

Women's  
Center for Ethics in Action

in alliance with men

**ARTS EDUCATION FOR THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS**

Précis:

Art critic Edgar Allen Beem wrote in the *Maine Times* that "...artists function as modern day shamans or witch doctors, keeping the bean-counting masses in touch with the myth and magic of existence through the alchemy of their art." While the arts are often the first to be discarded in any downturn of the economy, there are numerous pieces of evidence, both scientific and anecdotal, demonstrating the integral connection between life-long learning and an immersion in the arts.

Request:

This is a proposal to create a powerful piece of creative evidence that the arts can aid our learning. In this case, the arts can be shown to specifically train health professionals to do a better job. The grant will be used to pay the Gallery director to develop a full-fledged program of course instruction based on the results of this fall's pilot project, and to produce a workbook of art observation & communication exercises for use in the classroom during the spring semester and in years to come. The grant will also support evaluation efforts to determine the effectiveness of incorporating art into the education of health professionals. Assistant Professor of Nursing, Karen Pardue will collaborate as a content expert/resource to provide curriculum relevancy between the arts and health care education.

History:

Since its founding, the University of New England has played a leadership role in health professions education throughout the region. At the College of Health Professions (CHP), the physical and occupational therapy programs have built strong reputations and the physician assistant program was ranked as one of the top 25 in the nation by *U.S. News and World Report*. The CHP has recently implemented an innovative model for health professions education that will transform the face of health care in Maine, New England and the nation. Developed by the Dean and faculty, the *Integrated, Interdisciplinary Health and Healing Initiative (I<sup>2</sup>H<sup>2</sup>)* represents a major shift in the traditional approach for preparing health professionals.

Prevailing education and training models around the nation prepare health care professionals in the isolation of their own disciplines. The I<sup>2</sup>H<sup>2</sup> model is designed to prepare health professionals to be highly effective members of *collaborative teams* that will offer successful health care for individuals, work towards positive health outcomes for communities and evaluate the results of their efforts. This is being accomplished through the development and implementation of an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum, as well as clinical training, practice and research. The College of Health Professions' vision, the University of New England's experience and reputation in health professions education, and the location of the Westbrook College Campus in the center of health care in Maine, are all keys to the success of this ambitious project.

The Art Gallery on the University's Westbrook College Campus has a history worthy of a film noir treatment. This edifice, known as the cube or "little jewel" was designed by Thomas Larson and students, and built in 25 years ago by John Whitney Payson on the campus of the then Westbrook College to house the valuable Impressionist Collection of art assembled by his mother, the Mets-owning Joan Whitney Payson. For a number of years, visitors to the Gallery first encountered the famous *Les Iris* oil painting by Vincent Van Gogh directly facing them as they entered.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the Payson collection, which also included works by Whistler, Homer, Renoir, and Manet, among others, was transferred across the city of Portland to the Portland Museum of Art in 1991. The doors of this little jewel were then closed for seven years. Some of the many possible reasons for this development include the Payson divorce from the woman who had graduated from this school, the loss of students during its last decade.

#### Need:

When Pardue and Zill began their discussion, they first examined the needs of health providers.

Health providers utilize visual abilities, and all of their senses, as discriminating tools in gathering patient-related data. Careful inspection allows the practitioner to identify variations and changes from normal. Astute visual examination helps the clinician to arrive at an accurate diagnosis. Health profession students need to develop these finely tuned observational skills and abilities. Students also need a variety of opportunities to practice and improve visual aptitude. In addition, observation is a valuable skill -- it is a non-intrusive and non-threatening experience for the patient; it is a gentle approach that can yield considerable information.

Health professionals utilize inspection/observation as a part of the physical examination process, using the human body as the medium. The most commonly noted observations include reference to size, shape, proportion, symmetry, color, texture and light.

Much information can be gleaned through this visual assessment. When considering size, shape and proportion, the right and left side of the body is symmetrical. They form a mirror image of one another. Although minor asymmetry may turn out to be a normal finding, often left to right variations in size, shape, circumference or mobility of the arm or leg point to early indications of health problems.

The human body provides observational opportunities related to color. Healthy lips should be rosy and moist. Grey or bluish lips often signal a problem with circulation or oxygenation. Nail beds should be pink, and color should return quickly when blanched. Fingers and toes should appear the same color as the rest of the body.

