Welcome to the ATRIUM

Snapshot

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For more than two decades, Northwestern's Medical Humanities and Bioethics Program (with its various names) has been focused on the study of medicine as a human activity: its values, its practice, its education, its epistemology. Ethics is an inseparable part of that, and so are the humanities and the values-oriented social sciences. They can't be separated conceptually or pedagogically. If bioethics describes and solves problems, the humanities work to create them—embracing ambiguity and uncertainty, complicating with historical and cultural perspectives, expanding conceptual boundaries through critical analysis—and we believe neither approach can flourish until it's intertwined with the other. We as scholars, and Northwestern as a program, represent the conviction that ethics does not belong only to philosophers but also to physicians and scholars in other fields, to writers, artists and performers, and to patients. It's a human concern.

ATRIUM grows out of that vision of "non-disciplinary cohesiveness." Each issue will be inspired by a single theme, and the content will reflect our Program's balance between humanities and bioethics. Ideally, ATRIUM will model a multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing issues and working through problems in the classroom, at the hospital, and in policy-making bodies. As always, our goal is to do serious work without taking ourselves too seriously.

We chose to call this report ATRIUM for several reasons. Medically speaking, it references the human heart—oxygen-poor blood enters the right atrium, takes a journey, and returns to the left atrium enriched. Architecturally, an atrium is a central place that lets light and air into the middle of a building. But most importantly, for us "the atrium" is a place a few steps away from the coffee stand in Feinberg's oldest cluster of buildings, a sunny spot with comfortable chairs where professors and students meet.

This is where we live, and we'd like to invite you in.