor - we used the term “humanities” because it constitutes the study of the human condition - has sparked much interest among students from across campus as well as faculty who have requested to have their courses approved for elective credit. In just four years the program has grown to include courses in three additional Arts & Sciences departments (English, History, Anthropology) as well as the Business School, more than tripled the number of approved electives (now at 16), and seen a four-fold increase in the number of declared minors (52 as of Fall 2011). A recent poll of current pre-health students revealed that an additional 40 students intend to declare a Medical Humanities minor. Perhaps even more striking is the number of students who have designed their own majors based on our health-related courses. Twenty-four of the 41 juniors and seniors who are declared interdisciplinary studies majors are focusing their majors on medical humanities related areas. Moreover, our poll revealed that an additional 12 sophomores and 3 freshmen already intend to create their own IDST major that is rooted in the medical humanities. Presumably, several of those students who have declared, or intend to declare, a Medical Humanities minor, would switch to the proposed HCS major if it were available to them.
Proposed HEALTHCARE and SOCIETY Major Curriculum

10-11 units, including:

*HCS 200: Medical Humanities (1 unit) †
MGMT 349: Healthcare Administration & Management (1 unit) †
PLSC 365: U.S. Healthcare Policy & Politics (1 unit) †
HCS 388: Individual Internship (0-1 unit)
**HCS 390-391: Senior Capstone (0.5 unit X 2: 1 unit total)

One unit in “Law, Philosophy, Bioethics and Humanities” chosen from:
  CLSC 210: A History of Early Medicine (1 unit) †
  ENGL 400: JR/SR Seminar: Medicine, Mortality, and Meaning (1 unit) †† (FSLT is a prerequisite)
*HCS 240: Law & Medicine (1 unit) †
HIST 199: Health in American History (1 unit, FSHT)
HIST 361: Madness and Society in the Modern Era (1 unit) ††
HIST 390: Food and Power in Africa and Asia (1 unit) †
LDST 377: Ethical Decision Making in Healthcare (1 unit) †
PHIL 120: Contemporary Moral Issues (1 unit) †

Two units in “Research Methods, Analysis and Communications” chosen from:
  ACCT 201: Fundamentals of Financial Accounting (1 unit) †
  ANTH 211: Introduction to Ethnographic Field Methods (1 unit) ††
  GEOG 260: Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (1 unit) †
  LDST 389: Research Methods (1 unit)
  MATH 119: Statistics for Social and Life Sciences (1 unit) †
**PLSC 270: Social Science Inquiry (1 unit)
  PSYC 200: Methods and Analyses (1 unit)
  RHCS 102: Interpersonal Communication (1 unit, FSSA) †
  SOC 211: Sociological Research Methods and Data Analysis (1 unit) ††

Two units, chosen from:
  ANTH 302: Medicine and Health from a Global/Anthropological Perspective (1 unit) ††
  BIOL 110: Emerging Infectious Diseases (1 unit, FSNB) †
  BIOL 336: Eco-Epidemiology (1 unit)
  BIOL 346: Medical Entomology (1 unit)
  PLSC 363: Global Health, Infectious Disease, and Human Rights (1 unit) †
  PLSC 364/PSYC 353: Mental Health and Policy (1 unit)
  PSYC 311: Child Development (1 unit)
  PSYC 315: Adult Development (1 unit)
  PSYC 331: Behavioral Neuroscience (1 unit)
  PSYC 341: Cognitive Neuroscience (1 unit) ††
  PSYC 444: Clinical Case Studies: Neuropsychological Foundations (1 unit) ††

One additional unit, chosen from any of the above categories.

† course has no prerequisites
†† course prerequisites may be waived for HCS students on a case by case basis
* currently listed as an IDST course; subject code change is pending approval by A&S
** new course proposal is pending approval by A&S
MaryGrace Apostoli, '11

Senior created her own major to study international health care policy and practice

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When MaryGrace Apostoli, '11, realized her interests were too broad to fit into a single academic department, she didn’t let it stop her from following her passion for studying health care around the world. Apostoli came to the University of Richmond as a pre-med and music major, but after taking a class on health care policy and politics in the U.S. — and discovering she was “pretty dismal” at music theory — she realized there was much more to health care than science and clinical medicine and changed majors.

Apostoli completed the pre-med curriculum, but dropped her music major to a minor and created her own major — international health care policy and practice — with the help of her adviser, political science professor Rick Magul. Because the topic involves a variety of disciplines, she took courses in political science, economics, anthropology, business and leadership studies to understand health systems and disparities around the world. “So many industries and interests intersect to create the system of public health in a given country,” she said. “And the decisions made in the public health field affect the health of millions. So, I think it’s really important that we have a good grasp of how to keep people healthy from a systems and community level as well as in an exam room or a hospital.”

