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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

University of Chicago offers Mini-Med School: Box seats to the Biological Revolution

Maybe you chose to go to law school or enter the business world. Or, maybe you just overslept chemistry class or played too much frisbee on the quad. For whatever reason, like most people, you didn't go to medical school. Still think you've got what it takes?

All you need is a sense of curiosity and some free evenings this spring. The University of Chicago Mini-Med School is a free, 10-week series of easy to understand, entertaining and educational lectures for the general public. The Mini-Med School will meet downtown at the Cultural Center, Washington at Michigan, from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesdays, March 7 through May 9.

Though graduates of the Mini-Med School won't be eligible to practice medicine, they will receive a certificate upon successful completion of the program. More importantly, they will be better-informed citizens and patients, according to the host of the program, Samuel Hellman, M.D., an internationally known cancer expert and former dean of the biological sciences and the Pritzker School of Medicine at the University of Chicago.

"We think people are interested in the revolution that is occurring in biology and medicine. It affects many aspects of life, everything from health care to criminal justice to the food at the supermarket," says Hellman, professor of radiation and cellular oncology at the Medical Center. "For our part, we would like to accept our responsibility to inform and engage people in this revolution and the ensuing debate on issues like how new therapies should be tested on humans, when life begins, or how it should end."

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Hellman's co-host, immunologist José Quintáns, M.D., Ph.D., agrees but adds that the emphasis is on fun. "Sharing exciting knowledge is fun for both teacher and student," said Quintáns, who is master of the biological sciences division of the College. "The learning will be more inspirational than perspirational."

Each lecture will be a "course" in a subject covered in medical school. The courses are taught by some of the university's leading physicians and scientists, who are paired up to offer sometimes divergent views on their topic. For example, the first course, Anatomy 101: Building the Bionic Human, will be taught by paleontologist Paul Sereno and orthopedic surgeon Lawrence Pottenger. Both will describe how form follows function, but Sereno will explain how the dinosaur hip evolved 200 million years ago, while Pottenger will discuss the bioengineering of artificial joints for the twenty-first century.

Other courses will explore biochemistry, gene therapy, microbiology, clinical judgment, immunology and AIDS, drug development, neuroscience, and cancer. The final course, Medical Ethics 101: Living and Dying Well, will be taught by nationally known physician-ethicists Mark Siegler and Christine Cassel, who are leading figures in the debate over end-of-life issues.

All of the courses will allow ample time for questions as well as conversation and refreshments in the last half hour. There will be hands-on demonstrations and laboratory apparatus to try out.

The University of Chicago is the first private institution in the country to offer a mini-med school, the first such program in the Midwest. A model program has been run very successfully at the National Institutes of Health campus in Maryland. That course filled within hours of its first announcement and formed a waiting list of 1300.

While the admissions process is not as selective as that of its real-life counterpart, enrollment in the Mini-Med School is limited to the first 275 registrants. Registration is being accepted at (312) 702-9200. People registering for the entire series will have priority; seats for individual courses will be available only if space permits.

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