Rhetoric and Health explores how the meaning of health is rhetorically constructed and deployed in a number of different social, political, and medical contexts. It examines how language and argument shape our understanding of health, how health is understood in relation to wellness, illness, and disability, and how the meaning of health has become a site of argument and controversy. Students will examine the role of language and culture in the creation and circulation of biomedical knowledge; our complex lived experiences with illness (physical and mental); the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and disability in the experience of illness and healing; and the role that meaning plays in diagnosis, disease, and even epidemics. The course does not assume any background in science or medicine. One of our recurrent topics, in fact, will be to consider how non-experts interact with medicine and its technical vocabularies. Although the primary objective of the course is to understand the rhetorical and cultural dimensions of health and medicine, a secondary objective is for students to become more savvy patients and, for any students who might emerge on the other side of the stethoscope one day, better health care providers.

Learning Outcomes

- To understand and apply rhetorical and cultural theory to issues of health, illness, and health care
- To understand how creative engagement impacts the experience of illness and the patient-provider relationship
- To improve research and critical thinking skills
- To improve written, oral, and visual communication skills

Required Texts

All required texts are available via PDF on the Canvas website: https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/91713

Credits: 3

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the spring semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, problem sets, studying, etc.) for about 3 hours out of classroom for every class period. The syllabus includes more information about meeting times and expectations for student work.
COURSE POLICIES

Format. This course will run as a mix of a lecture and seminar. This means lectures will not simply summarize the readings and each class period will involve substantial amounts of discussion, exercises, and participation. As such, I expect that each member of the course will attend every course meeting having completed the readings for the day and prepared to participate.

Office hours. Office hours tend to fill up fairly quickly during high demand times, especially around exams and paper due dates. Please plan accordingly. During these times, I will make as many times available as I can; however, please keep in mind that meetings are on a first-come, first-served basis, and that I am teaching another course. During in-demand times, please keep meetings around 20 minutes so I may accommodate as many visitors as possible, and please do not miss appointments.

Email. Please allow at least 24 hours for a response to email during the workweek, and longer on over weekends.

Inappropriate use of email: questions that require me to substantially rehash lecture material (that’s what office hours are for); asking for information missed due to an absence (that’s what your classmates are for); or questions that are answered by merely reading the syllabus (that’s what the syllabus is for).

Late assignments. You are allowed an assignment extension of up to three days (until May 10) that may be used on the final project. Final projects turned in at any point after the extension will lose the equivalent of a full letter grade for each 24-hour period they are late, until the 13th—at which point they will receive no credit.

Academic Integrity. If you are uncertain about how to cite a source, please ask me. Plagiarized work—even if unintentional—may result in a zero grade and/or failure of the course as well more severe University penalties.

Accessibility. I am deeply committed to providing an accessible and welcoming learning environment for all students.

- I will gladly use your preferred name and your pronouns, and your classmates should do the same. Please let me know if I need to make any changes to my records.

- The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student’s educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

  - I honor all formal disability accommodations and I’m happy to work with students to make the course and its materials more accessible in informal ways (such as increasing font size, arranging seating, etc.). If there is something I can do to make the course more accessible to you, please just let me know!
ASSIGNMENTS

PARTICIPATION (15%) This is a small course and student participation is essential. There will be a number of in-class discussions, debates, exercises, and other activities that will constitute the bulk of your participation grade. There are additional opportunities to participate by commenting on your classmates’ reading responses (though please note that there’s a cap on this—commenting on responses is available only until the end of that week). While anyone may use laptops or tablets to take notes during lectures, when we shift to exercises and discussions, you will be asked to put your computers and tablets away. You may not use cell phones during class time. Important note: more than four unexcused absences will result in a proportional reduction of your final grade. To be excused, absences must be documented family or medical emergencies. Travel is not an emergency.

