

**Medical Humanities
HUM 298
Winter 2015**

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445 PLC

What are the meanings of and responses to human suffering in an increasingly globalized world? How are those meanings and responses inflected by race, class, gender, ethnicity, and national identity? How does Western biomedicine define disease and wellness and how are those definitions imposed on and adopted within the Global South? How have new genetic and reproductive technologies affected medical ethics? What happens when different cultural understandings of disease conflict with one another?

This class explores crucial questions about health, well-being, medicine, and social inequality in the twenty-first century. Through a combination of lecture and small-class discussion, as well as online forums, students will examine definitions of health and well-being; the implications of new genetic and reproductive technologies; disparities in global burdens of disease; the relationship among health, illness, and narrative; and gendered and cultural differences in the experiences of illness and the practices of healthcare and medicine.

The course not only critically examines medical institutions and medical education but redefines health more broadly as not just the absence of illness but as "well-being," which includes access to secure food sources, clean water, medical care, employment, self-determination, and strong communities. The course thus encourages students to consider the relationship among bioethics, health and well-being, and social inequalities within a range of settings, from the doctor's office to the homeless shelter, from the urban New York City emergency room to the rural Nicaraguan clinic.

Objectives for General Education:

Our main goal is two-fold: to introduce students to the major issues in global health, medicine, and bioethics, particularly as they relate to human rights, inequalities, and social justice; and to demonstrate, through course design and student participation, the benefits of collaborative, interdisciplinary learning, in which debate, self-questioning, and the active welcoming of diverse perspectives become tools for lifelong learning and problem-solving. The course is interdisciplinary in that it will expose students to different yet intersecting methodologies and approaches to issues of health, medicine, and well-being in today's world—one from the perspective of history (including archival work) that examines changing ideas (both popular and medical) about gender, sexuality, and reproduction; and one that examines the role of narrative (including literature and film) in the construction of definitions of health, illness, well-being, disability, and the identities associated with these designations. Our guest speakers, medical anthropologist Kristin Yarris and Africanist medical historian Melissa Graboyes, will bring yet another perspective, one that emphasizes the context of larger global social and economic forces related to health and well-being.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class participation: This class will require active and sustained class participation. The college classroom demands open, honest discussion; we will be covering material that may challenge your beliefs and values. While you may not agree with everything said, you owe it to each other to listen carefully and respectfully to other people's views.

Tuesdays we will all come together for lectures. The Thursday small classes will include many forms of participatory and experiential learning opportunities, including debates, role play exercises, in class writing and peer editing, as well as discussions.

Attendance: Because this will be a discussion-oriented class, you have to be here to benefit. We cannot recreate the class discussion for you if you have to miss class. Absences will affect your final grade.

Rules: No computers, iPads, etc. are allowed in the class unless we're doing a close reading of a text; we'll let you know if you should bring them. Please no texting either.

Grading:

Attendance: 15%

Participation: 15%

Journal Entries: 50%

Editorial Assignment 20%

Journal Papers: You will write a response to the readings each week. These are "position papers." They are to be approximately 500 words in length and must be uploaded by each **Monday night by 9:00 p.m. in the "Journal" section of Blackboard.**

You must do 8 weeks of journal submissions. If you do a beautiful job, incorporate all the reading, and thoroughly contemplate and address the occasional study questions, you will get full credit, which will be recorded as one point. We might award partial credit if the entry seems rushed and incomplete, or we might not give any points at all. If you complete all 8 of the journal entries in a full and substantial way, you will get an A on this part of the course. 7 points will be a B; 6 points will be a C; 5 points will be a D; you must do at least 5 entries to pass the class.

As you can see, the quality of the submission counts. We will comment on each week's papers, and so you will know if you're on track or if you need to do more.

These journal papers are your opportunity to grapple with the readings, to question, to connect one week to the next, and to raise issues that you'd like to see discussed in class. The journals aren't formally graded, but we still want complete sentences, though you don't have to worry about making an argument, having smooth transitions, and the like, unless that is specifically requested in that week's assignment. We don't have an exact page limit, but we expect you'll submit roughly 500 words. More is fine.

Editorial Assignment, due Monday, Feb. 23rd:

For week 8 you will not submit a journal entry; instead, you will be asked to write an op ed (an editorial) on a topic related to disability or genetics technologies. Unlike your journal entries, for this paper you will make and develop an argument on a particular position based on the readings for weeks 7 and 8. See description on Week 7.

Academic Integrity

University of Oregon students are held to the standards of the Student Conduct Code. Acts of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. All work submitted by students must be their own, written for this course. Acts of plagiarism and academic dishonesty can result in failure of the course and expulsion from the University. For guidelines and University rules on this very serious matter, see <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>

Students with Disabilities

We will make every effort to accommodate students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with one of us as soon as possible. Please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability.

Week 1. Topics & Questions: How do we tell our stories about health and illness? Who decides what counts as health? How are these constructions influenced by race, class, gender, power, culture, history and social context?

Tuesday, Jan. 6th: Overview: How do ethics and stories overlap?

Discuss on Thursday, Jan. 8th:

Abenaa Brewster, "A Student's View of a Medical Teaching Exercise"

Week 2. Topics & Questions: Critical Perspectives on Global Health; Global Health as a field of discourse and practice will be presented and critically examined in relation to inequalities, power, post-colonialism and culture.

