Honors 1540

Medicine and Literature

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Fall 2014

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Course Objectives: In this class we will look at the relationship between literature 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 make health care workers better at their jobs? Is the portrayal of medical personnel in literature and on television accurate? 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. 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 Position Paper: Based on a rubric I will give you, you will discuss how the presentation of an issue changes when it is presented in different genres. How does the treatment of a family’s reaction to a cancer diagnoses differ when presented in a graphic novel versus a poem versus a film. How does the genre change, enhance, or distort the message?

Panel Discussion Response: We are fortunate to have W;t presented on campus this semester. We will attend the performance and one of the “talk back” panels after the play. The panels will be composed of physicians, nurses, and patients. This assignment asks you to evaluate the answers and comments of the people on the panel and their discussion of the play. I will give you a rubric to guide your responses.
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: For this assignment you will write a series of journals for which you have three options: 1) think about something in your previous reading that sparked a memory of your or someone else's experience; 2) write about something you or someone else has experienced that wasn't sparked by the reading; 3) write a fictional or poetic account of something. These early journals will be musings on issues we have come up against in our discussions and reading that are larger than the medical issues: power or poverty or gender or vulnerability or pain, or whatever you choose. The issue will be the springboard for your writing.

For example, I might choose to write about vulnerability and power and my experience with infertility. This assignment requires research and my research could consist of gender theory since women are the primary players most of the time in infertility treatment. I could also do research on other women’s written accounts of their experience. Is vulnerability a common theme? Why or why not?

Or someone might choose to write about the issue of pain prompted by a poem or vignette we have read. The research could consist of the current medical research on pain control, alternative means of pain control and the controversy surrounding it. This information would provide commentary on your story or the story of the person whose experience you are describing.

If you choose the fictional option, your research would be on other fictions or poems written on this topic. Who is their author? How does his or her situation
or status inform the writing? How does the poet Audre Lorde write about cancer in a different way than Norman Cousins? Does their gender matter? Their race? Do physicians write about their own experience as patients differently than the rest of us do?

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 5%

Poetry Reading 5%

Mid Term Position Paper 10%

Panel Discussion Response 10%

Final Project

Abstract 10%

List of Questions 10%

Essay 20%

Poster 10%
**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
Overview and Introduction

Week 2
Poetic Medicine (Handout)
Creativity and science

Week 3
On Doctoring
T Donne “Death Be Not Proud” (22)
WC W “The Girl with the Pimply Face” (62)
TH Thomas “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (151)
Abse “X-Ray” (193)
Auden “Musee des Beaux Arts” (126)

Week 4
On Doctoring
T Stone “Gaudeamus Igitur” (281)
Carver “What the Doctor Said” (302)
TH Mates “Laundry” (349)
Hilfiker “Mistakes” (325)

Week 5
Intensive Care
T Shrader “Longtime Companion” (198)
Araujo “A Moment in the History of Nursing” (3)
Battaglia “Thin Margin” (9)
TH Campbell “The Radio” (47)
Grant “Edna’s Star” (95)

Week 6
Intensive care
T Klassen “The Facts of Lice” (111)
Kovach “Mourning Coffee” (115)
TH Rosenweig “What Was Left of Summer” (187)
“Nurse in the Neighborhood Clinic Disappeared” (144)

Week 7 Mom’s Cancer (Graphic novel)

Week 8 Dr. Fowler on Neuroscience and Literature

Week 9 Dr. Callahan on Directing and acting as interpretive acts.

Week 10 W;T (Reading the Play)

Week 11 W;T (Watching the Film)

Week 12
W;/t (Going to the play)
Original Poems Due

Week 13
Workshop Final Project

Week 14
Workshop Final Project
Poster session in library
Final Project Due