READING RESPONSES (20%) Reading is essential to this course. You will complete at least fifteen short responses to the readings over the semester that will ask you to reflect on the readings for the day, connect them with other readings, or otherwise engage with their main ideas. The reading questions also serve as a frame for how to do the reading: you should read the question prompts first. To receive full credit for a reading response, you must engage thoughtfully with the question (a short paragraph of 5-7 sentences) and the reading, using page numbers if citing directly from the text. Reading responses that thoughtfully engage with the question but do not engage with the reading (that is, that don’t demonstrate evidence that you’ve done the reading for that day) will receive half credit. Reading responses that do not thoughtfully engage with the reading or the question (e.g. are only a sentence or two) will not receive credit. Note: there are nineteen opportunities for reading responses. You do not need to be in class to get credit for a reading response. I will drop your four lowest scores, so feel free to do them all.

GRAPHIC PATHOGRAPHY (15%) This assignment asks you to tell a story—either your own or someone else’s—about health, illness, or medicine using comic form, using at least twelve panels. If you haven’t drawn in a while or don’t think you can draw, don’t worry! Anyone can make comics, and we will be drawing throughout the semester in preparation for this assignment.

EXAM (25%) There is one exam in the course, and it will cover material up until that point in the semester. The exam will ask you to identify and apply major concepts of the course, and will consist primarily of short answer and short essay questions.

FINAL PROJECT (25%) The objective of this assignment is to explore an aspect of health (e.g. a disease, healing practice, or medical procedure or tool) from multiple perspectives: historical, medical, cultural, political, and/or personal. Remember: this is not a class about what health is so much as it is about what health means. What you’re after with this assignment is a rich, or as Clifford Geertz might put it, a thick description of health, illness, and healing from a number of different angles in order to fully understand its meaning.

• Papers should be 8 pages at minimum and no more than 10 pages at maximum, double-spaced, and must incorporate at least three scholarly sources, not including any course material it uses.
• There is a creative option for this assignment. This assignment would lend itself well to a creative medium, such as comics, film, or something else of your own devising. If you choose the creative option, you and I will work together to create a set of evaluative criteria so that the project is equivalent to the paper option. As you’ll come to understand, although a creative assignment sometimes involves the production of fewer words, it does not involve less research, and it often involves more time (and yes, it’s sometimes more fun).
• During the last two weeks of class, you will give a polished presentation of your project. You may choose to give a manuscript presentation (from a script) or an extemporaneous presentation (from an outline). You should include a well-designed power point slideshow of no more than 10 slides. Presentations should be 7 minutes at minimum, and 8 minutes at the absolute maximum. Presentations are worth 5% of the project grade.
**Grading**

Percentages represent cutoffs.

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<th>Grade</th>
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| A     | (100 - 93%)      | Superior Work  
**Greatly exceeds** general requirements for an assignment by demonstrating high levels of creativity, skill, ability, initiative, and effort. Technically and stylistically superior writing. The "A" evaluation reflects achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements. **Please note:** simply doing everything an assignment asks of you does not translate to an A grade. |
| AB    | (92.9 – 88%)     | Excellent Work |
| B     | (87.9 – 83%)     | Good Work  
Exceeds requirements by demonstrating **above average** levels of creativity, skill, ability, initiative, and effort. The "B" evaluation reflects achievement that is above the level necessary to meet course requirements. |
| BC    | (82.9 – 78%)     | |
| C     | (77.9 – 70%)     | Average work  
**Meets basic requirements** as outlined in the assignment guidelines, but does not demonstrate any extra commitment to go above and beyond meeting those requirements. The "C" evaluation reflects achievement that meets the requirements in every respect. |
| D     | (69.9 – 60%)     | Below average work  
Meets some, but not all requirements, or is deficient in meeting each of the requirements. The "D" evaluation reflects work that is worthy of credit even though it does not fully meet the basic course requirements. Work falling below this level, work that is plagiarized, or work that is significantly late will receive a failing grade. Work that is not turned in at all will receive a zero. |

![Image of gestures and words]
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Note: the reading schedule after spring break is tentative. The most up to date version of the syllabus will always be found under the “course materials” module of Canvas.