Tuesday, Jan. 13th: Guest Speaker: Melissa Graboyes

Discuss on Thursday, Jan. 15th:

Paul Farmer, *Infections and Inequalities* excerpt

Arthur Kleinman excerpt from *Reimagining Global Health*

Johanna Crane on AIDS, excerpt.

Week 3. Topics & Questions: Chronic Pain. What stories do we tell about pain? Are there aspects of pain that can never be told? What are the consequences of no one listening to your story of pain? How does one live a liveable life despite pain? How does art express pain?

Discuss on Tuesday, Jan. 20th: Lynne Greenberg, *The Body Broken*, excerpt (Blackboard)

Meghan O'Rourke, "What's Wrong With Me?" *The New Yorker* (Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, Jan. 22nd: Christine Miserandino, "The Spoon Theory" (Blackboard)

Guest Speaker: Naomi Kirtner

Week 4. Topics & Questions: Cultural Constructions of Mental Illness; What are the meanings of mental illness? Students will explore artistic and literary expressions of patients seeking to redefine their own identities in the face of psychiatric diagnoses.

DSM V revisions and cultural representations of schizophrenia

Discuss on Tuesday, Jan. 27th: Rachel Aviv, "God Knows Where I Am," *New Yorker*.

(Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, Jan. 29th:

Personal narratives from *Schizophrenia Bulletin*: Greenblat, Boevink, Stefanidis (Blackboard)

Ellen Forney, excerpt from *Marbles* (Blackboard)

Week 5. Topics & Questions: Health in Narrative and the Cultural Imagination.

How does narrative construct medical encounters? What is narrative competency in medical care? What culturally constructed stories unfold within and help determine medical decisions and the creation of the "illness" and of the "patient"?

Tuesday, Feb. 3rd: What is “non-compliance”? What is the “patient’s” worldview? Show film *Worlds Apart*.

Discuss on Tuesday: Nancy Mairs, chapter from *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled* (Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, Feb. 5th:

Anne Fadiman, excerpts from *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Blackboard)

Week 6. Topics & Questions: Cultural Experiences of Illness and Healing;

What are the possibilities and limitations of using professional/biomedical diagnostic categories in different cultural settings? In this section of the course, we will consider health and healing as cultural products or systems.

Tuesday, Feb. 10th: Guest Lecture: Kristin Yarris.

Discuss:

Yarris, Kristin. 2011. “Pensado Mucho” (“Thinking Too Much”): Embodied Distress Among Grandmothers in Nicaraguan Transnational Families,” *Cult Med Psychiatry* (2014) 38: 473-98. (Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, Feb. 12th:

Ethan Watters, chapter on depression from *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (Blackboard)

Week 7. Topics & Questions: Medicalization, Bioethics, and Disability;

How do we decide what is “normal” and what is “healthy”? This week we will challenge cultural assumptions of “normality” and “disability.”

Discuss on Tuesday, Feb. 17th:

Show clip from *Orgasm Inc.*

Leonore Tiefer, Leonore Tiefer, “Female Sexual Dysfunction: A Case Study of Disease Mongering and Activist Resistance,” *PLoS Med* 3(4): e178. [Blackboard]

Sasanna Kaysen, excerpt from *The Camera My Mother Gave Me* [Blackboard]

Discuss on Thursday, Feb. 19th:

Deborah Kent, “Somewhere a Mockingbird,” in Parens and Asch, eds. *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* [Blackboard]

Harriet McBride Johnson, “Unspeakable Conversations,” New York Times articles with Peter Singer [Blackboard].

Op ed writing assignment: 2-3-page paper on disability studies and/or genetics. Due week 8, instead of a journal entry.

Week 8. Topics & Questions: Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Genetics; This week we will focus on the medical, ethical, and gendered implications of various reproductive technologies as they intersect with the personal and political meanings of creating human life.

Discuss on Tuesday, Feb. 24th: Watch this for class: “Should We Design Our Babies?”

<http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/article.php?id=7881>

Catherine de Lange, "Meet Your Unborn Child -- Before It's Even Conceived," *New Scientist*, April 9, 2014, <http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/article.php?id=7673>

Discuss on Thursday, Feb. 26th:

Read your part for the DNA ethics play. (Blackboard)

Week 9. Topics & Questions: Personal and Social Responsibility for Illness; This section of the course will challenge the conventional notion that health is a result of individual responsibility or personal choices and critically examine the cultural ideologies inherent in this dominant model of health promotion.

Discuss on Tuesday, March 3rd: April Herndon, "Mommy Made Me Do It: Mothering Fat Children in the Midst of the Obesity Epidemic," *Food, Culture, and Society* (September 2010) (Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, March 5th:

S. Lochlann Jain, "Cancer Butch" chapter from *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us* (Blackboard)

Pink Ribbons, Inc. film excerpt

Week 10. Topics & Questions: Speaking Back to Medicine: Alternative Stories; How do writers and other storytellers respond to dominant versions of health and medicine? How can stories help reshape social inequalities that affect health and well-being? How do storytellers reimagine illness, health and well-being on the one hand and health-related policies and social structures on the other?

Discuss on Tuesday, March 10th:

Helena Viramontes, chapter from *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Blackboard)

T.R. Reid, excerpt from *The Healing of America* (Blackboard)

Discuss on Thursday, March 12th: Mary Wood, "The Waiting Room," and Elizabeth Reis, "Hope Less." Imagining a different future for health care. Wrap-up.

Have a good spring break!