Texture is another visual consideration for the health provider. Coarseness of hair and thickness of skin may provide clues regarding nutritional states or circulation.

Lighting is a final element to take into account in the process of a health examination. Shadows or dimness of light limit findings and may mask existing problems. Clarity of light, and appropriate positioning of patients in the light, are valuable considerations as part of the physical examination.

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<sup>1</sup> This work of art made the front page of the New York Times in 1987 when it was sold at Sothebys for \$53.9 million, the highest amount ever paid for an Impressionist painting at that time.

Given these needs, students in the health professions require varied and stimulating opportunities to develop and refine observational skills.

Thoughtfully incorporating the art gallery into the student's academic experience can serve as a natural extension for the inspection concepts explored in the classroom and through textbook readings. Through discovery in the gallery, students can embrace an unhurried visualization of a variety of mediums, and can develop a greater awareness of their personal ability to note form, size and shape. The literature reveals that students often progress too quickly to the 'hands on' part of a physical examination, and fail to focus on the important data gained through careful observation. Time and experience in the gallery will facilitate the growth of observational capabilities among health profession students.

These guided exercises in the gallery not only enhance student visual abilities but also provide opportunity for increased interdisciplinary communication. This experience will encourage students in multiple health professions to offer a personal interpretation of what they observe, and communicate this perspective to others. This oral exploration serves as an opportunity to collectively share and learn, and creates an environment for inter-professional discussion. This dialogue can deepen the respect and appreciation participants have for their colleagues across the spectrum of health professions. The aim here is to build networks and relationships for future interdisciplinary activity and study.

The Gallery views this program as an opportunity to demonstrate other broader cultural and artistic perspectives as well. Art appreciation helps us to see our world in visual terms, to learn about different styles, mediums, ages, cultures, and methods of communication. Studying works of art sharpens our interpretive skills and helps us to see our own values preferences. (Do we love the abstract, the representational, or both forms of art?)

Professional artists who have had formal art training report that this profession is not well defined. Artists frequently use materials and technical methodologies in unusual ways, sometimes like no one else has ever done before. And every time is different. When creating works of art, artists have to think it through all the time. Learning about art helps with critical thinking, and is good for the mind in general.

"An increasing number of health professionals [also] acknowledge the contribution of the arts to mental and physical well-being," according to A. Liddon writing in *Health Service Journal* in 1996.

Since the Gallery has been re-opened to the public, the Director and staff have worked hard to present exhibitions of the highest quality. Most of the annual exhibitions have received glowing press attention.

Highlights of last year have included:

- An innovative Art in Action program for school children,
- Record-breaking attendance for its *Women of the World* exhibition -- which made the front page of USA Today, as well as its national website,
- The first Annual Sculpture Garden Invitational, and
- A gala celebration honoring John Payson, Nancy Payson, benefactors, Thomas Larson, architect, and Judith Sobol, former director.

- *Colors of Africa*, an exhibition of contemporary African art featuring 34 artists from 18 countries ranging from Egypt and South Africa to Nigeria, Benin and Zimbabwe.
- Four Maine Treasure Troves, works of art and furniture from four strong private collections in the area, ranging from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance to cutting edge post modern.
- Events as various as a dance presentation by Portland high school students from Sudan with hors d'oeuvres provided by Portland's Ezo African Restaurant; a Gallery Talk by a Cuban artist and art historian; and a Lantern Slide Show featuring unique slides from the 1890's made by the founder of the Portland Camera Club.

#### Activities:

Through scheduled classes held in the Gallery, students in Nursing, Dental Hygiene, Physician Assistant and Occupational Therapy programs will participate with Director Zill and Professor Pardue in guided viewing activities. The observational lessons are organized around the abilities of description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation.

Each class will also engage students in specific exercises to learn "deep viewing" or inspection/observation techniques.

Finally, students will be given readings from papers, articles and books to contribute to their interdisciplinary comprehension of the ways art informs science.

#### Evaluation steps:

Each student will fill out a short evaluation form at the end of their instruction. The instructors will also determine which exercises worked best and why. The discussion tools will also be analyzed for content.

The final product of the workbook will be composed of the most successful elements of the pilot program. Techniques specific to a particular discipline will also be noted and incorporated into the workbook appropriately. Every effort will be made to ensure that subsequent courses of art education draw upon the richest and best description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation methodologies identified during the pilot semester period.

This program is unfunded at present.