

STRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN BODY

2008

Anatomy Lesson

The act of dissecting a human cadaver is perhaps the most significant rite of passage for every first year medical student. A once living human being has decided to donate his or her deceased body for medical students to learn the intricacies of the human body. Why would a person make such a decision? What are the emotional responses of medical students to this activity? In this session, we plan to view a documentary called Still Life that explores these questions. Bioethics faculty John Hardt, PhD and Kayhan Parsi, JD, PhD will examine the legal, ethical and religious issues involved in cadaver dissection. There will be ample time for student questions, comments and reflections.

The following is a description of the film Still Life from the Fanlight Productions website:

“Each year, 16,000 medical students in the United States dissect cadavers as part of their introduction to medicine. Their emotional reactions to the experience are intense, sometimes traumatic, and may shape the way they will relate to their future patients. This unusual documentary probes the imaginative "shadow traffic" between the living and the dead. Crafted from interviews with 'gross anatomy' students, medical faculty, and a man who plans to donate his body to the medical school, it explores the unstated but powerful relationship between medical student dissectors and the cadavers which make it possible for them to learn about the human body.

Students share the fear, guilt, gratitude, and awe they feel during their dissection experience, while donor Bob Harvey talks about the life experiences that have influenced the way he feels about being a body donor, and offers wry advice to the medical students. Dr. Thomas Cole, the film's creator and a professor of medical humanities, discusses the empathy and compassion that can grow from the experience of dissection, while scenes from the movie, *People Will Talk* (starring Cary Grant as a professor of anatomy) offer an engaging historical perspective on public and professional attitudes. *Still Life* concludes with moving scenes from the medical students' annual voyage to scatter the ashes of unclaimed cadavers into the Gulf of Mexico.

This video will be provocative viewing for students in medicine, nursing, psychology, philosophy and religion. It offers both professional and public audiences a unique opportunity to probe the depths of their own humanity. *Produced at the Institute for the Medical Humanities, University of Texas Medical Branch.*”