

Call for Proposals

2027 Rhetoric of Health and Medicine Symposium

Theme: Returning Home: Institutionality and Identity in RHM

October 18 & 19, 2027

University of Cincinnati

Cincinnati, Ohio

Proposal Deadline: March 12, 2027

Overview

The Rhetoric of Health and Medicine (RHM) Symposium brings together graduate students, emerging scholars, senior faculty, community-engaged researchers, and practitioners working across a range of disciplines and professional contexts. Grounded in rhetorical inquiry, the symposium creates a welcoming space for participants to place humanities and social scientific traditions in conversation. Through this interdisciplinary exchange, attendees develop theories, methodologies, practices, and collaborations that deepen how we understand health, medicine, illness, disability, healing, and wellness.

Theme

The Rhetoric of Health and Medicine Society invites proposals for the 2027 Rhetoric of Health and Medicine (RHM) Symposium.

As we return to Cincinnati—a city deeply connected to the origins of the RHM Symposium—we mark a significant moment in the history of rhetoric of health and medicine. Over the past decade, RHM has developed from an emerging network of scholars, practitioners, and community partners into a vibrant *polydisciplinary* (Segal, 2020; emphasis original) society with its own traditions and infrastructures. This return is not simply geographic; it is a rhetorical move that serves as an opportunity to reflect on the history that has shaped RHM, while considering how we might make its evolving home welcoming and sustaining for longtime participants, graduate students, newcomers to the field, practitioners, and community partners alike.

The theme, *Returning Home: Institutionality and Identity in RHM*, invites participants to consider what it means to build and sustain a disciplinary home, and who is able to recognize themselves as belonging within it. Building on foundational work that established medicine as a profoundly rhetorical domain (Segal, 2005), RHM has grown into a community that examines health and medicine across myriad contexts. From its earliest articulations, RHM has been imagined not simply as a field of study but as a “scholarly dwelling place” (Melonçon & Scott, 2018) where scholars, practitioners,

community partners, and other health professionals might gather around shared concerns while remaining open to diverse perspectives and approaches. That dwelling place has expanded through the Symposium, the [*Rhetoric of Health & Medicine journal*](#), our newly revised website (RHMsociety.org), mentorship networks, community partnerships, the [Medical Rhetoric Standing Group](#) and, now, the RHM Society itself.

Yet, a dwelling place is never finished. It requires ongoing revision. We agree with J. Blake Scott, Lisa Melonçon, and Cathryn Molloy (2020) that RHM's continued vitality depends upon generosity: welcoming others into our conversations, supporting collaboration across disciplines and communities, and cultivating mentorship, feedback, and engagement that strengthen the field's collective ethos. We also agree with Kim Harper (2025) that sustaining this home also requires intentional attention to community equity and inclusion, as well as a willingness to examine who feels at home within the spaces we create and maintain. As Cathryn Molloy, Kim Hensley-Owens, and Fernando Sánchez (2025) observe, RHM's interconnected spaces have increasingly become sites of mentorship, collaboration, support, and intellectual community during challenging institutional and political times. The field has therefore reached a moment of institutional maturity—not as a finished project, but as a community grounded enough to support an official formalized society.

Returning home also asks us to examine how institutions shape identity, credibility, and expertise, and determine which experiences become actionable. For example, what forms of knowledge remain marginalized or difficult to recognize within our disciplinary structures? As V. Jo Hsu (2026) points out, stories can function as forms of theory and worldmaking for communities whose experiences have been rendered invisible through dominant epistemological frameworks. RHM scholars are therefore uniquely positioned to develop genres of witnessing that make visible health experiences, institutional failures, community knowledge, and embodied expertise often excluded from traditional frameworks (Teston, 2025).

Returning home, then, is not simply an act of looking backward. It is an invitation to consider how disciplinary identities are formed and how relationships and communities of care are sustained over time. The call invites participants to reflect on the tenets that make RHM a disciplinary home while also building its futures. Returning to Cincinnati offers an opportunity to consider where we began, how we have grown, and how we might continue cultivating a field that is inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the communities we serve.

In keeping with RHM's longstanding commitment to intellectual flexibility, methodological innovation, community building, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Burry & Melonçon, 2024), we welcome work that reflects on the field's past, interrogates its present, and imagines its futures through projects connected to health and medicine. Returning home also means recognizing that the places we inhabit shape the possibilities for health, care, belonging, and collective flourishing (Johnson, 2025). Some key questions could include, but are not limited to:

- What does it mean to build, inhabit, and sustain a disciplinary home in RHM?
- Who experiences RHM as a scholarly home, and what conditions enable or limit that sense of belonging?
- How do histories of RHM inform its present structures, values, identities, and future directions?
- What responsibilities accompany the institutionalization of a field, and how might those responsibilities be enacted through care, collaboration, and accountability?
- What infrastructures—formal and/or informal—sustain RHM scholarship, teaching, advocacy, and community engagement?
- How do practices of care, maintenance, stewardship, and service contribute to the ongoing work of sustaining a scholarly community?
- How, and with what tools, can RHM scholars/researchers use to better understand and critique the institutions implicated in our work?
- Which genres, methods, experiences, and forms of evidence are recognized as legitimate within RHM, and which remain marginalized or difficult to accommodate?
- What theories, methods, tools, or practices can RHM scholars use to better understand and critique the institutions implicated in their work?
- How can we imagine and build futures for RHM that respond to changing institutional, political, social, technological, and health landscapes?

