The Department of Medical History and Ethics provides academic education and professional training in medical humanities through four program areas: a Master of Arts in Bioethics, an undergraduate Minor in Medical History and Ethics, a Theme in Professional Responsibility and Medical Ethics integrated into the School of Medicine curriculum, and a variety of continuing education activities for practicing health care professionals.

1) Student Access and Opportunity

Our Master of Arts in Bioethics program was re-activated in 2002 after a several year hiatus, and is limited in enrollment to a maximum of six students. We are currently recruiting applicants for our third entering class. Current enrollment is five. The current program has been re-structured, and our outreach efforts are still evolving. Our primary goal thus far has been to identify the educational and career backgrounds of our optimal applicant pool, which in turn will allow us to target our diversity efforts in those areas. Our students come from backgrounds ranging from clinical nursing to philosophy and law. To date, we have broadcast our message via our website, announcements at bioethics conferences, and mailings to Departments of Philosophy across the country.

The department has an excellent Graduate Program Assistant who nurtures applicants and works hard to address their individual needs and priorities during the application process. Under her guidance, one of our current students was able to receive a Graduate Opportunities & Minority Achievement Program (GO-MAP) scholarship. We have no departmental scholarship funds available and greatly appreciate the Graduate School’s GO-MAP program as it provides a competitive tool for attracting minority applicants. The department participates in the annual GO-MAP on-campus fair.

The department has also made efforts at outreach to students beyond the Master’s program. For example, in 2003, we initiated an undergraduate summer research assistant program. Our extramurally-funded research program enabled us to hire several undergraduate students for summer internships. The students generally worked independently on project-specific assignments; however, to maximise the learning experience for these students, our faculty (Burke and Fryer-Edwards) developed a seminar series entitled “Race and Genomics.” This seminar series allowed the students to interact formally with faculty and each other. Depending on funding availability, we hope to be able to continue and formalize this program. This would allow us initiate specific recruitment efforts and to target a diverse pool of applicants for the program. As several of these students anticipate attending graduate or medical school after completing their undergraduate education, a potential ancillary benefit from this program lies in introducing these students to the University of Washington as an attractive option for graduate study.
2) Student Development and Retention

One advantage to a graduate program with limited enrollment is the individual attention it allows faculty and staff to provide to students. In a given academic year, our faculty advisors mentor a maximum of one or two students. The Graduate Program Director provides leadership in this area by developing procedures for student tracking and as Chair of a Student Oversight Committee that assesses student progress at periodic intervals. Additionally, our Graduate Program Assistant provides individual guidance on issues ranging from academic needs to housing to social issues.

Meeting the financial as well as academic needs of our students is critical in retention. We are not in a position to guarantee funding for entering students; however, to date, we have been fortunate enough to be able to offer Research Assistantship to all our graduate students who expressed an interest in this option. Our department would appreciate any centralized programs the University might offer to assist in meeting the financial needs of graduate students as they expand our ability to be competitive in attracting a diverse group of students.

At the end of the program’s first year, we conducted a focus group with the 3 graduate students to elicit their thoughts and suggestions on the program. Specific changes have been implemented based on this feedback, including changes in mentoring procedures and course requirements. This spring, we plan to conduct similar discussion groups with both 1st and 2nd year students and this formal feedback will evolve along with the program.

3) Engagement with External Community

The Department has an established Continuing Education Program with outreach efforts to a broad range of health care professionals. For example, we host a week-long Summer Seminar in Medical Ethics as well as an accompanying certificate program. This Seminar is designed for health care professionals with an interest in clinical ethics. It attracts a geographically and ethnically diverse group. The goal with recruitment efforts here is to reach as broad an audience within the health care community as possible.

Department faculty (McCormick, Fryer-Edwards) also participate as instructors in the U-DOC program. (U-DOC is a high school summer enrichment program offered by the University of Washington School of Medicine Office of Multicultural Affairs. U-DOC's goal is to foster, affirm and encourage high school students' interest in the medical profession by allowing them to further explore medical careers and to get a valuable introduction to college life.)

The Department’s community outreach efforts include variety of sponsored lectures. We sponsor an endowed Bodemer Lecture featuring a speaker or speakers with expertise in medical history and/or bioethics. The department also sponsors the Medical Ethics Brown Bag lunchtime series open to the University community and the public. We primarily use posters and University media outlets to publicise these events. One of our current outreach efforts springs from the funded-research of
Denise Dudzinski, PhD. Professor Dudzinski is funded to sponsor Science and Faith/Values themed lectures with the goal of bridge-building. We have compiled mailing lists to invite a diverse audience of on-campus and off-campus faith communities to this lecture.

4) Staff and Administrative Diversity

As previously noted, we are a small department: there are currently 4 staff positions in the department. In our staff recruitment efforts, our policy is to promote access and diversity. We use the HR recruitment services and thus benefit from their efforts at outreach to diverse applicants. In addition, we include a statement of equal opportunity in all recruitment materials and include complete contact information for the Disability Services Office in our response letters to all applicants. We intend through these formalities to express our commitment to equal opportunity and access.

5) Faculty Diversity

The Department of Medical History and Ethics has 6 full-time faculty members, 2 active emeritus faculty members and one joint position with Medicine (20% fte in MHE). Our most notable success with diversity among our faculty is gender equity. In all of our faculty searches we follow and value the Equal Opportunity Office’s guidelines regarding advertising the positions.

Given that our department encompasses both medical history and bioethics, we have the advantage of representing a range of academic and experiential backgrounds. Our faculty includes historians, philosophers, physicians, and clinical ethicists. We also greatly value the contribution of our affiliated faculty who contribute significant diversity to our department.

6) Curriculum and Research

Our curriculum is designed to encompass a broad range of perspectives and to appeal to a range of student interests. In addition to core courses in medical history and ethics, we offer courses as diverse as “Concepts of the Body in 19th and 20th Century America”, “Alternative Approaches to Healing” and “Genetic Discovery in Medicine and Public Health”.

The Department’s research program has grown substantially under the leadership of Dr. Burke and many projects include a specific focus on minority and/or underserved populations. Most recently, we submitted an application for a Center of Excellence in Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications Research entitled, Genomic Health Care and the Medically Underserved. If funded, this Center will not only build upon and greatly expand the collaborative efforts of an ethnically and culturally diverse group of Investigators, but will also provide training opportunities to Native American post-doctoral fellows and junior faculty.
7) Climate

The Department of Medical History and Ethics adheres to the University’s commitment to providing a workplace that is diverse and welcoming and one that is, above all, free from discrimination. Our goal is to provide a safe, open and intellectually stimulating environment. For example, our students are provided work carrels within the department suite in an effort to facilitate and encourage interaction with both faculty and staff. Additionally, the Chair has a policy of being available to meet with faculty, staff and students to address any concerns that may arise.