Memorandum

To: Faculty Senate
Seton Hall University

From: Karen E. Boroff, Ph.D.
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President

Re: New Minor in Medical Humanities
2018-FS-05

Date: April 18, 2018

The Office of the Provost is in receipt of a proposal for offering a minor in Medical Humanities. This motion was passed by the Faculty Senate at its March 16, 2018 meeting.

The market assessment provided in the proposal demonstrates growing student interest in medical humanities programs. While targeting medical practitioners, one can see how it could be an attractive program to students in the social sciences and other areas. Certainly, the breadth of the electives chosen for inclusion in the program speaks to the interdisciplinary outreach across schools and colleges that took place to draft this proposal. The cited objectives of providing students with greater awareness of biomedical ethical issues and religious perspectives on matters of illness, suffering and health are a part of our academic mission.

There are many attractive aspects to this proposal – the use of existing courses, the lack of additional resources, and the Lilly grant for funding faculty development seminars. In order to proceed with any approval, however, some linkages should be provided to ensure the quality of this program’s academic profile. Under the specific objectives, the first two bullets are clearly addressed by the requirements to take Phil 1130, Biomedical Ethics, and RELS 2511, Christian Values and Health Issues. The third and four bullets speak broadly to gaining perspectives on the ways that illness, health, aging, wellbeing, suffering and death are experienced, and the relevance of humanistic inquiry into healthcare. Even with the minor requirement that electives must be spread among three disciplinary areas, can it happen that a student’s coursework does not really develop all the learning (or program goals)? Might this breadth benefit from more specific guidance, for example, one course from each of four groupings?

Another aspect that I would ask the proposers to address is the assessment of the learning objectives of the program. As stated, “the minor will challenge students to reflect critically on not only the clinical issues… the equally important philosophical, spiritual, and ethical questions and challenges.” The learning objectives address what “we” will provide/offer/demonstrate for students. I would rather learn what it is that you expect students to demonstrate/offer/provide as a result of this course of study. I ask you to reflect on whether an internship should be required. Increasingly, employers value prior work experience in their
hiring decisions. Beyond this, data analytic skills are in demand. Perhaps you might want to give thought to developing a learning objective here. Last item for consideration- the term “health humanities” may be a broader term than “medical humanities”.

I will be happy to consider approving this program once I learn how we can be sure that a student who progresses through the minor will achieve these learning objectives.