

Sarah Thompson

Interdisciplinary Program: Bioethics

Hendrix College

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The field of bioethics is burgeoning; each scientific breakthrough – the decoding of the human genome, the prospect of stem cell research, advances in regenerative medicine – presents society with the same question: how do we apply these remarkable tools? As the rapidly expanding frontiers of scientific discovery provide increased understandings and degrees of control over the human body, the ability to manipulate human biology has unearthed some troubling ethical queries. Because these issues relate directly to the lives and deaths of men and women, these matters warrant careful consideration and study. Our progress in the scientific realms requires philosophical guidance to apply the information afforded by science; scientific and philosophical disciplines are, in this sense, inextricable. And the relationship between the two fields is certainly not lost on the American public. The controversies surrounding bioethical questions have permeated through the consciousness of our society – they serve as the topics of presidential debates, they are woven into the plots of broadcast television, they are handled in the day-to-day workings of healthcare professionals worldwide. These questions are inescapable, and I would like the opportunity to apply the time and study necessary to earnestly struggle with them, within the structured framework of an interdisciplinary program.

Because I am a premedical student, these matters bear particular relevance to my professional aspirations. My education should equip me with the skills required to handle the moral implications of this practice, not just the technical aspects. Beyond this major's applicability to my situation as a pre-medical student, these bioethical questions captivate me, and I find myself unable to detach the ethical from the scientific. Whether administering door-to-door vaccinations in Peru or culturing liver cells right here on Hendrix campus, I feel strongly compelled to dissect and deal with bioethical issues, many of which I have encountered in my

experience as a student of science. The internal controversy sparked by these questions drives me to delve into bioethical debates, and this requires a sustained study of the philosophical issues involved in medicine. To that end, the following interdisciplinary major has been constructed.

The course structure of this interdisciplinary major will provide the appropriate foundations in philosophy and biology. An additional history course is included to establish a historical context for the practice of modern medicine. The depth of the biological study is adequate enough to provide a solid foundation in the science around which these debates revolve. The philosophy courses, then, will provide exposure to the arguments surrounding many contemporary bioethical debates and guidance in the analysis and evaluations of these issues. Because there are few course options available at Hendrix which address bioethics specifically, an independent study with a member of the Hendrix faculty and an overseas study course are included among the course requirements. An internship will also be helpful in furthering bioethical study and establishing the necessary depth of focus required for this major. Similarly the capstone, which will consist of a research project and paper, will demand substantial research and investigation.

## Course Structure

- 1) The Core: The following courses must be completed and will serve as the foundation of the bioethics major:
  - 1) BIOL 150: Cell Biology
  - 2) CHEM 240: Organic Chemistry I
  - 3) CHEM 250: Organic Chemistry II
  - 4) GT301: Genetics (National University of Ireland at Galway [NUI-Galway])
  - 5) HIST 227: Medicine and Disease in Pre-modern Europe
  - 6) PHIL 225: Ethics and Medicine
  - 7) PHIL 330: Ethical Theory
  - 8) Bioethics Seminar -- Oxford Overseas Study Program (1 course credit)
  - 9) PHIL 490: Independent Study, Capstone (see below)
- 2) Electives: In order to complete the course requirements two of the following courses will be completed in addition to the core requirements listed above:
  - 1) BIOL 470: Advanced Genetics
  - 2) PHIL 350: Philosophy of Science
  - 3) BI315: Biochemistry II (NUI-Galway)
  - 4) AN213: Human Gross Anatomy (NUI-Galway)
  - 5) MI317: Molecular and Cell Microbiology
  - 6) PHIL 385: Epistemology
- 3) Internship (Optional): Along with the established coursework, the student should participate in an internship program focusing on bioethics. While any Hendrix-approved internship offering a bioethical study for undergraduates would suffice, some possibilities include:
  - 1) Center for Clinical Bioethics - Georgetown University Medical Center
  - 2) The Hastings Center
  - 3) Center for Science in the Public Interest
  - 4) Genetic Alliance
- 4) Capstone: PHIL 490 – (Special Topics) Independent Study – Bioethics  
The bioethics major would culminate with an independent study under a philosophy professor and a research project and paper on a topic selected by the student. The grade on the independent study will be the Capstone grade.