Inclusivity and Accessibility

We understand access as an “ongoing, iterative process” (Melonçon, 2018) that involves careful planning and nimble adaptation to the unexpected (Haas & Eble, 2018). With your help, we are committed to making the symposium an inclusive and accessible space from proposal submission to day-of events. [See our working accessibility plan](#), which we will continue to develop. We invite feedback and recommendations at any time at rhmsymposium@gmail.com.

Proposal Details

A hallmark of the RHM Symposium has been its orientation toward dialogue among attendees. We are excited to maintain this tradition through a mix of short presentations (lightning talks), workshops, and work-in-progress sessions. In response to previous participants' requests for more virtual options and the ability to attend multiple workshops, **this year's workshops will be held virtually at a date prior to the in-person Symposium.**

First, please anonymize the submission. To submit a proposal, complete the [RHM Symposium 2027 Submission Form](#). The form will ask for the following information:

- **Contact information** including name, affiliation, email, position
- **Title** of your project/proposal
- **Keywords** that describe your professional identity, research area, and/or proposal
- **Proposal** of up to 500 words, not including citations.
 - Note: Proposals for panels can be up to 1,000 words and should include an overview of the panel and brief descriptions of presentations within the panel.
- **Proposal Type Indication**—see more details below.

As part of the proposal submission process, you will be invited to designate what kind of session you'd like your project to be considered for, including:

- Work-in-progress for working groups of 3 to 5 participants
- Lightning talk (5-7 minutes)
- Writing Studies lightning talk (5-7 minutes)
- Panel (60 minutes)
- Advanced career scholars' panel (60 minutes)
- Workshop (90 minutes)

NOTE: A mainstay goal of the symposium is to create space and time to be with and build community. For this continued reason, we invite you to submit one or multiple proposals for different session types to make the time worth it for you. You will need to submit separate forms for each session type you'd like to be considered for. The same project can be submitted for multiple session types or you can submit multiple projects, but we ask that you only submit once for any given session type (i.e., please don't submit multiple work-in-progress proposals or multiple workshop proposals). Each submission will be reviewed independently.

Session Type Descriptions

- **Work-in-progress:** Participants accepted for the work-in-progress session will be placed into small working groups with three to five other participants. Members of these groups will exchange drafts and provide feedback on each other's works-in-progress (drafts of articles, dissertation chapters, grant proposals, book chapters, etc.). Proposals for works-in-progress should describe the project and indicate the genre of the work-in-progress drafts of articles, dissertation chapters, grant proposals, book chapters, etc.). **Virtual or In Person**
- **Lightning talk:** Participants accepted for lightning talks will be organized into panels with short (5-7 minute) presentations followed by a facilitated discussion. Proposals for lightning talks should describe the project being presented and articulate what kinds of questions or discussion prompts the talk would offer. **In Person Only**
- **Writing Studies lightning talk:** New this year! A panel of lightning talks (5-7 minutes) dedicated to the intersection of RHM and Writing Studies (to create space for scholars due to CCCC de-charter). **In Person Only**
- **Panel:** Accepted panels will feature 3-5 presentations of 10-15 minutes each on the speakers' current research (60 minutes total). Panel proposals should provide a panel overview and brief descriptions of each presentation. **In Person Only**
- **Advanced career scholars' panel:** New this year! Accepted panels will feature 3-5 presentations of 10-15 minutes each on the speakers' current research (60 minutes total). Panel proposals should provide a panel overview and brief descriptions of each presentation (this panel is aimed at scholars who identify as "mid- to late-career"). **In Person Only**
- **Workshop:** Accepted workshops will guide symposium attendees through hands-on activities or guided discussions with specific themes and goals. These workshops will be held virtually on a date TBD, 1-3 weeks before the in-person Symposium. Proposals for workshop facilitation should articulate the purpose of the workshop, how the workshop will be interactive for attendees, and what practical takeaways attendees will leave with. We welcome workshops that draw on diverse forms of expertise and invite participants to learn across disciplinary, methodological, professional, and career-stage perspectives. Possible topics might include service-learning or ethnographic methods facilitated by clinicians or community partners; community health needs assessments led by public health

practitioners; or other approaches that expand the methodological, pedagogical, and professional capacities. **Virtual Only**

NOTE: Only work-in-progress submissions will be considered for our Top Paper award and the Barbara Heiffron Graduate Student Fellowship for top graduate student submissions. All work-in-progress submissions are automatically considered.

Important Dates

- March 12, 2027: Proposals due
- End of May, 2027: Decisions released
- October 1, 2027: Drafts of works-in-progress due
- October 18-19, 2027: RHM Symposium

Submit your proposal by completing the [2027 RHM Symposium Submission form](#). You can complete the form multiple times if you are submitting to participate in multiple ways (e.g., for works-in-progress and lightning talk).

Have a question? Contact us!

Please contact the symposium organizer and RHM Society Vice President, Justiss Wilder Burry at burryjw@jmu.edu or rhmsymposium@gmail.com if you have questions, feedback, accessibility requests, or recommendations. Also feel free to contact Lora Anderson, Local Chair for the 2027 Symposium, at ardusell@ucmail.uc.edu.

More details about the 2027 RHM Symposium can be found online at [RHM Biennial Symposium – rhmsociety.org](https://rhmsociety.org).

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