Society and Health Care in American History
History of Medicine 504
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Fall 2016

Instructor: Molly Laas
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3-5 p.m. and by appointment

Class times: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Course Description and Aims
This course is designed to introduce students to the history of health care in America from the early republic to the present. In this class we will analyze the motivations and actions of individuals engaged in health care, as they contain infectious disease outbreaks, make a profit, deliver children, try to understand suffering, trauma, and death, pioneer new healing techniques, promote social equity and access to care, decide which bodily states are healthy and which are pathological, and, in general, try to promote human flourishing, either just their own or other people’s. As such, the sweep of the story of American health care is not just that of the development of new, life-saving treatments for disease, but is also a deeper inquiry into the way medicine interacted with culture, politics and society in America. Some of the questions we will return to during this semester are:

• How did the medical profession consolidate its authority, and how was that authority accepted or called into question? What was the role of health care institutions in this process?
• How did American medicine change from an domestic practice to an enormous industry?
• Who gets to participate in health care (as patients, as caregivers) and how? Who is excluded, and why?
• How have approaches to public health changed over time, and how have these approaches reflected changes in the way disease was understood?
• How have women and non-white people sought to control their bodies in the medical encounter?
• How did patients experience illness and treatment?
• How have cultural discourses about disease shaped the ways in which Americans understand their bodies in sickness and health?
• What is the role of science in the history of American medicine?

Course Policies

Texts
All reading assignments will be on Learn@UW as PDF files. Please print them out for in-class use. If you would prefer, a course reader can be purchased at Student Print. Eula Biss’s book On Immunity (2014) is available online and at the bookstore.
Preparing for Class
Your main job is to read the texts carefully and thoroughly, jotting down notes to help you understand the author’s argument and how it helps elucidate some aspect of the history of health care in America. In class, your job is to take responsibility for sharing your questions and thoughts and helping all of us learn. The goal for the class is to learn about the history of health care in America, to be sure, but we will also learn how historians marshal evidence and create analytic arguments, both by studying examples and by doing this work ourselves.

An important way to contribute to the class’s collective work is to leave your laptops, tablets, and cell phones closed, muted, and out of sight during class. (Students who need to use adaptive technologies in class are of course exempt from this request.) I know many of us have grown accustomed to reading PDF copies of articles on our computers and typing our observations into note-taking software, but I strongly suggest reading in hard copy and writing notes by hand, which has been found to increase comprehension of a lecture or reading.\(^1\) Laptops can be powerful tools, but they are also formidable agents of distraction. Laptop users have a hard time paying attention in class, and end up capturing the attention of people around them.\(^2\) We will use our computers in class occasionally, and so I ask that you please use them as tools, not toys.

Written Assignments
You will be responsible for writing two meditations on the reading this semester, to be posted at Learn @UW. Responses should be about 200-300 words long. The aim of the meditations is to give you a chance to explore the texts. You should aim for a critical historical analysis of the material, framed by questions you would like the class to discuss. One way to do this is to compare the argument in one reading with that of a different reading or lecture, or explore a question that you had while doing the reading. The meditations are not meant to be reviews or summaries of the article you’re writing about. Instead they are designed to help you gather your thoughts on a text or topic to prepare you for class and to help continue the discussion. I will grade you on a 0-2 point scale: 0 points for an inadequate response, 1 for just a summary, and 2 for showing good thinking. Don’t be afraid that your analysis is wrong or too simple! This is all just practice.

You will also write one additional Learn@UW meditation, which will be a response to one of your classmate’s posts. It will be graded on the same scale as the meditations. Original meditations are due 24 hours before class starts, and responses to posts may be uploaded up until class begins.

The final essay is a 10-15 page paper, drawing on digital humanities techniques and tools. A proposal will be due in week 4 of class, with a first draft due in week 10, with peer feedback

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due the following week. I will collect and read this first draft and the comments, and give you feedback on your draft. The final version of your paper is due on the last day of exams.

**Assessment**

Class participation (attendance, preparation, and engagement) – 30%
Meditations – 20%
Feedback on your peers’ drafts – 10%
Final Essay – 40%

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 | Introduction**


**Week 2 | Domestic Medicine in Early America**


**Week 3 | Medical Education and Theories of Disease**

Rosner, Lisa. ‘Thistle on the Delaware: Edinburgh Medical Education and Philadelphia Practice, 1800-1825.’ *Social History of Medicine,*

Selections from John Griscom, *Sanitary Conditions of the Laboring Population of New York*

**Week 4 | Antebellum Medical Practice and Sectarian Medicine**


**Week 5 | Medicine in the Civil War and Reconstruction**


Walt Whitman, “The Wound Dresser”


**Week 6 | The Advent of “Scientific Medicine”**
Mon. Oct. 10  Selections from Claude Bernard’s *Experimental Medicine*


**Week 7 | The Growth of Institutions**


**Week 8 | Infectious Disease vs. the Germ Theory**

Lewis A. Sayre, “Cholera: The Lesson of Preceding Epidemics” *The Forum* October 1892 pp. 133-144


**Week 9 | Colonial Medicine + Nursing**


**Week 10 | Defining the “Normal” Body**


Margaret Lowe, “From Robust Appetites to Calorie Counting: The Emergence of Dieting among Smith College Students in the 1920s,” *Journal of Women’s History* 7, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 37-61

**Week 11 | Disability + Industrial Medicine**


or Kim Nielsen, “Helen Keller and the Politics of Civic Fitness” pp. 268-292


**Wed. Nov. 16** Daniel M. Fox and Judith F. Stone, “Black Lung: Miners’ Militancy and Medical Uncertainty, 1968-1972” from *Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health*

**Week 12 | Human Experimentation + Clinical Trials**


**Week 13 | Chronic Disease**


**Week 14 | The Business of Medicine**


**Week 15 | Medicine and the Social Body / Wrap Up**

Final research papers due on the last day of exams.