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## The Art of Medicine: Art & Anatomy Class Helps Students and Staff See the Person as Well as the Patient

04/09/13 - Life at NYULMC



First-year medical student Annie Wang at NYULMC's Art & Anatomy class, part of the Master Scholars Program in Humanistic Medicine.

"Drawing is such a great way to learn anatomy for students. You commune with the thing you're drawing. You take it in a different way than you do when you're dissecting it. You develop this personal connection with it," says Laura Ferguson, now in her fifth year as artist-in-residence at NYULMC. For the 10 semesters she's been here, she has taught the drawing course Art & Anatomy, one of the ongoing offerings of the Master Scholars Program in Humanistic Medicine, under the auspices of the Office of Student Affairs.

In the words of program director, associate professor Allen Keller, MD, the goal of Art & Anatomy and the other seminars offered by the program each semester, is to "encourage students to explore other areas they're not necessarily getting elsewhere in the curriculum, to help them maintain, nurture, and even grow their idealism." He adds, "Most individuals come to medical school idealistic. At too many medical schools, that gets beaten out of them. At NYULMC, we really are committed to maintaining that."

Most of the program's seminars—which this semester also include The Art of Seeing, which features trips to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Literature and Addiction, as well as a popular healthy cooking course which, like Art & Anatomy, is offered every semester—are open to all members of the Medical Center community. (The cooking class, open only to medical students, is the one exception.) "It's a wonderful opportunity where you have students, residents, faculty, and other individuals from a variety of areas who work at the Medical Center," says Dr. Keller. "Otherwise, we would not likely be sitting in the same room together."

At a recent session of Art & Anatomy, first-year medical students huddled together, many of them chatting away as they drew bones and organs with charcoal or pencils. Another table of artists went about their work more quietly. "It's just a chance to relax a

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*"The great thing about the Art & Anatomy class, you really see how each body is different. When you're drawing, if you draw a heart, you're drawing that particular heart. You want it to look like a portrait of that heart."--NYULMC artist-in-residence Laura Ferguson*

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little bit—wind down the day,” says Abe DeAnda, MD, attending physician in cardiac surgery, who is taking the class for the second semester in a row (it gets many repeat takers). He adds that he is not new to the practice of drawing. “But this is a nice environment to do it in. It’s just a good excuse to get away for an hour and a half a week.”

Andrea Tufano (pictured right, foreground), a faculty group practice assistant in cardiology, also finds that the class is a great way to relax after work, as well as an unusual chance to get up close to the human body. “Where else do you have the opportunity to go into the anatomy lab, and not be stressed about learning all this? Here, we just get to enjoy it and see the beauty in it,” she says.



For Natasha Bobrowski-Khoury, the class makes an excellent complement to her work as a technician in the Department of Physiology and Neuroscience. “As part of my job, I do dissection. It’s not exactly the same,” she explains, since her lab works with mice. “But it’s close enough, because I am working with something that translates to humans. And I’m planning to go to med school, too, so this is kind of introducing me to anatomy already.”

For the medical students, almost all of them in their first year, the class is a welcome break from the rigors of their main curriculum. Annie Wang, who was a pre-med student before coming to NYULMC, finds it provides much-needed balance. “In undergrad I just didn’t have time for anything else, and I really wanted to have something other than school in my life. . . . I did a lot of art in high school, and then I kind of just forgot about it. Now I have the chance to come back to it and it’s really fun.” She adds that it also helps her reflect on the human body in a different way, knowing that she is drawing an actual person. “It’s a little bit of a different perspective on what art is, and it makes you think about bigger questions.”

Her observation is a perfect example of the Medical Humanities Program’s goals at work. Katie Grogan, PhD, the program’s administrator says, “Art & Anatomy is a great example, where students are spending so much time in the anatomy lab anyway, but are actually signing up to come back and spend even more time, because the work they’re doing in a seminar like this is so different, and they sort of reflect on that whole experience. The concept of death and dying—it offers this other platform for them to process that.”

Laura Ferguson concurred that the class provides a connection between seeing the human body, and seeing the person. “The great thing about the Art & Anatomy class, you really see how each body is different. When you’re drawing, if you draw a heart, you’re drawing that particular heart. You want it to look like a portrait of that heart, as opposed to a drawing in a medical textbook, where it’s the most generic heart.”

She continued, “What we try to do is focus on individuality. So you’re thinking about the person whose body it was. Even a bone got to be the way it is partly because of the way that person lived their life: how much walking they did, how strong they were, how much muscular effort went in to shape the bone and make it different from someone else’s bone. I wanted them to have that kind of take on the body, because in med school they dissect and they memorize and they learn all the different parts, but they may not have that connection to the real person—especially the non-diseased person, or the non-pathological person.”

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**The class, which is offered every semester and is open to all Medical Center faculty and staff, is held in the anatomy lab in the MSB basement.**

The Masters Scholars Program, pioneered in 2000 by Steven Abramson, MD, now chair of the Department of Medicine, and Mariano Rey, MD, then dean of students, evolved into its current iteration in 2008 and is now a model for other programs around the country. “There has been so much research about the benefits of the humanities in medical education and rates of burnout in medical school, and how valuable work in these disciplines, and self-reflection is in combating that,” says Dr. Grogan. “We’ve had medical students say that when they were choosing a school, they looked to see what the offerings were in medical humanities.”

The classes also provide a way for diverse members of the Medical Center community to come together around the values—compassion, empathy, communication, justice—that the program advances. “It takes advantage of our broader community and helps us connect,” Dr. Keller said. “It teaches all of those who participate in these activities how interdisciplinary and interdependent ideally medicine and health are. Bringing art, bringing science, bringing humanistic values, are all really important.”

As Dr. Grogan put it, “It’s not tangential to medicine. It’s really intrinsic.”