

Suggestions for Students Developing Artistic / Creative Projects in the Scholarly Concentration in Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS)

The HSS Scholarly Concentration (HSS SC) permits students to develop creative artistic studies of medicine with analytical, interpretive, and/or critical dimensions. Creative arts in themselves are not routinely or necessarily counted among humanities and social sciences; analysis, interpretation, and critique are hallmark practices in HSS scholarship. For the HSS SC, artistic projects will require explicit connection to medicine or health, and scholarly examination: thickening of contexts, account of production, or theorizing – to open black boxes of artistic “creation” and “appreciation.”

Students could open scholarly dimensions of their arts projects along any of multiple paths. Most of this will involve supplementary writing—unless these dimensions can be built into the art work itself. Here we suggest several options, a few examples (not an exhaustive list):

- 1) **Scholarly development** might involve *comparison* with works by other artists with which the student’s work has some affinity, or from which it derived inspiration. What have these other artists said about their work? How have critics received them? What audiences have they reached? What aesthetic and intellectual effects have they aimed to produce? What relationships do these other works bear to illness experience, health care, or medical training?
- 2) **Thickened contexts** might involve liner notes on how themes or topics ingredient to the art project have been taken up in HSS literatures around health or health care. For instance, a student’s portrait paintings exploring ethnoracial identity might be accompanied by writing that engages scholarship such as: history of colorimetric palettes in dermatology, or representation of racial minorities in medical textbook illustrations, or literary analyses of Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, or other scholarly analyses of race and graphic representation (e.g. Fanon, Gilman, or Metzler)... Or, thickened contexts might consider aesthetic effects or philosophical insights that the art work means to elicit in medical school audiences (or beyond).
- 3) **Account of production** might involve the student’s written reflection on the creative process: what media, materials, genres, structures, segments were chosen for the finished work/s? What was left on the cutting room floor? How did the student learn or revise her specific techniques (social dimensions of art/craft pedagogy/practice)? How did s/he revise or refine the work? What forms of aesthetic or ethical judgment had to be exercised? Were there collaborators? What emotions, ideas, experiences, or historical conditions inform or constrain the work? How did the student artist’s hopes for what the work could convey, and to whom, affect the production process?

In general, students should be aware of some relevant segment of the wide-ranging scholarly literature about various kinds of artistic production in relation to health/medicine/medical education. Such literature exists for creative/literary/reflective writing, graphic arts, plastic arts, and performing arts. A student should find some modest ways to signal her/his awareness of these conversations, to display some **reflexive, critical or theoretical awareness** of where her/his own work fits, what it accomplishes or echoes or emulates, what difference it makes. Even as student artwork necessarily draws upon

uniquely individual experiences, emotions, and muses, turning it into a scholarly project asks that individual creativity not remain private—but that it open up to larger social worlds.

Individual faculty mentors/elective preceptors will be able to assist students in thinking about ways to develop scholarly dimensions of artistic projects.

Selected references that might provide some perspective (available as PDFs on HSS SC Sakai site):

Benjamin, Walter, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

On the “aura” of an original work is eroded by its copy—and how mechanical techniques of copying / communication produced a modern aesthetics of “shock.”

Benjamin, Walter, “The Storyteller.”

On relationships of narrative with death, and with craft practices, and reconfigurations of these relationships in historical shifts from the short story to the novel.

Berger, John, *Ways of Seeing*, esp. “Chapter 1.”

On how paintings and spaces where they are curated can materialize issues of class position or stratification.

Cartwright, “Science and the Cinema.”

On twined histories of cinematic craft and biological sciences.

Fischer, “Cultural Critique with a Hammer, Gouge, and Woodblock.”

On the print work of physician artist Eric Avery.

Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature.”

On representational conventions and the production of racialized and gendered “types” in pictorial arts.