



Incorporating Ignatian Values Into a Human Gross Anatomy Course

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The Course

PTD 500 Human Anatomy is a 7 credit lecture- laboratory course taught to first semester physical therapist students. Human anatomy is foundational knowledge to the clinical practice of physical therapy and still explains much of the “why” of physical therapy interventions in many practice environments.

Students are challenged on many levels to manage and comprehend an enormous volume of factual knowledge. The gift of the donor body greatly assists the students’ ability to learn and retain this information. While the donor is the “first patient”, the academic demands of the course can lead to a “depersonalization” of the donor. Furthermore, the experience of donor body dissection confronts the student with the limits of physical life, including death and disability.

This experience for the student creates a unique opportunity to incorporate reflection and to develop habits of thinking that will support them during future emotionally demanding experiences both as a student and as a physical therapist post graduation.



The Assignment

Reflective Writing Project:

Human anatomy confronts the student with limits on physical life: the realities of illness, injury, aging and dying. These same realities are experienced by physical therapists in clinical practice. The human cadaver is the first patient for each student- a gift from a family for the education and help of others. The purpose of this project is to reflect upon these realities, how to create professional separation without depersonalization and to think about the relationship between science and art. Students are expected to write 3-5 (double- spaced, Microsoft Word docx. file) pages of their reflections on *the meaning* of learning using the cadaver over the ten dissection weeks of the course.

To assist with the identification of a personal meaning of the gift, students should select one (or more) of the five Ignatian values emphasized by SPAHP to center their reflective writing:

- Finding God in All Things
- Cura Personalis
- Magis
- Men and Women For and With Others
- Faith That Does Justice

Students may select one or more values and reflect upon how the donor’s gift demonstrated this (these) value(s). A description of each value can be found at <http://spahp.creighton.edu/departments-offices/chaplains/ignatian-spirituality>.

A Student Exemplar

...To see a body by which a whole *personal universe was experienced in is a miracle*. The gift assigned to me was Paul and I know nothing about him besides the bundle of various tubes, tissues bonded together by ligaments, skin, collagen, proteins and cause of death. Because of Paul I was gifted the opportunity to understand death in a way removed from the abrasive of trauma attached to seeing it occur in someone you love and adore. Because of the abrasive nature in my own experiences with death, I never have placed my bet on there being existence beyond our earthly conscience, for there to be a causal impetus to biology, physics, thermodynamics etc. Frustratingly in the past, this led me to the tendency to devalue any conversation of inherent value and virtue to the human life. Nothing like a conversation with your brilliant father in between rounds of chemo to change your mind on the topic of human life.

The level by which you ‘*cura personalis*’ is predicated on the value by which you place in the word ‘person’. In our culture, there is an underlying belief that propagates a feeling that human life is simply the collection of A to B signals, chemical synapses, or a more complicated monkey. While, scientifically yes this is correct. To hold the definition of ‘person’ to the lowly in comparison standards of the experimental method is wrong. Regardless, of God, of the meaning of life, of scope of science etc. But, precisely because of the muscles, ligaments, minerals, proteins, ion differentials and any other law of physical nature there is; the truth still exists that by the mechanism of these bits and pieces. For a seemingly infinite amount of time; Paul held the hand of his wife, felt the pain of losing a job, learned to play baseball, felt anger at a classmate, wrote papers in college, asked his wife out for the first time etc. The compilation of occurrences and memories are what created the person Paul was. The specific biology I see in front of me was both the direct result of that life, and the precise reason Paul lead the life he did. On top of this, the life Paul lived ripples into the lives of others, in more ways than three pages may allow...

