

## Instagram as a virtual art display for medical students L'utilisation d'Instagram pour l'exposition virtuelle des œuvres d'art des étudiants en médecine

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### Implication Statement

We require our medical students to create art as part of a core course. Projects have historically been displayed at our health sciences library. During a rapid adjustment to virtual teaching at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, using Instagram to hold a virtual art show was a quickly implemented alternative. With student consent, course directors posted different artwork every weekday for eight weeks to a course account. By capitalizing on the visual strengths and extensive reach of the Instagram platform, we promoted our medical students' talents both locally and nationally. We plan to use Instagram and in-person displays in the future.

### Énoncé des implications de la recherche

Dans un de leurs cours du tronc commun, nos étudiants en médecine sont amenés à faire de l'art. Avant la pandémie de la COVID-19, leurs projets étaient exposés à la bibliothèque des sciences de la santé. La solution de rechange trouvée dans le cadre d'une adaptation rapide à l'enseignement virtuel au début de la pandémie a été d'utiliser Instagram pour exposer virtuellement les œuvres. Avec le consentement des étudiants, les responsables de cours ont publié des œuvres différentes tous les jours pendant huit semaines sur un compte Instagram créé pour le cours. Tirant parti des atouts visuels et de la vaste portée de la plateforme, nous avons pu promouvoir les talents de nos étudiants en médecine tant au niveau local qu'au niveau national. À l'avenir, nous comptons combiner les expositions physiques et Instagram.

### Introduction

For the last six years in our arts, ethics, and humanities core course, first-year medical students have created an original piece of artwork while reflecting on their learning experience. These pieces are evaluated on the students' described intent, effort, and reflection on the process. In previous years, the art was displayed gallery-style with students' permission at our health sciences library for several weeks, beginning with an opening celebration. These live events allowed students to interact with the artwork and with each other, learning which topics inspire

their colleagues and how life experiences affect perspectives of medicine.

### Innovation

When in-person gatherings were restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we moved our display to Instagram to preserve interaction, albeit virtually. The use of social media as a teaching platform in medical education has grown in popularity over the past decade<sup>1</sup> and involves understanding the strengths of various platforms.<sup>2</sup> Instagram is readily accessible, popular among our students and colleagues, and fit our needs to display visual artwork, which made up a large number of student

submissions for this assignment (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> We considered building a customized website, but did not have the time or budget to create one. Moreover, we liked that we could “tag” students (mention their username) in a platform they were already using, which would draw their followers’ attention to the posted projects. Instagram offered a way for students to interact with the art through comments and likes.



Figure 1. Example of an Instagram post of student artwork (with permission from the artist)

With the artists’ permission, course directors posted photos of artwork every weekday on a course-specific Instagram page (@uusomlom) for the final eight weeks of the semester. To build a following, we announced the Instagram account to students and colleagues within and outside of our institution and tagged our institution’s and admissions office’s accounts.

## Outcomes

Most (62%) of the projects were visual in nature. Of those, 55% of students gave permission to post their art. More

may have agreed if asked to “opt out” rather than “opt in.” Of student projects, 20% were longform written works and 18% were audio or video projects, which were excluded because of the limitations of Instagram. Our initial target was to attract 100 followers, which we reached in one week. By semester’s end, we had 146 followers. Our first week’s posts each received an average of 40 “likes.” Instagram metrics show 1,313 impressions (views) over the same time period and 7,767 impressions over the eight weeks. All the pieces posted were commented upon.

There were advantages and disadvantages to using Instagram. Using a virtual platform saved the costs of a live event, about \$1500. Additionally, art posted to Instagram is enduring compared to a temporary display at the library. Instagram allowed the art show to be accessible to a wider audience: colleagues and family members outside our local community, but it limits our reach to platform users. For this reason, and because we value the in-person viewing of artwork, we hope to resume live displays when practical, in conjunction with Instagram posts.

## Conclusion

Medical education traditionally occurs in person, and when circumstances preclude usual teaching methods, faculty are presented with opportunities to find creative solutions. With minimal time to adapt in restrictive circumstances, using Instagram allowed us to maintain this valued celebration of students’ creativity.

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