

Savannah Mohacsi

Human Biology Proposal of Study

There was one class in my Stanford career that had a tremendous impact on me. The Thinking Matters course, Reading the Body, taught by Cari Costanzo and Abraham Verghese, inspired me to think critically about the world, especially humanity. It was taught with a dual perspective: anthropology and medicine, to better represent how our bodies are perceived medically, socially, and culturally. This course made me reflect on the way these entities guide how we accept, reject, and analyze our bodies. The way we view our bodies and other's bodies influences how we experience life, whether it be through illness, disability, gender, or racial identities. Reading the Body provided me with the framework to better understand humanity and the intricacies and differences that compose our identities and experiences. This is the mindset I want to continue building through my Human Biology concentration. My ultimate goal is to become a physician, but a physician who truly understands how every patient has a body that carries stories, connotations, and adversity.

My Area of Concentration will be titled: **How the Mind and Body Shape Human Experience**. It will fulfill two Areas of Emphasis: Ethics and Medical Humanities and Bio-Medical Science. I am using my concentration to enhance my compassion for the body, and understand how the mind and body are two dual entities that give a human their sense of identity. I want to explore the body physically through Physiology to appreciate the body as a form and how that form visually sets norms in the way it is meant to function and look. I want to investigate the social sciences, like sociology and anthropology, to unfold the human experience. Additionally, I want to look to psychology to understand how the mind works, and in turn, integrate that knowledge to understand how the mind can manifest within the body.

I want to obtain a Bachelors of Arts because the bulk of my classes are within the humanities, or medical humanities. I will be taking a few biological science classes; however, the overall picture I want to have of the body is more holistically rooted in the humanities. Both the harder and the softer sciences are needed for me to fulfill this though.

Right now I am taking **Medical Anthropology (Humbio176A/Anthro82, A. Garcia)** because it is providing me with the framework for my concentration. In this class, Dr. Garcia explains the body through anthropological perspectives and terminology to allow the students to understand how society and cultures know and understand the body. This class is vital to my concentration because it allows me to understand the body through a biomedical perspective, a cultural perspective, a societal perspective, a political perspective, and through the perspective of the individual embodied experience.

Another course I plan on taking is **Mind, Culture, and Society (Psych215, Markus, H.)** which explores through a psychological perspective of how there is an interdependence between the psychological and the sociocultural. It's important to understand how society can imprint and shape the mind, because that contributes to the way one forms and creates their identities.

I plan on taking **Regional Study of Human Structure (Surg101, Gosling, J.)** as well as **Human Physiology (Humbio133, Kao, P.)** to fulfill the more biological perspective of the body. Both classes will provide me with the foundations of human structure, through studying the skeleton and muscles in cadaver dissection, as well as understanding how the physicality of the body is capable of controlling metabolic processes and mechanisms in the body, all of which inform how our bodies function. By understanding the function of the body, I will be able to draw to this source of knowledge when understanding the body in terms of societal constructs. I won't be able to understand the embodied experience of disease, if I don't understand how the

disease takes over the body biologically. Physiology and anatomy are taught from a biomedical perspective that standardizes what is normal in terms of the physical body. I will be able to better understand deviance in social identities if I have a baseline of how our medical system sees the body.

I plan on taking **The Art of Vision (Humbio167, Marmor, M.)** because it provides me with a more niche perspective of the body, through the eyes. This course goes through biological functioning of the eyes, and connects it to the social context of art. Through the biological process of processing vision through one's own body, that information transmits to the mind and processes our perspective of the world, then that perspective is transmitted back to the world in the way we treat other bodies and the we perceive our own bodies. This class epitomizes the interdisciplinary nature of my concentration as it engages with what is normal and abnormal in art, due to the way the artist perceived the world through the biological condition of their sight.

I plan on taking **Literature and Medicine (English185A, Professor not listed)** because it will teach me how literature can define and redefine the relationship between physical suffering and medical treatment. This combines the physicality of the body as seen through the lens of biomedicine and the embodied experience of illness of the patient. Literature gives the perspective of how society views this relationship, which differs from the more analytical approaches in which a medical textbook would depict the human and illness. The narrative of disease provides so much more insight into the holistic human experience, providing a framework to understand a patient's identity.

I plan on taking **Foundations of Bioethics (Humbio174, Magnus, D.)** to see how the body and the mind interact in ethical concepts. By understanding bioethics, I will better be able to understand why a body needs to be treated in a certain way, and what happens to human when

they are not treated in the way that abides by society's ethical frameworks. That will help me grasp how treatment of an individual, body, or part of a body, seeks to politicize the human, and how we create boundaries in the field of medicine based on these ethical concerns.

My introductory courses in my breadth include pre-med requirements, such as chemistry, which helped me understand how the body functions on an atomic level. My pre-med classes influenced me to major in human biology so I can explore the human further. I've taken **Art of Medical Diagnosis**, an introseminar taught by Dr. Samuel Rodriguez, Dr. Tom Caruso, and the artist Lauren Toomer. This was one of my favorite classes and provided me with the observational skills of looking at art, and applying it to skills that would help me be keen in the process of diagnosis as a physician. Observation is key in trying to understand the body, and draw conclusions of what is going on inside, whether that pertains to a problem in the mind or a physical illness. I haven't taken this yet, but I plan on adding **Introduction to Psychology (Crosby, Jennifer)** to my breadth, to give me a framework for interpreting the mind and how it manifests in emotions, mental illness, personality, behavior, and perception. Right now I'm in a class called **Challenging Sex and Gender Dichotomies in Biology and Medicine (Stefanick, Marcia)** which explores gender and sex through a biomedical perspective (sex) and through a social perspective (gender). I'm learning how biology and the social are intermixed and that the problem with research today is that researchers are failing to consider the concept of gender, since it's difficult to quantify. This class provides a solid framework of how the body fulfills the biological and the social, thus informing identity based on our biology.

In conclusion, this diverse and interdisciplinary coursework will contribute to the growth in my understanding and perception of the human. Not only will I be able to draw from my stereotypical biological perspectives as a pre-med, but I will be able to expand on the notion of the mind and body by adding medical humanities, and the other social sciences to explore how the biological functions in the world. This is such a vital perspective to have because when I am a physician one day, more specifically a Reconstructive Plastic surgeon, I have to be able to understand my patient in all realms of their embodied experience. I have to be able to analyze why they psychologically want or need surgery, why their bodies deviate from any societal norms, if there is a mechanical or functional problem in their physical body, if there is something manifesting in their identity from the culture, and if that will change after surgery. There is more to understanding a patient than what I can learn through reading a medical textbook, which is why I have developed this concentration of exploring the mind and the body and how it influences human experience.