

Conference Details

The coronavirus and recent racial protests have not only prompted conversations about science, medicine, and public health, but have forced us to look at inequities embedded in our modern society, tying into larger conversations about race, ethnicity, language, discrimination, and institutionalized racism. The need to create a healthy, diverse, inclusive, safe, culturally, and linguistically diverse, and just society has never been more evident. The healthcare system, in particular, suffers from institutional racism that is fundamentally contrary to its mission, and this has been spotlighted by the racial disparities of the COVID pandemic. The humanities can help us to hear, connect with, and develop empathy for the experiences of others, and to center the voices of those most vulnerable to exclusion. Thus, they must be central to the deep examination of our healthcare institutions required to foster the inclusion and equity that ultimately translate to wellness.

To adequately examine and understand these complex topics, it is necessary to expand beyond clinical and biomedical scientific practice and solicit expertise and insights offered from students, scholars, and experts in the humanities. The humanities disciplines contribute greatly to technology and medicine in their quest to improve the human condition but are too often overlooked as a potential resource for workforce growth or enrichment. Additionally, humanities students are not taught to 'market themselves' to medical and tech organizations and are led to believe that their areas of study are irrelevant to these fields. We believe that by building and strengthening bridges between these areas of practice we can enhance the care for all people. Keeping the humanities strong requires that we value their positive impact and include their important roles in other disciplines.

This conference project creates the environment for this bridge, building on previous efforts of the Humanities at Work project; namely the linguistic internship and Humanities in Health Initiative (a cross-unit partnership which includes Linguistics, Education, Honors College, Business, Medicine, and Community and Industry Partners) which are partially funded by a Pitt seed grant. This project thus aligns with our efforts to build an engagement platform/hub for connecting humanities to the community, health, and tech industries. It will help cultivate an interdisciplinary Community of Practice (CofP), which will work to provide support and structure for collaborative studies focusing on centralizing humanities and cross-disciplinary training to improve the human condition, combat racism in healthcare and raise awareness about the impacts of racism on health. The virtual format of this conference will also facilitate greater access and more diverse participation and will allow several opportunities for networking in addition to the scheduled talks, to allow for the organic generation of new partnerships.

This conference will convene experts, community members, and students from all disciplines to work together to discuss the diverse roles humanities plays in health and well-being and to discuss how to make our community safe, inclusive and healthy for all. Currently, given the compounded crisis our world is experiencing with COVID-19, social inequity and unrest, divided political landscape, we hope that our conference will lead to new partnerships and working groups to tackle some of these more immediate issues.