



Promoting and Teaching the History of Medicine in an Undergraduate Medical Curriculum



*James Shedlock, Director
Ron Sims, Special Collections Librarian
Ramune Kubilius, Collection Development/
Special Projects Librarian*

*Galter Health Sciences Library
Feinberg School of Medicine • Northwestern University*



GALTER

HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY

of Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine

www.galter.northwestern.edu

Introduction

- Presentation Goals
 - Describe the Galter Library's history of medicine seminar
 - Report on the course's evaluation over time
 - Discuss the impact of the course
 - Describe planning ideas for future changes

Context

- The Northwestern MD curriculum
 - Includes Patient, Physician and Society course
 - “Discuss the social, cultural and ethical aspects of medicine ...”
 - “Demonstrate a base of communication skills ...”
 - Offered in Years 1 and 2
 - Contains Seminars in Medical Humanities component
 - Required, choose from 20+ seminars
 - Five weeks duration
- History of medicine seminar in place since 2005

Background

- Medical humanities, a curriculum strength
- Discussed many options to participate in curriculum.
- Consulted with Humanities faculty.
- Defined the Galter seminar as student driven, personal exploration, group activity.



Background, cont.

- Seminar Objectives
 - “The primary goal of the History of Medicine seminar is to introduce students to the history of their profession through the examination and review of primary texts.”
- Driving theme: what do we learn from history? How does learning from the past inform today’s understanding of medicine?

Seminar Content

- The assignment – Students pick a disease (e.g., general surgery, orthopedics, mental illness/insanity) or health condition (e.g., sanitation) and trace the topic back in time using the Galter collections.
 - 21st/20th c, 19th c, 18th c, 17th c, 16th c or older
 - Summary: what they learned.
- After students select seminar, they report their topic.
- First session: discuss why they chose the topic and what they know about it from 21st century lit.

Seminar Content, cont.

- Make weekly reports to the seminar. For disease, discuss the etiology, treatment, prognosis. For health conditions, discuss problem, social context, outcomes.
- Use Doody book review method.
- Instruction method: drive open discussion, not more lecture.
- Seminars are meant to promote self- and group learning.

Seminar Content, cont.

- Maximum 6 students per seminar
- Have 10-15 minutes for reports, questions, discussion
- Topics:
 - The usual: surgery, orthopedics, cancer ...
 - The unusual: Hansen's Disease, hospital architecture



Seminar Content, cont.

- Added content from Ron Sims, ‘show and tell’ portion of each session:
 - Printing and bookbinding
 - Instrumentation, using the Galter instrument collection
 - History of the medical school – founders, buildings, noted figures (lots of photographs)
 - Special Collection ‘treasures’ – incunabula, most important books in medicine

Seminar Content, cont.

- Unwritten lessons
 - Care and appreciation of rare books:
 - White gloves
 - Pencil, no pens; laptops; phone cameras
 - Role of the library in their education and profession
 - Presentation skills
 - Most presentations use laptop, flat screen display
 - Last presentation must be in PPT format.
 - Personal contact with librarians – here to serve you

Evaluation

- Course evaluation:
 - Evaluation criteria: attendance (mandatory), participation, knowledge, attitude, completion of assignments
 - Pass/fail grade
 - Good things about the seminar
 - Usefulness, relevance to rest of med education, to your life as a physician
 - Things that could be changed



Evaluation, cont.

- Uniformly positive comments, suggestions:
 - Concentrate on handling more rare books.
 - Limit workload.
 - Do tour, intro before class to aid picking a topic.
 - Divide historical time better than one week per century; add one extra week to the seminar.
 - Add more social context to medical topics.
 - Explore non-Western medical traditions.
 - Consider more than one topic per student and divide topics over time periods.
 - Don't change anything.

Evaluation, cont.

- Student evaluation
 - Most students are ‘into’ history and are self-motivated.
 - Most students respect self-learning; they know what to do to succeed in class; they want to learn.
 - Most students extremely bright: smart, articulate, perceptive.
 - Most students extremely talented and skilled re: technology; very creative PPT presentations.
 - Students expect faculty to be prepared.

Lessons Learned

- Students like the rare books part. Many are fascinated with the history of their profession. Want to explore humanities not addressed in undergrad years.
- Students choose the same topics.
 - Some topics are personal – self or family conditions; potential practice areas.
- Librarians relate to humanities.
- Another librarian contribution to the curriculum.

Lessons Learned, cont.

- Issue: book in hand vs. online; seminar could be taught without actual rare books ... plenty of content is easily available online.
 - Is there any value gained by handling a rare book vs. reading/seeing content online?
 - Similar to gross anatomy vs. online simulation
 - Touch is valuable to forming perspective.

Potential Changes

- Identify readings in history of medicine – everyone read the same article and discuss it. Relate article to rare book.
- Similar as above: pick topics from major advances in medicine; relate to actual book, artifact.
- Collaborate/teach with faculty: a book person and a science person... add another, more ‘scientific’ perspective to discussion.
- Maintain status quo.

Conclusion

- Librarians make another worthwhile contribution to the curriculum.
- Promote the library's collections, especially rare books, and the role of the librarian as scholar, 'historian'.
- Demonstrate value of history in modern medicine.