January 24: Introductions

- Get on Canvas and explore the course website; answer the first “introduction” question and respond to someone else.

January 29: What is “rhetoric”? What is a rhetorical perspective?


January 31: What is “health”?

- Jonathan Metzl, “Why ‘Against Health’?”
- Richard Klein, “What is Health and How Do You Get It?”
  - Recommended: Peter Conrad, “Wellness as Virtue: Morality and the Pursuit of Health”

February 5: The interaction of culture and medicine

- Jenell Johnson, selections from American Lobotomy: Introduction and Chapter 2

February 7: Rhetorical illnesses

- Judy Segal, “Hypochondria as a Rhetorical Disorder” from Health and the Rhetoric of Medicine
- Lisa Keränen, “This Weird, Incurable Disease: Competing Diagnoses in the Rhetoric of Morgellons”

February 12: Medicalization, I

- Look over the criteria for substance dependence on Canvas
  - Recommended: Irving Zola, “Medicine and Social Control”

February 14: Medicalization, II

- Erik Eckert, “A Case for the Demedicalization of Queer Bodies”
  - Recommended: selections from Jennifer Terry, An American Obsession

February 19: The rhetoric of bioethics

- Martha Solomon, “The Rhetoric of Dehumanization: An Analysis of Medical Reports of the Tuskegee Syphilis Project”
- Camisha Russell, “Questions of Race in Bioethics”

February 21: The rhetoric of bioethics, II

February 26: The rhetoric of disability


February 28: On pain

- Introduction to Elaine Scarry, The Body in Pain
- Hoffman et al., “Racial Bias in Pain Assessment”

March 5: The rhetoric of mental health, I

- Peter Kramer, selections from Listening to Prozac
- Jonathan Metzl, selections from The Protest Psychosis

March 7: HIV, AIDS & the rhetoric of epidemics

- Exam review

March 12: Exam

March 14: Film: How to Survive a Plague

March 19: Graphic pathography and graphic medicine overview

- Discuss: How to Survive a Plague
- Introduction, Graphic Medicine Manifesto

March 21: Pathography and final project workshop workshop

- Selections from Cancer Made Me a Shallower Person; The Hospital Suite; Marbles
- Bring your sketches and rough cards to class today—we’ll be working through some storying exercises.
- Final project proposal due (1-2 paragraphs explaining what you’ll be doing and how—post on Canvas)
- Suggest an option for crowdsourced topic (April 23): what do you want more of? What are we missing? You can suggest a specific reading, or a topic (and Dr. J can find a reading to match it).

SPRING BREAK

April 2: Racism and health

- Williams, “How Racism Makes Us Sick”
- Roberts, “The Problem with Race-based Medicine”
- Graphic Pathography rough cards due (just bring ‘em to class to show me)
- Vote on crowdsourced topic (go back to crowdsourced discussion and “like” the three options you like best.)

April 4: What doctoring means: The oath, the coat, and the ethos of medicine

April 9: Rhetoric and autism

- Selections from Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism: On Rhetoric and Neurological Queerness*
- Amanda Baggs, “In My Language”

April 11: Possible class visit by “Comic Nurse” MK Czerwiec / TBA

- Note: we may shift the pathography reading party to this day

April 16: Pathography reading party

- Note: Today you should bring one hard copy of your finished graphic pathography to share.
- Please remove your name.

April 18: Beyond health: the rhetoric of wellness, optimization, and self-care

- Carl Cederström and André Spicer, selections from *The Wellness Syndrome*
- Recommended: Crawford, “Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life”

April 23: Crowdsourced Day: What do you still want to know?

April 28: Presentations, Group 1

April 30: Presentations, Group 2

May 2: Presentations, Group 3; wrap up

**Final projects due Monday, May 7:** Upload to Canvas Dropbox

MK Czerwiec