



In today's post, I want to chronicle the experiences of a project led by Rice University's Medical Futures Lab, and which I have been lucky to work on since the fall of 2020. It's called the Translational Humanities for Public Health (THPH) project. I believe it mirrors the ambitions and methods of *Synopsis* in certain ways worth exploring here. The project's website, as I hope to show,

is a crucial resource for educators, researchers, policymakers, and activists influenced by and sympathetic with the open-access model of this site.

THPH was founded in 2020, soon after the emergence of Covid-19 in the US, by Dr. Kirsten Ostherr, who directs the Medical Humanities Program and the Medical Futures Lab at Rice University. It was conceived of as “a project that identifies and disseminates humanities-based (and humanities-inspired) responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.” To do so, the project “document[s] these creative efforts to help others benefit from them, and to bring tools for understanding the human experience to communities in need of support during this time of crisis.” In order to accomplish that mission, Dr. Ostherr assembled a team of undergraduates, graduate students, postdocs, and university staff with expertise in web design to develop the project. That work began in the spring and summer of 2020 with the development of a survey that sought “to capture all kinds of pandemic responses that involve some dimension of the humanities,” though we were particularly interested in approaches that might be deemed “translational.” Our understanding of “translation” drew on the NIH’s National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), which defines the term as “the scientific process by which observations in the laboratory, clinic and community are turned into interventions that improve the health of individuals and the public — from diagnostics and therapeutics to medical procedures and behavioral changes.” It was and remains our belief that the humanities stand uniquely capable of yielding tools and insights that might reduce suffering and promote justice in the long arc of our response to the pandemic. Our goal was that by compiling projects through the survey that answered to this conception of “translation,” we might compile an archive of such tools and methods that would be freely available.

Since the project’s inception, nearly twenty volunteers have worked on it. Shortly after the surveys started to be collected, we developed a website to archive them. As of last count, the site hosts 143 projects and grows daily. These projects come from around the world. (The global distribution can be viewed [here](#).) They come from across the university, in disciplines ranging from Bioethics and Folklore to Archaeology and Linguistics. They profile projects ranging from film and video to podcasts, websites, and traditional academic writing. And they can be accessed by intended audience, where the latter ranges from healthcare professionals and community organizers to prisoners and patients. We have also worked to build various “pathways” through the site. These allow a visitor to see sequential groupings of projects that may be relevant to them based on their own background and position. A visitor might select “African American Studies—Master’s Degree,” for instance, if that’s the course of study they’re embarked upon, in order to prioritize projects tagged in such a way that indicates their likely relevance.

I have been honored to be a part of this project, and I see it as deeply sympathetic with *Synopsis*’ own ambition to function as a “department without walls.” I hope this brief precis will encourage people to explore the site, integrate it into their own work and teaching, and take out project survey.

Photo Credit

Anna Shvets. "Hands with latex Gloves Holding a Globe with a Face Mask." *Pexels*. 14 May 2020.