

The Ancient Roots of Modern Medicine: Development of an Interdisciplinary, Undergraduate Pre-Health Course

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BACKGROUND: Recent years have seen a vehement push for the integration of humanities in medical education to develop professionalism, empathy, innovation, communication, and critical reasoning skills among clinicians in training. Ancient Greek and Latin language, literature and medicine, which lie at the root of modern Western medical terminology and practice, offer an opportune avenue to the study of medical humanities. While many undergraduate programs offer courses in medical etymology, few courses in history, culture, and ethics of ancient Greco-Roman medicine exist; those that do are often higher-division courses targeted to students in the field of Classics.

OBJECTIVES: To create a 36-100 student, lower-division, 3-credit course on the ancient roots of modern medicine, including in etymological, historical, cultural, and ethical terms, and targeted to undergraduate, pre-health students at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

METHODS: Course learning objectives were formulated. Twelve medical etymology textbooks were reviewed and rated on a 4-point utility-scale to identify a main textbook. Thirteen primary sources (ancient texts) and 49 secondary sources (modern scholarship) on ancient and modern medicine were reviewed. Chapters of J. McKeown's *The Hippocrates Code (HP)*, chosen as main textbook, and supplemental readings were annotated and coded by themes derived from content presented. *HP* chapters and supplemental readings were selected to fit a 15-week, Monday-Wednesday-Friday, 50-minute class schedule. Mon/Wed classes were dedicated to etymology content, Fri classes to discussion of culture, ethics, and history of ancient medicine and the relation to modern Western medicine. Fri readings were organized into thematic units: Conceiving Medicine (week 1-3); The Body & the Ethics of "Knowing" (week 4, 6); The Practice of Medicine (week 7-9, 11); Professional Identity & the Physician (week 12-14). Lesson learning objectives and discussion questions for supplemental readings were formulated and grading distribution determined: midterms(2)—30%, final—25%, pop quizzes(6)—10%, online quizzes(weekly)—20%, and attendance/participation—15%.

RESULTS: "CLAS 2030 The Ancient Roots of Modern Medicine" was approved as a Classics course and Arts and Humanities General Education Distribution Requirement. Course will be offered starting in Fall 2022.

DISCUSSION: Capitalizing on modern medical terminology etymology, this Classics course explores modern medicine's ancient roots, beyond just language, and aims to foster humanistic skills invaluable to the field of medicine. Course will be evaluated in its ability to meet stated learning objectives by students who complete course.