

MEDICAL HUMANITIES AND BIOETHICS

Degree Types: MA, Dual MA/MD, Dual MA/MS, Certificate

The Master of Arts in Medical Humanities & Bioethics (<https://bioethics.northwestern.edu/masters/>) program provides a rigorous exploration of medicine and its ethical implications through the perspectives of anthropology, literature, philosophy, history, and law. Students acquire the interdisciplinary tools to develop a broader, richer understanding of medicine in society and to engage in complex ethical analysis. Graduates can apply their knowledge and skills to clinical practice, ethics consultation, teaching, policy, and academic scholarship.

This interdisciplinary degree is designed for current and future professionals in medicine and a wide array of healthcare-related fields. It can be pursued independently or as a dual-degree with an MD or MS in Genetic Counseling. Combining the MA with a JD or PhD may also be possible on a case-by-case basis.

The program consists of two years of course work (which can be compressed into one year) and a capstone project.

Additional resources:

- Department website (<https://bioethics.northwestern.edu/masters/>)
- Program handbook(s)

Degrees and Certificate Offered

- Medical Humanities and Bioethics MA (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/medical-humanities-bioethics/medical-humanities-bioethics-ma/>)
- Medical Humanities and Bioethics Certificate (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/medical-humanities-bioethics/medical-humanities-bioethics-cert/>)

Medical Humanities and Bioethics: MA

Learning objective(s)/Students should be able to...

- Identify and apply primary theoretical approaches employed in bioethics case analysis.
- Identify and apply concepts and methods of literary analysis to interpret bioethical and clinical texts.
- Identify and apply basic legal reasoning to the critical reading and analysis of judicial opinions in medicine.
- Identify and apply concepts and methods of social science research to analyzing contemporary dilemmas in medicine and bioethics.
- Identify and apply historical reasoning and methods to analyzing contemporary problems in medicine.
- Identify range of professional roles and skills in bioethics, complete ethics consult experience, and develop and present a scholarly presentation for a bioethics audience.
- Engage with colleagues in scholarly, collegial critique of emerging research in the field.
- Design and execute a scholarly exploration of the literature around a chosen topic of interest.

- Demonstrate ability to apply and integrate the theoretical and methodological tools from MHB core disciplines to problems in medicine.

Medical Humanities and Bioethics Courses

MHB 401-0 Foundations of Bioethics (1 Unit)

This course will explore major theories and key cases in contemporary bioethics. Participants will learn the history and the application of the major moral theories in the discipline of bioethics, such as principlism, casuistry, care ethics, virtue ethics, and narrative ethics. A survey of the central issues in bioethics will be examined through key historical cases.

MHB 402-0 Medicine & Law (1 Unit)

Using judicial opinions as our primary texts, this highly interactive seminar focuses on constitutional law and analyzes how the U.S. legal system mediates conflicts between individuals and the State, parents and children, and doctors and patients in areas including reproductive medicine (contraception, abortion, & assisted reproductive technologies), end-of-life medicine (withdrawal of life support, physician assisted suicide/dying), genetics, and public health.

MHB 403-0 The History of Medicine and Bioethics (1 Unit)

In this course, we examine aspects of the history of medicine in the US, from the nineteenth century to the present, paying particular attention to changes and continuities over time. In so doing, we consider the ever-changing and provisional nature of medicine, the ways medicine is embedded within society, and how medicine both supports and is shaped by non-medical factors.

MHB 404-0 Literature, Medicine, and Bioethics (1 Unit)

This course surveys the uses of literary texts and theories in understanding the workings of health care, illness experience, and bioethics. The first five weeks focus on narratology and close reading as methods for understanding texts relevant to medicine and illness; the second on how narrative works in bioethics, from clinical ethics to speculative fiction to the design of health policy.

MHB 405-0 Social Science and Medicine (1 Unit)

This course will introduce students to key classic and contemporary scholarship in the social science of medicine to explore how empirical research can inform and enrich our understanding of moral issues in medicine. Organized around a series of core topics in bioethics (e.g. death and dying, reproductive technologies, organ transplantation, and disability), the course examines a range of theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies from the social sciences, with a particular emphasis on ethnographic and cross-cultural approaches. Students will learn how to interpret and assess social scientific research, as well as how to bring a social scientific perspective to bear on problems in medicine.

MHB 406-0 The Practice of MH&B (1 Unit)

This capstone course takes students from theory to practice, providing an introduction to ways they might put their MHB knowledge into action as they develop careers in various clinical and social contexts. One-third of the course is devoted to the practice of clinical ethics consultation and the work of institutional ethics committees. Other topics covered include writing and publishing academic articles, delivering compelling conference presentations, developing excellent teaching skills, conducting and regulating research, and offering expert opinion to public debate through the media.

MHB 410-0 Special Topics in Medical Humanities and Bioethics (0.5 Unit)

This course presents a series of lectures throughout the school year to acquaint students with particular topics or issues in medical humanities and bioethics, not covered by other courses in the curriculum. Lecturers will present introductions to particular topics and their current research.

MHB 499-0 Independent Study (0.5-1 Unit)

This is a course of independent study on a topic or topics within bioethics and/or the medical humanities. Students will study independently or in small groups, guided by regular meetings with program faculty. Topics, course content, and meeting schedule will be developed in consultation with faculty.

MHB 500-0 Capstone Project in Medical Humanities and Bioethics (1 Unit)

The final requirement of the MHB program, this course challenges students to analyze topics in bioethics or medical humanities and to employ the field's multiple disciplines in their analysis. Students may choose between two rigorous capstone options. The first option is a comprehensive exam, which requires long-form essay responses to four questions. The second option is a master's thesis, which is a writing project intended to produce a knowledgeable survey of the current thinking about a specific topic in the field. Both options require analytical and writing skills, a mastery of the disciplinary approaches covered in the MHB core courses, and the ability to justify one's work in an oral defense.