

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. Students need not be participants in the Humanities & Social Sciences Scholarly Concentration to register for elective work. SOCM electives typically result in a **major (substantial) paper (12-20 pp) or an equivalent product of humanities or social sciences scholarship or creative work**. 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. In general, SOCM electives are not prescheduled and do not have pre-established course syllabi—though SOCM Clinical Ethics electives do have recurring availability and requirements. **Students are responsible** for finding a preceptor, planning their elective, following pre-approval processes if required, 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 availability for mentoring / precepting of an elective project in a specified time frame. **Advance 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, Rachel Niehuus—or, for a Clinical Ethics elective, Arlene Davis or Jean Cadigan—and course manager, Allison Maldonado—that an elective is in the works (their contact information is below). Registration for any SOCM elective requires a coordinator's permission.

Identifying and engaging with a willing faculty preceptor is the key to registration for a SOCM elective. **No elective can be scheduled without permission of a preceptor and electives coordinator.**

Resources to help students identify prospective preceptors (who must be on Social Medicine faculty):

- instructors for SHS1-3 & SHS4 (RICE);
- [faculty member bio pages](#);
- [websites for Social Medicine-affiliated Centers](#): Center for Bioethics, Center for Thriving Communities, and Center for the Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications of Biotechnology;
- Social Medicine electives coordinators: Rachel Niehuus; Arlene Davis (for clinical ethics electives).

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 that students have done to brainstorm, rummage in literature, and consider how their work may fit with work of prospective preceptors is welcome.

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 in the Humanities & Social Sciences Scholarly Concentration will be given special consideration.

Specific Procedures

Eligibility:

Students often register for SOCM electives during specific blocks of Individualization Phase. Students in Application Phase are permitted to register in electives, but generally are able to do so only when some scheduling wrinkle (or deceleration) has freed up a time stretch of clinical commitments. Foundation Phase students are no longer permitted to register for electives while engaged in Foundation Phase coursework. They may register for electives in the summer after MS1 year. (However: summer elective work incurs extra tuition.)

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 the preceptor who will complete a One45 evaluation, and approval of the Social Medicine elective coordinator;
- notify Social Medicine course manager (Allison Maldonado) 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) over whatever interval is agreed with the preceptor. 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 slot, to allow for prompt preceptor evaluation via One45. 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 404 Global/International Projects in Social Medicine
SOCM 405 Health Systems and Population Health Research
SOCM 410 Readings/Projects in Social Medicine at Asheville Campus
SOCM 412 Clinical Medical Ethics (primary faculty Arlene Davis & Jean Cadigan—in selected blocks)
SOCM 416 Advanced Fourth Year Elective in Social Medicine (for Individualization Phase students who have already done one SOCM elective).
SOCM 420 Clinical Medical Ethics Practicum (primary faculty Arlene Davis & Jean Cadigan)

See also [Registrar's list of SOCM Electives](#) [may not be complete]

Individualization Phase SOCM electives

Indy Phase Elective Registration portals have specific deadlines. At the latest, registration may be accomplished in drop/add **no less than 60 days before the elective block desired** (in which elective deliverables will be submitted). Students are responsible for working out elective plans in advance of pertinent deadlines. Deadlines are not good reasons to rush discussions with prospective preceptors. 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—in consultation with the preceptor. Preceptors will submit a grade/evaluation in the One45 evaluation portal within a couple of weeks of the end of the scheduled elective.

Students should arrange 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 are at discretion of student and preceptor.

Official schedule of Individualization Phase “blocks” can be found [here](#).

SOCM Electives Staff

Electives Coordinator: Rachel Niehuus (Rachel_Niehuus@med.unc.edu)

Clinical Ethics Course Dir: Arlene Davis (arlene_davis@med.unc.edu)

Course Manager: Allison Maldonado (allison_maldonado@med.unc.edu)