I am very grateful for the opportunity to have attended the annual conference of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, as I feel it addressed a wide array of interdisciplinary topics relevant to a career in the medical field.

It was beneficial to look at the many different facets of the physician-patient relationship in one session entitled, “Trust and the Profession of Medicine”. Another session on humanism reiterated many of the characteristics and actions medical professionals must incorporate in their treatment of patients and given my interest and desire to eliminate health disparities, it was interesting to hear a talk going over this subject during one of the plenary sessions. I attended the “Translating urban bioethics to rural settings” session with the hope that my newfound knowledge in this area will prove to be applicable during my rotation rural rotation and will help me be able to relate better to future patients.

It was also fascinating to have had the chance to attend sessions in areas that were aligned with my own personal interests in medicine. Having taken a course on transplantation immunology in graduate school, a session entitled, “Challenges in Transplantation Ethics” gave me the opportunity to delve a little further in this area and better understanding the legal, ethical and social implications involved with this issue. Additionally, I was also able to attend sessions on topics ranging from research and tourism in developing nations to the ethical issues raised by labiaplasty. As I have a deep interest in international medicine, one of the highlights of my time at the conference was the opportunity to view the documentary, “The English Surgeon”. This was a wonderful film which went over many of the challenges and barriers physicians face in developing nations. I was very happy to have the opportunity to talk to Dr. Marsh, the subject of the film afterwards to go into more detail about his experiences. I also attended a session led by a medical student who in his free time takes pictures of transgendered individuals to raise issues surrounding this community. I was very impressed by his work and how he has managed to intertwine his hobby and personal interests to advance medical education in this field through a website and giving lectures to medical students. One of the nights I was at the conference, I enjoyed an evening with an eclectic group of professors and physicians and we had a poetry session. This was something I had never done before and it made me appreciate the therapeutic use of poetry. Overall, I was very satisfied with my experiences at this conference and would definitely recommend it to any student who has an interest in bioethics and medical humanities.

Sara Chalifoux
I attended the American Society of Bioethics and Humanities annual meeting which was held from October 15-18, 2009. The meeting was comprised of lectures, paper sessions, and panel discussions which encompassed topics such as critical bioethical dilemmas, medicine and literature, and a humanistic approach to patient care. Suffice it to say, it was an extremely intellectually stimulating and rewarding experience. I was fortunate enough to attend a myriad of lectures given by some of the brightest scholars in their field of expertise.

One particular lecture I thoroughly enjoyed was called "Perspectives on Mental Illness." This lecture entailed introducing and interpreting writers who integrated their personal mental illness into writing. Consequently, beautiful writing in books and an extraordinarily candid play resulted.

For example, Marcia Childress PhD of the University of Virginia School of Medicine gave a lecture called "Metaphor as Translation: Virginia Woolf's "On Being Ill" as Motive for Metaphor in Her Fiction." Dr. Childress vividly depicted how Virginia Woolf used her struggle against depression, bipolar disorder, and overt mania to convey the complexity of one truly understanding what mental illness encompasses without actually possessing the disease. Dr. Childress revealed that Woolf did her best to convey the struggle through multiple metaphors. For example, at a time where mental illness was not entirely understood by the medical community, Woolf took it upon herself to share that although severe mental illness can debilitate a person resulting in bed rest, this bed rest was actually a very valuable asset in the scope of illness. She felt that when one was confined to bed rest, one was able to be with one's self, which allowed for introspection of one's life, providing a relaxing and therapeutic environment which allowed one to escape from what she called, the "army of the upright" and most imperatively, from the illness. In fact, Woolf cherished these times at which she could write without interruption, analyzing her thoughts and reveling in her solitude. Her rich use of similes and metaphors are what truly makes "On Being Ill" a piece of literature which will withstand the test of time.

Another lecture given by Lydie Fialova of Boston University called "Understanding Suffering in Mental Illness: Sarah Kane's 4.48 Psychosis" depicted Sarah Kane's struggle of escaping the severe depression she experienced, or as Ms. Fialova explained "Kane's very fragmented work vividly describe[d] the turmoil of her state of mind-experienced as torture-from which she could not escape otherwise than by death." Fialova provided examples from the play which reaffirmed her theory. The line of "In this sense, suffering is the impossibility of nothingness," truly captured how Kane felt about her tragic life and illness. This play expressed a myriad of
emotions, revealing the darkest sides to mental illness. To me, her work was fascinating, her state of mind almost tangible.

In all, I had a wonderful experience at the conference. I was able to employ my intellectual frame of mind in various ways outside the realm of concrete medical science and think deeply on subjects which I am unable to study or experience at school to the utmost degree due to a rigorous curriculum and hospital work-ethic. I thank you and am grateful for the opportunity to attend such a fulfilling conference.

Amy Patel