



# News and Views from the INSTITUTE FOR THE MEDICAL HUMANITIES

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## **IN PAPYRAL FULFILLMENT OF MY LOVE OF WISDOM: WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT PAPER DURING THE WRITING OF MY DISSERTATION**

Six weeks prior to my oral examination, I sent out paper copies of my Ph.D. dissertation to my committee members to review. The final form of the dissertation must be submitted electronically to the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. The signatures of committee members must be placed on 100 percent cotton bond paper. Thus, paper retains its authority while electronic copy has established its status as a secure space saver. I want to write a few words about my thoughts on paper culture because through the years that I worked on my dissertation, I consumed reams of paper while, at the same time, I could not do without the convenience and neatness of electronic transactions. My question is: Will the world eventually go paperless?

Mandira Mitra's poem, "A Dissertation on Dissertations," goes: "A soulful of you, lost in crowded stacks / In medias University's mildewed racks / Instructing moths and silverfish / In partial fulfillment of grandma's last wish." As much as browsing in a bookstore enjoying the fresh smell and crisp touch of new books, I like being lost in the musty smelling stacks of library books. When with a pencil in my gloved hand I copied passages from Sylvius and Richard Morton in the Blocker History of Medicine Collection, I felt something that I never do when I make photocopies—a feeling that I am one with a heritage larger than myself. True, paper is vulnerable to moths and silverfish. Hurricane Ike forced me to throw away a great deal of documents and books damaged by the water in my house. All collections of rare books will be eventually digitalized to be accessible to scholars and general public alike. Actually, while I hardly visited the library through

the years of my researching and writing, I did Google search every single day.

Nevertheless, as one from a culture that embraces paper art, such as origami, paper screens, and calligraphy, I am reluctant to believe that books made of paper will disappear. If you have taken Dr. Eric Avery's art practicum, you may have been fascinated not only by the beauty of paper but also by the creative process of paper making. Will paper survive simply in objects of art? In *The Uprising of Books: The Age of Googleberg*, the Japanese author Minato Chihiro suggests that in a thousand years, the age of paper books will be seen as an "exceptional age" between those of lithography and of electronics. Another Japanese author, Maeda Rui, writes in *When Paper Books Perish* that paper books have no future and poses a question about what literature can do when classics and Twitters become "data" on the same level.

To predict the fate of paper, one may need to consider how knowledge has been conveyed with media including paper. The historians Ian F. McNeely and Lisa Wolverton argue in *Reinventing Knowledge: From Alexandria to the Internet* that the institutes of knowledge have been the library, the monastery, the university, the republic of letters, the disciplines, and the laboratory. Before the



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library there was Socratic dialogue. The libraries in Alexandria and in the Kan Dynasty represented the edifice of wisdom in the West and the East, respectively. The university in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was not the institution in a modern sense but, rather, human networking by instructors and students. By the republic of letters, the authors mean the period from the seventeenth century through the Age of Enlightenment when letters were circulated and multiple authors made additions, just as what goes on in today's Twitter. In the age of science, laboratories became the place of hypothesizing, proving, reproducing, and publishing new facts. The present is the era of the laboratory but also of the internet. I realize that the IMH has all the characteristics of these historical spaces of intellectual encounters. For the IMH, knowledge is not mere data but an invitation to reflect on the past,

act in the present, and envision the future. Knowledge is being shared dialogically and practically, paper-based and paper-free in our institute.

I concluded my dissertation with my wishful thought that people in 2525 may call the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the Renaissance, when the spirit of humanity and humanism present in the early Renaissance in Europe was revived on a global level in the form of the medical humanities, of which my area of interest, literature and medicine, was a vital part. What will become of the culture of paper? I think that knowledge as data will quickly make paper a relic of the past but that the knowledge the medical humanities reinvent will continue to embrace paper as culture.

Nobue Urushihara Urvil

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## **IMH NEWS IN BRIEF**

Bill Winslade gave several presentations at the University of California (UC) at Davis in February. He presented "The Puzzles of Pedophilia" for the Bioethics Program of the UC Davis School of Medicine and the School of Law. He was the Bioethics Distinguished Lecturer at the UC Davis Health System where he presented "The Birth, Life, and Death of the Brain: Legal and Ethical Perspectives." Winslade also led workshops with hospital clergy and social workers in the UC Davis Health System.



Anne Hudson Jones gave a presentation titled "Knowing and Not Knowing: Triage, Trauma, and Double Effect at Memorial Medical Center after Katrina," at a conference on "Echoes of Trauma: Exploring the Intersections of Trauma and Culture," held at LSU, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, March 3-4, 2011. The international conference was organized and hosted by LSU's English Graduate Student Association as their 21st Annual Mardi Gras Conference.



Howard Brody and Laura D. Hermer published "Professionally Responsible Malpractice Reform" in *the Journal of General Internal Medicine* online.

The article "Artificial Nutrition and Hydration: The Evolution of Ethics, Evidence, and Policy" by Howard Brody, Laura D. Hermer, Larry D. Scott, L. Lee Grumbles, Julie E. Kutac, and Susan D. McCammon was accepted by the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*.



Howard Brody spoke on "The Future of Bioethics" for the 20th Anniversary Ethics Symposium of the Kaiser-Permanente Northern California Department of Medical Ethics.

Laura Hermer presented "Medicaid: Dangerous Times" at the Department of Pediatrics Grand Rounds and Robert M. Rose presented "Working to Put the Brain Back into Biomedicine: Studies Linking Mind, Brain, Body, and Health" at the Department of Psychiatry Grand Rounds.

## **GRADUATE STUDENT NEWS**

Several students presented papers at the First Annual Student Humanities Symposium, hosted by the McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston on March 19. Peggy Determeyer presented "Not Dead Yet: The Case for a Holistic View of Brain Death," Andrew Childress spoke on "Liminality and the Subjective Experience of Catastrophic Illness and Injury" and Alina Bennett presented "Medical Humanities and Medical Education."



Sheena Eagan and Alina Bennett attended the National Undergraduate Bioethics Conference and the Feminist Theory Workshop both held at Duke University. They hosted an information table about the IMH graduate program in order to recruit potential new students.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

A special IMH Colloquium will be held on Wednesday, April 6, 2011, 10:30 a.m.–noon, in 2.222 Primary Care Pavilion (PCP). Terrell Dixon, Ph.D., Associate Professor of English at the University of Houston, will give a presentation titled "The Native Health Conundrum and the Drilling Fight for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge."