

Introduction to the Medical Humanities

MDHM 201 | 901, CRN 13012
Tuesday, Thursday 1:30PM - 02:50PM

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Office Hours: Thursdays 3-4pm & by appointment
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Assisted by: TBA

You want to be a doctor. Or, maybe you want to help people and being a doctor seemed like the best option—the most noble, the most respectable, the most gratifying. Yet, there remains an entire constellation of problems in health care that exist beyond the reach of the individual physician. These problems are socioeconomic, infrastructural, financial, political, legal, technological, practical, racial, cultural, and emotional. They entangle the patient and the practitioner. They manifest in issues of health care disparities. They become glaring in limits to one's ability to access to health care. They creep up in narratives of medical paternalism.

This introduction to the medical humanities aims to address the world of health care beyond medicine. It engages with scholars in literary studies, history, anthropology, art, science studies, sociology, philosophy, and media studies who have wrestled with many facets of medical practice. We will survey a range of topics in the medical humanities, interrogate genres of representation, and explore different research methods. The topics in this course will move in three parts. We first begin in the hospital, then enter the world of patients, and finally open up to communities of care. With each passing week, we will examine one major topic in medicine and link it a major framework in the humanities. We will interrogate both the content and form of a piece of writing, performance, or film that explores important issues in health and healing, such as discrimination, gender, illness categories, disability, economics, and religion, among others.

You will develop skills in analyzing the politics of expertise and gain a better understanding of institutional politics of medical research that shape patient experiences. By the end of this class, you will learn to be critical of narratives of “help.” Where do we take the dual realms of medicine as being able to both help and harm? If you decide to become a health care professional, which communities would you serve? What kinds of shifts do you want to foresee? What conceptual and practical tools will you need to realize those shifts?

Learning Outcomes

In this course, you will learn how to 1) comprehend different frameworks in the humanities that engage with medical issues, 2) learn multiple methods of research in the medical humanities, 3) compare theoretical approaches to medicine, 4) closely read and contextualize primary sources, and 5) develop visual and oral skills for communicating original research questions.

Zoom Etiquette

The Zoom chat will be open on the first week of class. Notes will be taken on the class Google Doc and any questions outside of class will be posted on the class Slack. Urgent questions will be posted in the Slack Q&A for members of the class to answer (including the instructor and TA)

Class Google Doc

Since everyone will have a slightly different situation with their internet access, we will keep a class Google doc with notes linked here: shorturl.at/dvFWX

The Google doc will be a collaborative document for which we will randomly assign students. Volunteers will receive points counting towards their participation grade. The appointment team for the week will record notes, add questions in the Zoom chat backchannel and add hyperlinks to relevant sources for us to review in discussion on Thursdays.

Class Slack

Make sure to add yourself to the class Slack. We will post questions and answer here, share assignments, discuss peer reviews, and offer feedback.

Grading

Participation	5%
Responses	20%
Peer Review	15%
Final Project Part 1: Write	10%
Final Project Part 2: Propose	10%
Final Project Part 3: Outline	15%
Final Project Draft + Submission	25%

Disability Resource Center

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Assignments

Responses

You will be assigned 20-30 pages of reading for each class. Reading responses are due at midnight night on Canvas before every Tuesday and Thursday class. These are meant for you to raise questions about concepts that might be unfamiliar to you or ideas that you'd like to discuss further. You are required to submit **ten responses total**, which include five passage posts on Tuesdays and five written reviews for Thursdays. Extra responses can be considered towards extra credit with permission of the instructor.

TUESDAY Passage Posting x 5

Select one passage from the reading that stands out to you. Briefly discuss what you find interesting about the passage. Written posts must not exceed 250 words; video messages must not exceed 2.5 minutes.

THURSDAY Written Reviews x 5

Write about a concept that you've learned in the week and other outstanding questions that you'd like to discuss. You also have the option of responding to a question from a previous review. Written posts must not exceed 250 words; video messages must not exceed 2.5 minutes.

Final Project

Content

Your final Assignment can be a creative narrative piece or a research paper based on an experience you have had with medicine, whether as a patient, caregiver, intern, shadow student, emergency medical services member, or other role. For instance, if you have a personal experience with mental illness, you can choose to research on the history of American asylums to write a historical fiction piece of someone (perhaps a grandparent) receiving treatment in the 1950s. Or you can produce a series of cartoons satirizing recent health care propaganda. Or you can develop a speculative fiction on what single-payer healthcare would look like if from the perspective of an undocumented immigrant. Your topic must be approved by the instructor hand. Assignments will be assessed based on demonstration of active critique either implicitly in the form of your work or explicitly through footnotes.

Form

You will have a choice of expressive media for your assignment. You can choose to either produce a written piece, which includes a work of fiction, non-fiction, research paper, poetry, or a play; or, painting, sculpture, graphic novel, short film, or music composition.

Your final assignment must come in three parts:

1. **Abstract** (300 words): Introduce your piece to a broader audience, your intentions behind it, your sources, your inspiration, and your process of creating it.
2. **Body** (up to 1500 words for essays, 3-4 minutes for film/music): You will show your own interpretation/process of your piece
3. **References**: Include up to 5 citations from scholars engaging with topics in the medical humanities.

Logistics

You will be divided into 10 groups of 6. In each group, find a partner. Discuss if you want to work on similar topics or similar genres for your assignment. You will peer-review each other's work in pairs and present your ideas as a group. You are allowed to reach out to more members in your group for peer review.

You will submit different parts of your assignments according to the following deadlines:

PART 1: Write (Sep. 17)

- Think of a medical experience that you had recently and offer in as MUCH detail as possible how things felt, smells, tasted, looked. Allow your partner to learn as much about your style of inquiry and reflection through this piece.
- Length: 500 words max, or 5 minutes if an audio recording

PART 2: Propose (Oct. 1)

- Describe your intended content and chosen form of media. What topic concerns you the most? What kinds of questions are guiding your form of inquiry? What kinds of scholarship are you planning to draw from? What are your chosen methods?
- Do you want this to turn into a graphic novel? Short film? Short story? Will you take on historical ethnography? Actual ethnography? Journal article? Musical? Song? Parody? (300 words)
- If you find that your group members are engaging in similar topics, you can share topics. Collaborations must be approved by the instructor
- Length: 300 words max
- *Peer reviews and should be posted within 48 hours. Offer feedback on the intellectual scope of the proposal, its clarity, feasibility, and execution.*

Part 3: Outline (Oct. 15)

- How do you plan to take on your topic? If you are producing a short story, research paper, or creative narrative piece, discuss the structure of your argument or intended flow of the piece.
- Offer a detailed description of your methods. If you are planning to create a media project, include the kinds of materials you wish to use, how you would source them. Include up to 5 academic references that are guiding your thinking.
- If you plan to take on collaborators, list their individual roles.
- Length: 2 pages max
- *Peer reviews and should be posted within 48 hours. Offer feedback on the intellectual scope of the proposal, its clarity, feasibility, and execution.*

Part 4: Draft 1 (Oct. 29)

- Turn in a draft of your piece and its 3 parts to your group leader.
- *Peer reviews and should be posted within 48 hours. Offer feedback on the intellectual scope of the proposal, its clarity, and execution.*

Part 5: Revision & Presentation (Nov. 19)

- Turn in a final of your piece and its 3 parts to your group leader. Pieces should be posted on the course Wordpress template by November 20.
- *Peer reviews and should be posted within 48 hours. Offer feedback on the intellectual scope of the proposal, its clarity, and execution.*

Late Policy

You are allowed a total of three days extension to be applied across the semester as you wish. For instance, you can use one day for each assignment, or three days for one assignment. Should you require an extension, please request one in person or by email **at least two days** before the paper, response, or assignment is due. In such cases, your grade will not be affected and the instructor will work with you to find a new deadline that works better but will still keep you on track with the class. If you request an extension the day before the work is due or the day it is due, there must be extenuating circumstances (such as illness or a family emergency), or your grade will be negatively affected. In such cases, please notify the instructor.

Reading Tips

Read before you come to class. Readings provide a shared foundation for our discussions. The materials for this course include work by anthropologists, historians, cultural theorists and philosophers. Please bring the readings to class so that we can refer to specific passages in the texts. It is highly recommended that you start reading early for weeks with heavy reading loads. Recommended readings provide additional context and theorization related to the week's theme, but there is no expectation that you will read these texts during the term. If you have any concerns about the readings, please do not hesitate to come to office hours.

Take notes (in the margins or in a separate notebook) while you read, as well as in class, as this will help you process the materials. Some questions to consider while reading:

1. What are the conditions of production of this text? (historical, geographical, etc.)
2. What are the author's central arguments or main points?
3. What evidence does the author use to support their argument?
4. What ideas or authors are being argued against?
5. What assumptions does the author rely on to make their argument?
6. Do you find the author's argument convincing? Why or why not?
7. What surprised you about the reading? What did you learn?
8. What experiences in your life, or in your research, resonate with the reading?

