

**Medical Humanities
HUM 240
Winter 2017**

Professor Mary Wood, English (mewood@uoregon.edu)

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Wednesdays 1:00-2:30 p.m.
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Course Description

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 (both now and historically) and how are those definitions imposed on and adapted 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? How can the arts (literature, visual art, film, music) and philosophy have an impact on medicine and vice versa? How do cultural narratives inform both popular and expert understandings of medicine? This class explores crucial questions about health, well-being, medicine, and social inequality in the twenty-first century, with a particular focus on how narrative works in medical contexts.

Objectives for General Education and Learning Outcomes:

The main goal of this course is two-fold: to introduce you to major issues in global health, medicine, and bioethics, particularly as they relate to human rights, inequalities, and social justice; and to demonstrate the benefits of interdisciplinary learning, in which critical thinking, attention to language, open discussion and debate, self-questioning, and the active welcoming of diverse perspectives become tools for lifelong learning and problem-solving. By the end of the course, students will have learned to analyze the politics and narrative forms of health-related texts, to recognize and understand the histories of medical discourses, to understand and analyze bioethical dilemmas in contemporary biomedicine, and to interpret cultural representations of health, illness, and well-being.

This class counts as an Arts & Letters group-satisfying class.

Grading:

Attendance: 15%

Participation (discussion, in-class exercises): 10%

Comments on others' Response Papers: 15%

Response Papers: 40%

Editorial Assignment/Role Play performance: 20%

Grading Rubric: Writing assignments (and Role Play for students who choose that option) must show original thinking, incorporation of readings (including quotation from text and reference to specific scenes and arguments), and attention to details such as grammar and syntax. A more detailed rubric for the response papers appears below.

Course Assignments and Schedule

Class participation: This class will require active and sustained class participation. This class is based primarily on discussion. **Thus, you must do the reading every week. The more thoroughly students have read, the better discussion will be.** The college classroom demands open, honest exchange of ideas; 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. We welcome respectful disagreement!

Response Papers: You will write a response to the readings about every other week (I'll provide a list of exact due dates), for a total of four response papers. These papers are intended to contribute to the shared inquiry that is the heart of the class. This shared process of inquiry and engagement with ideas and texts will in turn help you develop your skills as writers. These skills will find more formal expression in the graded essay (or alternative role play exercise) due week 8 or 9 (described below). Response entries are to be approximately 500 words in length, should respond to the prompt, and must be uploaded by **Monday night by 9:00 p.m. in the Discussions section of Canvas. Important: You will be writing about the readings for the Tuesday and Thursday immediately AFTER the Monday turn-in date.**

You must do 4 weeks of response assignments, beginning in the second or third week of class (I will divide the class into two groups; one group will begin the second week and the other group will begin the third). Each submission must fulfill the following rubric: 1)**summarizes** in depth every reading assigned that week; 2)**refers to the text** of the readings through quotation or close paraphrase; 3)**responds to the readings** with the writer's own opinion; 4)**supports that opinion** through argumentation, narrated experience, and/or ethical assertions; 5)**demonstrates attention** to grammar and proofreading. **Unlike your editorial assignment (due Week 8 or 9), these papers do not have to have a finely-honed thesis.** They are a chance for you to

explore your own thinking without necessarily having to be nailed down to one particular argument.

These response 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. I will read each entry carefully, respond to it, and often refer to student entries in class discussion.

Comments and Quotations

For each week that you do NOT submit your own response paper, please do two things instead:

- 1) Read and comment (one or two sentences)--in the Discussions section of Canvas—on the Response Paper of one other student.**
- 2) In the Discussion box for that week, write in the one sentence quotation from all the week's readings that most affected you. Put it in quotation marks and give the source. Ignore the prompt for that week.**

You are expected to do the reading and come to class prepared to discuss it whether or not you have submitted a response paper for that week.

Editorial Assignment or Role Play, due Tuesday, Feb. 28th, or Tuesday, March 7th:

For week 8 or 9 (depending on your group and which week your response paper normally falls on), you will **either** 1) write an editorial on a topic related to disability or genetics technologies **or** 2) participate with other students in a role play in front of the class on a controversial issue in bioethics.

1) Editorial Assignment: Unlike your work on the response papers, for this editorial assignment you will make and develop an argument on a particular position based on the readings for weeks 7 and 8. The paper should be about 600 words and should be posted on Canvas in the same way as your response papers. You must have a clear thesis, strong writing, and good grammar.

2) Role Play: Once we see how many students choose this option, we will form groups and discuss with each group a particular ethical dilemma, assigning a particular role (physician, nurse genetic counselor, parent, pastor, etc.) to each member. You'll need to do some planning and rehearsing before the actual performance. I urge you to consider this option because both you and the class learn a lot from it!

