

## **Bodies, Community, and an Ancient Greek Healing God: An Experiment in Outreach**

Bronwen Wickkiser

The healing god par excellence of Greek and Roman antiquity was Asklepios, son of Apollo. Worshippers flocked to his sanctuaries where they hoped to meet Asklepios in a dream in which he would heal them, often by performing a medical procedure or prescribing a regimen for cure. His geographic and temporal reach are remarkable: we have evidence of his cult beginning in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE and extending for almost a millennium, and his sanctuaries would multiply to span the length and breadth of the Greco-Roman world. Images of Asklepios can be identified easily due to his iconographic trademark: a walking staff about which a serpent twines. His staff and serpent remain to this day a symbol of many medical groups, including the World Health Organization.

This spring I decided to organize my senior seminar in Classics at Wabash College around Greek and Roman healthcare, and more specifically around the cures of Asklepios. Given medical challenges posed by the COVID pandemic, the topic felt timely. In addition, I chose to pilot a new format for the seminar: instead of having the students write research papers as their culminating project, they would take their hard-earned knowledge beyond the ivory tower and present it to the local community.

In this paper, I will discuss the project that the students created: the process of developing it and of identifying and securing an audience, the content of it, and the experience of presenting it. In the end, the students presented to ten separate sixth-grade classes at the local middle school, teaching the full class period in each instance. I will also discuss some of the many rewards for both the college students and the sixth-graders. Finally, I will talk about an unexpected turn of events that led one of the seminar students on a personal and deeply reflective journey about the significance of health to the integrity of our campus community, a journey that touched on several of the most powerful questions we had been discussing in our seminar.