In addition to her time in the classroom, Apostoli also traveled to Copenhagen, Denmark to study public health at the Danish Institute for Study Abroad. She visited doctors, hospitals, policy organizations and government offices to see how the system worked firsthand. Apostoli said she learned about the issue in a different cultural context, taking a lot away from how Denmark — which she said has impressive health statistics — organizes its health care systems. But Denmark isn’t the only place outside of the U.S. where Apostoli has studied health care. She spent her sophomore spring break on a “life-changing” mission trip to the indigenous community of Pampas Grande, Peru, where she and others volunteered in a local clinic. “It really motivated me to learn more about why health disparities exist and how they can be eliminated,” she said, "and to build a career that would enable me to reach out to third-world communities and offer skills and experience they could benefit from.

Beyond her travels, Apostoli is also putting her studies to practical use in Richmond as co-president of the Global Health Club, an organization that works to raise awareness about health disparities around the world. She also worked as a recruiter for Teach for America, is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, a Richmond Artist Scholar, a Westhampton College Distinguished Leader and National Merit Scholar.

Overall, her time abroad and the interdisciplinary nature of her coursework — looking at similar issues from different angles — are what Apostoli credits as being crucial to her academic experience at Richmond. “This major has given me such a well-rounded view of health care and of the world that I feel it has really prepared me for a number of paths within the field,” she said.

After graduation, Apostoli said she eventually plans to attend medical school and become a pediatric physician in poor-resource settings. But first, she will work as a research associate for the Advisory Board Company in Washington, D.C., looking into the best health care practices around the country and the world.

“Following my rationale for creating my own major,” she said, “I am really eager to continue learning about how health care is delivered around the world, why countries make the choices they do, and how we can pool our resources to improve health care across the board.”
Resource Implications

1. Required Courses

Based on student interest, we anticipate that 20-25 students per year would declare a Healthcare and Society major and estimate that an additional 15-20 students per year would minor in Medical Humanities.

Medical Humanities (HCS 200)

Adjunct instructor Cynthia Merrill, who is a retired physician, teaches this class. This is a discussion-based course and enrollment is capped at 14. Because of the popularity of this class, we have limited enrollment to declared Medical Humanities minors or those who intend to declare the minor. At a minimum, we would need to continue our practice of offering 4 sections of this course per academic year.

U.S. Healthcare Policy & Politics (PLSC 365)

This class attracts a diverse mix of students, including Medical Humanities minors, Political Science majors, and students who are interested in public/global health. Because of this, it has been a challenge to accommodate current Medical Humanities students, especially those who are not seniors. As an example, in Spring 2011 the course, which has a usual enrollment cap of 24, expanded to 60 students in an attempt to accommodate student demand. Despite this, there was a wait-list of 35 students. Some mechanism would need to be instituted whereby a certain number of seats could be set aside for Healthcare and Society majors/minors each year. Dr. Rick Mayes would likely require a release from one of his other PLSC courses in order to offer additional sections of PLSC 365.

Healthcare Administration and Management (MGMT 349)

While this course was created to support the Medical Humanities minor, enrollment is not limited to students with a declared minor in Medical Humanities. The course was offered for the first time in spring 2011 and 19 students enrolled, including several students majoring in business administration. Recent changes to the business administration curriculum will enable Dr. Steve Thompson to offer one section of Healthcare Administration and Management per academic year. We do not anticipate this course will require any additional faculty resources.

Individual Internship (HCS 388)

Community-based learning is an essential component of our proposed major. With an array of major hospitals, free clinics, government health offices, and an academic medical center, the Richmond community can provide rich and diverse experiential learning environments for our students. Additionally, many students undertake health-related work abroad (e.g., mission trips) and at home during the summer. Students may satisfy the internship requirement through engagement in various health-related experiences, including those obtained through other Richmond courses (e.g., LAIS 388).
**Senior Capstone (HCS 390-391)**

Students will conceive and develop research or discovery projects that build upon and integrate the concepts covered in their HCS coursework. Because students can choose among many electives in completing their HCS major, the capstone sequence will provide cohesion during the senior year as students learn from one another’s projects. Dr. Mayes has the permission/support of his department to offer this course on an ongoing basis.

2. Elective Courses

We do not foresee any resource implications related to currently offered elective courses. However, since pre-business courses are typically fully enrolled, it is possible that elective demand for ACCT 201 could exceed capacity.

3. Administrative Oversight

Dr. Rick Mayes (Political Science) and Dr. John Vaughan (Biology) will serve as co-coordinators for the HCS major.