Honors 1540
Prescriptions for Empathy
Perspectives in the Humanities
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Course Objectives: In this class we will look at the relationship between literature, empathy and medicine, focusing most specifically on how different aspects of health care are portrayed in literature. We will examine writing by and about physicians, nurses, patients, and others in health care. What does this writing have in common? Where are the differences? What happens when roles are reversed and caregivers are patients? How can reading literature help health care workers be better at their jobs? Is the portrayal of medical personnel in literature and on television accurate? Is empathy a benefit or a liability in health care situations? These questions and others will drive our discussion as we do a close reading of texts and write and talk about them.

We have divided the class into issues or topics in health care. We discuss the different points of view of those who give and receive care under these headings to avoid the discussions devolving into generalized and not very helpful stereotypes.

Students need to come to class with the assigned reading and writing completed.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the semester you should be able to discuss the challenges inherent in working as a health care professional or consumer and the specific challenges associated with writing about those roles. You will also interrogate your own experience with medicine, medical personnel and illness. I will evaluate your success in these goals through directed journal writing about texts and your own experience, oral presentations in which you critique and
discuss the dilemmas and issues presented, and through creative and analytical writing.

**General Education Learning Outcomes:** Students will read and write about texts produced by writers from diverse backgrounds and be mindful of the history that produced these texts. They will demonstrate the ability to interrogate issues or power or privilege openly and tolerantly.

Texts: *On Doctoring*, Eds. Richard Reynolds and John Stone; *Intensive Care: More Poetry and Prose by Nurses*, Eds. Cortney Davis and Judy Schaefer, *W;t*, by Margaret Edson. *Mom’s Cancer: A Graphic Novel*, by Brian Fies. *Good Eggs: A Memoir*, Phoebe Potts. Handouts from the instructor and guest speakers. Please keep in mind that although we will not read every selection in every text, you still need to purchase the texts, as your assignments will be based in part on selections from the texts that we have not read in class.

**Assignments**

**Journal:** Students will write at least one journal for each day that they come to class. The journal will be in response to a direct query given in class. An adequate journal response will be at least one double-spaced typed page. Journals are due weekly.

**Mid-Term Exam:** You will be tested on your reading and on concepts presented in class. The test will ask you to identify and tell the significance of these items.

**Medicine in the Movies:** For this assignment you will compare two movies that feature medicine as a theme. How is medicine portrayed? Is there an absence or presence of empathy? Why? Present the results of your comparison by creating a word cloud and then comment on your results.

**Poetry Presentation:** The creative process often teaches us as much about a subject as reading someone else’s work. With this in mind, you will be writing original poems in response to some issue dealing with medicine and health care. They can be based on your own experience or can be fabrications. I am mindful
that this may be a first time experience for some of you. **You will be graded on your willingness to engage seriously with the task and not on whether they are perfect poems.** You will produce at least five polished poems that you will then present to the class at a poetry reading. I will then compile these works into a class anthology.

**Final Project:** The final project has several parts. The initial ones (the journal, the abstract, the list of questions) are designated to get you thinking about the larger contexts that surround medicine and literature about medicine: things such as poverty, pain, empathy, vulnerability, access to healthcare, and fear, among others.

The later workshops will hone your argument and prepare you for your presentation.

You will write a research assisted essay in which you identify a literary text that you think raises interesting questions about the issue or concept you choose. This text should be one we did not read in class. Using the literary text as a spring board, you will then formulate an argument. For example, you might choose a text that is about pain from the perspective of a healthcare professional. This might lead you to a discussion of pain management or physical versus psychological pain or alternative methods of pain control.

Your reading about poverty might lead you to research about global healthcare or insurance benefits for poor families.

The main goal of this assignment is to have you explore the larger questions at issue in your literary piece. The original literary text or a sample of it will be a part of your poster as well as the results you found in your research and the conclusions you draw from it.

This assignment will consist of several parts:

- An **abstract** describing the issue you are pursuing and explaining why you chose the option that you did.
• You will also be required to submit a list of questions that you are going to address in your essay. What are the central, important, key arguments surrounding your issue. What do we have to agree on to even discuss them? For example if you are writing about the pain of mental illness, you would pose a series of questions about psychological versus physical pain. You will then write your essay.

• Finally, you will present your findings in a poster session in the honor’s office. The campus will be invited.

Grading:

Journal 30%

Original Poems 10%

Poetry Reading 5%

Mid Term Exam 15%

Medicine in the Movies 15%

Final Project

Abstract 5%

List of Questions 5%

Essay 10%

Poster 5%

Late Work: As a rule, late work will not be accepted. If you have a difficulty let me know ahead of time and we will discuss it.

Plagiarism: If it is not your own work, do not try to suggest that it is. Plagiarism is passing off someone else’s work as your own. It is grounds for failing the
assignment in question and possibly being punished by the university. It is easy to cheat and it is easy to catch cheaters. Don’t do it.

**ADA Act:** The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, psychiatric, sensory, systemic or learning disabilities. Please contact us at the beginning of the semester to discuss any accommodations that you might need.

**Core Beliefs:** According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “determine before the last day to drop a course without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student’s core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student’s request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student’s beliefs”

**Emergency Contingency Plan:** In the event of a campus emergency, we will continue to conduct class online. You can access the class, relevant lectures, writing prompts, and assignments via online.weber.edu. Please forward your wildcat mail to whichever email you regularly check so that you can keep up with new developments.

**Syllabus:**

**Week 1**
M Overview and Introduction
W The Empathy Paradox
F How to Read a Text

**Week 2**
M Science vs Humanities

**Week 3**

**On Doctoring**
M) WC W “The Girl with the Pimply Face” (62)

**W** Thomas “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (151)
F Abse “X-Ray” (193)

**Week 4**

*On Doctoring*

M Stone “Gaudeamus Igitur” (281)

W Carver “What the Doctor Said” (302)

F Mates “Laundry” (349)

Hilfiker “Mistakes” (325)

**Week 5**

*Intensive Care*

M Shrader “Longtime Companion” (198)

W Araujo “A Moment in the History of Nursing” (3)

Battaglia “Thin Margin” (9)

F Campbell “The Radio” (47)

Grant “Edna’s Star” (95)

**Week 6**

*Intensive care*

M Klassen “The Facts of Lice” (111)

W Kovach “Mourning Coffee” (115)

F Rosenweig “What Was Left of Summer” (187)

“Nurse in the Neighborhood Clinic Disappeared” (144)

**Week 7 Mom’s Cancer** (Graphic novel)

Mid Term Exam

**Week 8 Neuroscience, Drama, and Empathy**

**Week 9 Medicine on Television**

You need to watch the pilots of *House M.D.* and *Grey’s Anatomy*

Final Project Abstract due

**Week 10 W;T** (Reading the Play)

**Week 11 W;T** (Watching the Film)

**Week 12**

*Good Eggs*

**Week 13**

Workshop Final Project

Draft of Essay Due

**Week 14**

Workshop Final Project

Draft of Essay Due

Poster session in library

**Week 15**

Final Project Due

Presentations

Poster Session in Library