Course Readings

INTRODUCTION: FORM AND CONTENT

- 8.25 Introduce yourself (quiz on Canvas)
- 8.27 How to Read for History: shorturl.at/DJRS4
How to Read a Book: shorturl.at/coPQZ
How to Read a Poem: shorturl.at/nuOTW
How to Read a Comic: shorturl.at/vzLS6
How to Read Beyonce (from film critics): shorturl.at/forxL

PART 1 HOSPITALS & THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF MEDICINE

DOCTORS

COVID-19 & burnout (interview & podcast & article)

- 9.1 **Guest:** Dr. April Carpenter
Castin, “Physical Therapy Burnout is Destroying Our Profession”
- 9.3 *This American Life*, “The Reprieve”

DISEASE & ILLNESS

historical arguments of medicalization & paternalism

- 9.8 Rosenberg, *Care for Strangers* “Introduction” and “Life on the Ward”
Rosenberg, Our Present Complaint, “Tyranny of Diagnosis”
- 9.10 Arthur Kleinman, “Catastrophe and Caregiving: The Failure of Medicine as an Art.”
Arthur Kleinman, “Caregiving: The Odyssey of Becoming More Human.”

NARRATIVE MEDICINE

the relationship between writing & medicine

- 9.15 **Guest:** Ricardo Nuila
“Dog Bites,” Ricardo Nuila (2011)
- 9.17 “I am a Rock,” Ricardo Nuila (2016)
[Final Project Part 1: Write! Due](#)

GRAPHIC MEDICINE

critique of bad doctors & graphic genres

- 9.22 *Understanding Comics*, McCloud, Scott. 1994.
- 9.24 *The Bad Doctor*, Williams, Ian. 2015.

PART 2

PATIENTS & THE POLITICS OF CARE

DISCRIMINATION

negotiating authority

- 9.29** Anne Pollock, *Medicating Race*, selections
Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, selections
- 10.1** Paul-Emile, Kimani, Alexander K. Smith, Bernard Lo, and Alicia Fernández. 2016. "Dealing with Racist Patients." *N-perspective*. February 24, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp1514939>.
Final Project Part 2: Propose! Due

GENDER, SEX, SEXUALITY

transgender, pathology

- 10.6** **Guest:** Travis Alexander
Reading: TBD
- 10.8** **Reading:** TBD

MENTAL ILLNESS

domestic violence

- 10.13** **NO CLASS**
- 10.15** Carmen Maria Machado, *In the Dream House*, choose your own selection
Final Project Part 3: Outline! Due

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

bipolar, DSM history

- 10.20** **Guest:** Beth Semel
Beth Semel, "Do Androids Dream of Electric Speech? Listening Practices in Automated Psychiatric Assessment" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7JFCeaUiXAO&feature=youtu.be>
- 10.22** Esmé Weijun Wang, *The Collected Schizophrenias: Essays*, selections

PART 3

COMMUNITIES OF HEALTH CARE

DISABILITIES

bioethics, fertility

- 10.27** Rapp, Rayna. 1998. "Refusing Prenatal Diagnosis: The Meanings of Bioscience in a Multicultural World." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 23 (1): 45–70.
- 10.29** Margaret Lock, "Death in Technological Time: Locating the End of Meaningful Life."
Final Project Draft Due

ECONOMICS

costs, accessibility, human rights, undocumented immigrants

- 11.3** **Guest:** Yamini Natarajan
“Home,” Ricardo Nuila
“Poor and Uninsured,” Ricardo Nuila
- 11.5** “Taking Care of Our Own,” Ricardo Nuila
Gawande, “Overkill,” in *The New Yorker*

PANDEMICS

health of publics, government & non-government bodies

- 11.10** Robin Scheffler, *Contagious Cause, selections*
- 11.12** *Radiolab*, “Contagious Laughter”
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/segments/91595-contagious-laughter>

RELIGIONS

buddhism, buddhist medicine, de-center hospitals

- 11.17** <http://www.jivaka.net/philly/>
“Meditation,” “Healing Rituals,” “Traditional Medicine,” “Social Dimensions of Health”
- 11.19** WRAP-UP
Final Project Due

Title IX Responsible Employee Notification

Rice University cares about your wellbeing and safety. Rice encourages any student who has experienced an incident of harassment, pregnancy discrimination or gender discrimination or relationship, sexual, or other forms interpersonal violence to seek support from The SAFE Office.

At Rice University, unlawful discrimination in any form, including sexual misconduct, is prohibited under Rice Policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment (Policy 830) and the Student Code of Conduct. As the instructor and a responsible employee, I am required by Title IX to disclose all incidents of non-consensual interpersonal behaviors to the Title IX Coordinator on campus. Although responsible employees are required to make this notification, it is the student's choice to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that students are aware of the range of options available and have access to the resources when in need. For more information, please visit safe.rice.edu, titleix.rice.edu, or email titleixsupport@rice.edu.

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.