Unless otherwise noted, readings are on Canvas.

Week 1: 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. 10th: Overview: How do world view, diagnosis, and stories overlap?

Thursday, Jan. 12th:

Abenna Brewster, "A Student's View of a Medical Teaching Exercise" (pp. 128-130);
Atul Gawande, "Whose Body Is It Anyway?"

Week 2: 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. 17th: Paul Farmer, *Infections and Inequalities* excerpt (pp. xi-xxxv),
excerpt from Helon Habiba, *Oil on Water*

Thursday, Jan. 19th:

Arjun Suri, et al., "Values and Global Health."

Susan Reverby, "'Normal Exposure' and Inoculation Syphilis."

Week 3: Chronic Pain and Addiction. What stories do we tell about pain and addiction? 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 life despite pain? How does art express pain and addiction?

Tuesday, Jan. 24th: Lynne Greenberg, *The Body Broken*, excerpt (pp. xii-xvi and pp. 1-29)

Thursday, Jan. 26th: Meghan O'Rourke, "What's Wrong With Me?" (pp. 32-37) *The New Yorker*; excerpt from Quiara Alegría Hudes's play *Water By the Spoonful*.

Week 4: 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.

Tuesday, Jan. 31st: Rachel Aviv, "God Knows Where I Am," *New Yorker* (pp 57-65 magazine pages).

Personal narratives from *Schizophrenia Bulletin*: Greenblat, Boevink, Stefanidis (9 pages altogether)

Thursday, Feb. 2nd: Ellen Forney, excerpt from *Marbles* (58 pages, unnumbered)

Week 5: Health and Disability in Narrative and the Cultural Imagination.

How does narrative construct medical research and practice? What culturally constructed stories unfold within and help determine medical decisions and the creation of the “illness” and of the “patient”?

Tuesday, Feb. 7th: Niklas Altermark, “The ideology of neuroscience and intellectual disability: reconstituting the ‘disordered’ brain.”

David Perry, “Down Syndrome Isn’t Just Cute”

(<http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/10/down-s-behind-thesmiles.html>)

Thursday, Feb. 9th:

Ted Talk by Sue Austin, “Deep sea diving...in a wheelchair” (in class); Nancy Mairs, chapter from *Waist-High in the World: A Life Among the Nondisabled* (pp. 87-107).

Week 6: Multicultural 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. 14th:

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

Thursday, Feb. 16th:

Ethan Watters, chapter on PTSD from *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (pp. 65-124)

Week 7: 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.”

Tuesday, Feb. 21st:

Clip from *Orgasm Inc.* (in class)

Leonore Tiefer, “Female Sexual Dysfunction: A Case Study of Disease Mongering and Activist Resistance,” *PLoS Med* 3(4): e178 (pp 436-440, 3-column pages)

Susanna Kaysen, excerpt from *The Camera My Mother Gave Me* (40 pages).

Thursday, Feb. 23rd:

Deborah Kent, “Somewhere a Mockingbird,” in Parens and Asch, eds. *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (pp. 57-63)

Harriet McBride Johnson, “Unspeakable Conversations,” New York Times articles with Peter Singer (13 pages NYT online).

Editorial writing assignment: 2-3-page paper on disability studies and/or genetics. Alternative: Take part in genetics Role Play in class (we will send around sign-up sheet). Due week 8 or 9, depending on which group you're in.

Week 8: Assisted Reproductive Technologies and Genetics: What are 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. 28th: Watch in class: "Should We Design Our Babies?" (60 m)

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

Richard Hayes, "Our Biopolitical Future: Four Scenarios."

(http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/downloads/200703_worldwatch_hayes.pdf)

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> (equivalent of 6 pages)

Thursday, March 2nd:

Genetic ethics plays!

Week 9: Burdens and Responsibilities on Patients and Health Professionals: What are the political and cultural narratives behind rhetorics of patients' "personal choice" and "individual responsibility"?

Tuesday, March 7th: April Herndon, "Mommy Made Me Do It: Mothering Fat Children in the Midst of the Obesity Epidemic," *Food, Culture, and Society* (September 2010) (pp. 332-349).

Thursday, March 9th:

S. Lochlann Jain, "Cancer Butch" chapter from *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us* (501-538)

Pink Ribbons, Inc. film excerpt.

Week 10: 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?

Tuesday, March 14th: Helena Viramontes, chapter from *Under the Feet of Jesus* (pp. 93-103 and 133-156).

T.R. Reid, excerpt from *The Healing of America* (pp. 28-45 and 226-243).

Thursday, March 16th: Catch-up and Review.

Have a good spring break!

Course Policies

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; we'll let you know if you should bring them. We will project material under discussion. Please no texting either.

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 me as soon as possible. Please request that the Counselor for Students with Disabilities send a letter verifying your disability.