

Disease, Medicine, and Society
HIST 615-001 / 635-002
Syllabus

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Office: Horizon Hall 3156
Office hours by appointment

Fall 2023
Th 7:20-10pm
East Building 134

Course overview

The experience of illness and health, whether physical or mental, is familiar to all of us, as are concerns related to germs, hygiene, and sanitation. Beginning with our commonly held assumptions about these shared aspects of modern life, this seminar will explore the history of medicine as it has intersected with other political, social, and cultural developments, focusing on Europe and the U.S. from the late 18th to 20th centuries. How have understandings of health and disease both reflected and shaped changing ideas and attitudes about modern society and culture? How does scientific knowledge construct and produce its object of study? How are medical ‘truths’ translated into practice and diffused into local cultures? Discussion topics will include the historical and social constructions of disease and wellness; cultural components of illness; politics of public health and hygiene; social determinants of health; medical technologies and their ethical, social, and cultural implications.

Course requirements

Grade breakdown:

Class participation 20%
Discussion questions and lead 20%
Book review 25%
Final paper 35%

1. *Class participation:* As a graduate seminar, this class will be primarily based around group discussions. You are expected to come to class each week having read the assigned texts and prepared to discuss them with your classmates.
2. *Discussion questions and lead:* You will be asked to post one discussion question on the main reading each week by Thursday 5pm on Blackboard. In addition, two students will work together each week to lead the class discussion. Discussion leaders should spend approximately 15 minutes at the start of class providing some historical and historiographical context on the reading, and highlighting key topics they would like the class to reflect on together.
3. *Book review* (1000 words), due 10/12 by 7pm: Early in the semester, you will each select a book published in the past 5-8 years on the history of medicine, which you think relates to the theme(s) of the course. You will write a book review of your selection, conforming to the standards of a professional historical journal (*American Historical Review*, *Journal of Social History*, etc.). You and your classmates will then choose one of these books to read and discuss together for the 11/30 meeting.

4. *Final paper* (4000 words), due 12/8 by 5pm: You can choose between the following two options for your final paper. 1) A historiographical essay on 5 recent publications, through which you will reflect on the changing (or enduring) themes, methods, and approaches of the history of medicine. Two of the books may come from the course syllabus (but should not include the book you reviewed for the first paper). 2) An article aimed at a popular media outlet that analyzes a current medical debate from a historical perspective. You will be asked to prepare a brief paper proposal (250 words) and a preliminary bibliography by 11/9.

Reading assignments

The following books are available for purchase at the university bookstore:

- *Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963)
- *Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (1962)
- Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (1984)
- Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in 18th-Century Germany* (1991)
- *Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (2001)
- *Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (2006)
- Robert Aronowitz, *Unnatural History: Breast Cancer and American Society* (2007)
- *Allan Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product That Defined America* (2007)
- *Jan Goldstein, *Hysteria Complicated by Ecstasy: The Case of Nanette Leroux* (2009)
- Elena Conis, *Vaccine Nation: America's Changing Relationship with Immunization* (2015)
- *Guy Beiner, ed., *Pandemic Re-awakenings: The Forgotten and Unforgotten 'Spanish' Flu of 1918-1919* (2022)

*Books noted with an asterisk are available online through the GMU library catalog. Other texts on the syllabus will be shared online through Blackboard.

Course policies

- *Academic integrity:* The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. GMU has an Honor Code (<https://oai.gmu.edu/full-honor-code-document/>) with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using MLA or Chicago format. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.
- *Course communication:* Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class.

- *Attendance and conduct:* You are expected to attend and participate in every class session. For justifiable absences (such as illness or other emergencies), you may be asked to provide official documentation. You should e-mail me in advance if you know of an upcoming conflict. Repeated absences will impact your participation grade. Please refrain from eating or sleeping during class.
- *Use of technology:* Cell phones and other communicative devices must be switched off or put on silent (not vibrate) mode and kept out of sight during class hours. Laptops/tablets are only permitted if you need them to access the readings during class and for presentations.
- *Late assignments:* For all written work, lateness will be penalized by 1/3 of a letter grade (for example, A to A-) for every 24-hour period beyond the deadline. If you have extenuating circumstances, you should always get in touch with me directly.
- *Special accommodations:* If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services at 703.993.2474 or ds.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Weekly schedule

Week 1 (8/24) Introduction

Erwin H. Ackerknecht, "A Plea for a 'Behaviorist' Approach in the Writing of the History of Medicine," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 22, no.3 (1967), 211-214.

Week 2 (8/31) Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic* (1963)

Week 3 (9/7) Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years* (1962)

Erwin H. Ackerknecht, "Anticontagionism between 1821 and 1867: The Fielding H. Garrison lecture," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 38, no.1 (2009), 7-21.

Week 4 (9/14) Library research techniques session with Dr. George Oberle

Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (1984), part I

Week 5 (9/21) Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin* (1991)

Ludmilla Jordanova, "The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge," in *Locating Medical History: The Stories and Their Meanings* (2004)

Due: Book review selection

Week 6 (9/28) Porter, *Bodies Politic* (2001)

Roy Porter, "The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from Below," *Theory and Society* 14, no.2 (March 1985)

Week 7 (10/5) Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies* (2006)

Charles Rosenberg, "The Therapeutic Revolution: Medicine, Meaning, and Social Change in 19th-Century America," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* (Summer 1977)

Week 8 (10/12) Book reviews due and Blackboard Discussion Board to select final reading (No in-person meeting this week)

Week 9 (10/19) Aronowitz, *Unnatural History* (2007)

Aronowitz, "From Myalgic Encephalitis to Yuppie Flu: A History of Chronic Fatigue Syndromes," in *Framing Disease* (1992)

Week 10 (10/26) Brandt, *The Cigarette Century* (2007)

Week 11 (11/2) Goldstein, *Hysteria Complicated by Ecstasy* (2009)

Mary Fissell, "Making Meaning from the Margins: The New Cultural History of Medicine," in *Locating Medical History: The Stories and Their Meanings* (2004)

Week 12 (11/9) Conis, *Vaccine Nation* (2015)

Due: Final paper proposals

Week 13 (11/16) Beiner (ed.), *Pandemic Re-awakenings* (2022)

Week 14 (11/23) - Thanksgiving break -

Week 15 (11/30) Class book selection

Allan Brandt, "Emerging Themes in the History of Medicine," *The Milbank Quarterly* 69, no.2 (1991), 199-214.