Social Medicine (SOCM) Electives Notes for Students

Overview

Social Medicine (SOCM) electives are generally specific topical projects developed by individual students in consultation with a Social Medicine faculty member. Collaborative work involving two or more students is possible. Presently there are no pre-scheduled SOCM elective courses or pre-established course syllabi. SOCM electives result in a major paper (12-20pp) or equivalent product. All electives, especially scholarly reading/writing projects, are built around specific student interests and negotiated timeframes—though a few faculty members have ongoing research projects that students can plug into—and the clinical ethics elective has recurring availability. Students are responsible for finding a preceptor, planning their elective, registering the elective with the SOM registrar, and completing the tasks in their study plan.

SOCM elective planning by any student should begin with two steps:

1) consultation with one or more Social Medicine faculty members to discuss their capacity for mentoring / precepting of an elective project in a specified time frame. Advanced consultation with potential Social Medicine preceptors is a must; if you are considering doing a Social Medicine elective you should contact faculty as early as possible.

2) notification of Social Medicine electives staff—coordinator, Dr. Barry Saunders, and course manager, Kathy Crosier—that an elective is in the works (their contact information is below).

Identifying a willing faculty preceptor is the key to registration for a SOCM elective. No elective can be scheduled without a preceptor’s permission.

Resources to help students identify prospective preceptors:

- instructors for SHS1-3 (formerly PD) & SHS4 (RICE);
- faculty member bio pages;
- websites for Social Medicine-affiliated Centers: Center for Bioethics, Center for Health Equity Research, and Center for Genomics & Society;
- Social Medicine electives coordinator, Dr. Barry Saunders.

Prospects for engaging a faculty member as preceptor are best if:

- elective topic offers a good fit with faculty interests/expertise;
- faculty member is given plenty of advance notice.

It is not necessary to have a topic fully developed at an initial faculty consultation. General ideas are fine starting points; flexibility is good; elective topics are often modified over several stages of discussion. Advance work students have done to brainstorm, rummage in literature, and consider how their work may fit with work of prospective preceptors is welcome.

last updated 7/19
Faculty member capacities are finite; their work commitments vary throughout the calendar year. It is not possible to guarantee that every student wishing to undertake a particular elective in a particular slot can be accommodated. Early consultation is strongly advised. Students who have been admitted to the Humanities & Social Sciences Scholarly Concentration will be given special consideration.

Specific Procedures

Students registering for an elective must:

- agree with preceptor on plan of work (e.g. syllabus, provisional bibliography), schedule of meetings, and deliverables (paper, presentation, etc.);
- register for the elective with SOM registrar, conveying approval of preceptor and Social Medicine elective coordinator (an official signed form may be required for Foundation Phase students, but Individualization Phase students can convey an email confirming permission);
- notify Social Medicine course manager of elective topic and timeline.

Amount and timing of elective work:
6 hours of elective credit presumes ~160 hours work (equivalent to 4 weeks of full-time effort). Students may register for 6 or 3 hours’ credit. SOCM electives presume significant work, generally resulting in production of a 12- to 20-page paper, or presentations/products of equivalent scale. Students may accomplish portions of elective work over weeks or months prior to the official registered course slot (assuming approval of preceptor), but must submit all final materials by the close of the official course, to allow for prompt preceptor evaluation. Students should only seek SOCM elective credit for new work, not work performed for other courses or for paid projects.

Available Electives:
SOCM 403  Readings/Projects in Social Medicine
SOCM 403B  (for Science of Medicine Selective in Individualization Phase)
SOCM 404  Global/International Projects in Social Medicine
SOCM 405  Health Systems and Population Health Research
SOCM 408B  (for Science of Medicine Selective at Asheville Campus)
SOCM 410  Readings/Projects in Social Medicine at Asheville Campus
SOCM 412  Clinical Medical Ethics (primary faculty Arlene Davis with Elizabeth Sonntag)
SOCM 416  Advanced Fourth Year Elective in Social Medicine (for Individualization Phase students who have already done one SOCM elective).

See also:
- Registrar’s list of SOCM Electives [may not be complete]
- Examples of prior student electives

last updated 7/19
Individualization Phase SOCM electives
Students should devote time/effort comparable to that expended by a student doing a four-week clinical elective: 40 hrs/wk = 160 hours. There is no official obstacle to a student's logging some of the 160 hours of work in advance. Preceptors will submit a grade/evaluation within a couple of weeks of the end of the block.

Students should anticipate particular need for direct contact with preceptors in the first few days of developing project and methods, and again in review of final project drafts/products. In a four-week elective, these phases of work may feel quite compressed. Other meetings can be at discretion of student and preceptor.

Official schedule of Individualization Phase “blocks” is here.

SOCM 403B is an elective option for the Science of Medicine Selective taken by all students during Individualization Phase. Like all SOCM electives, 403B requires students to work out a project with a faculty preceptor. (Equivalent course on Asheville campus is 408B.) The Selective is open to a range of ethics, policy, STS approaches to medical sciences—but some other Social Medicine subdisciplines will not be appropriate for this particular elective (e.g. creative writing). The selective requires students to attend weekly Science of Medicine sessions and to make a final presentation of bench > bedside connections of a particular bit of bioscience knowledge or technology—a “translational” framework. Most Science of Medicine students present evidence from randomized controlled trials that change clinical outcomes. This framework need not govern the student’s final elective paper, but it does need to inform the 15-min slide presentation (5-10 slides) that the student gives to peers in the final week of the Selective. Students who are unsure about the fit between their elective project and Science of Medicine agendas should consult the SOCM electives coordinator or the Science of Medicine Course Directors (for 2019-20, Drs. Camille Ehre & Christine Kistler).

SOCM Electives Staff
Electives Coordinator: Dr. Barry Saunders (bfsaunde@med.unc.edu)
Course Manager: Kathy Crosier (kathy_crosier@med.unc.edu)