

University of Wisconsin-Madison
Medical History and Bioethics 740: Narrative Medicine and Public Health
School of Medicine and Public Health

Meeting time and location: 2:30-5:00pm, location TBA

Instructional mode: face-to-face with some online components

Requisites: MED SCI-M 810, 811, 812 and 813

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Office hours: TBA

Course description

Narrative medicine is the practice of using stories to understand health and illness in the context of people's lives and experiences. Whether through fiction or nonfiction, poetry or prose, text or graphics, giving voice to the stories of patients and caregivers allows their experiences to be heard, made sense of, and valued. Developing an ability to honor narrative is key to high-quality history-taking and ultimately excellent diagnosis and treatment.

Learning to listen to others and to express one's own vulnerabilities are valuable tools for all health practitioners, but they are especially valuable in the context of public health. The scope of public health interventions encourages practitioners to think in terms of populations, but efforts to improve quality of life through prevention must ultimately be grounded in individual lives, resulting in a powerful synthesis of the personal and the public. This course will explore how narrative medicine techniques can enrich the practice of public health, both through the power of *listening* to stories to understand how individuals experience health and through the power of *telling* stories to mobilize communities.

Credits: 2

Credit hours

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 90 hours of student engagement with the course learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit), which include regularly scheduled seminar meetings, reading, observing, writing, and responding to other students' writing reading.

Learning activities

Activities for the class include:

- Seminars led by faculty instructors (30 credit hours/2 weeks)
- Reading or watching films (20 credit hours/2 weeks)
- Observations (8 credit hours/2 weeks)
- Responding to other students' work (6 credit hours/2 weeks)
- Writing (26 credit hours/2 weeks)

The table below provides an example of how you might choose to organize your time for week one, but (with the exception of the scheduled seminars) you may choose to complete the work at any time you like, provided you meet the deadlines for posting your completed assignments on Canvas.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-9:40	Reading	Reading	Reading	Watching	Reading
9:40-10:00	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
10:00-11:40	Writing	Observing	Observing	Writing	Writing
11:40-12:30	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
12:30-2:10	Responding	Writing	Writing	Responding	Writing
2:10-2:30	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
2:30-5:00	Seminar	Seminar	Seminar	Seminar	Seminar

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Identify and employ narrative components such as plot, setting, characters, point of view, and tone.
- Use narrative medicine skills in the context of clinical encounters and public health interventions.
- Express yourself in different modes (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, film, graphic novels), and use both free writing and sustained writing techniques.
- Explain the connections between public health and individual experience, and the difference between viewing problems as personal problems vs public issues.
- Reflect on the meaning of health in the context of individuals' everyday lives, especially people who are different than yourself.

Assignments

Seminar participation: Active participation in seminars is crucial to building a community in which creative work can happen. We will talk more about how to create this community in the first seminar session, but in the meantime see the attached rubric for some basic guidelines on seminar participation.

Short writing: These assignments are to be completed in under two hours, and there is no set limit for how long/short they should be. The aim of these assignments is to get you creating freely and often, without a lot of rumination about the process or how “good” the product is. All meaningful and good faith attempts to engage with the assignment prompts will be counted as satisfactory for the purposes of grading.

Online responses: Following some short writing assignments, you will be asked to comment on other students’ work through Canvas. The aim of these responses is to give your classmates feedback on their work, and to help them understand what their work looks like from the perspective of another reader/viewer. These responses need not be long; 250 words will typically suffice.

Sustained story: You will work on one piece over the second half of the course, taking time to plan, draft, and revise this work. The format and length of this work is up to you, but the work must be substantially more polished in terms of quality than the short writing pieces you submit. You will also be required to bring in drafts to workshop in seminar sessions during week two.

Grading

This course is graded as satisfactory/unsatisfactory. In order to receive a grade of “satisfactory,” you must complete the following: 6 of 7 short writing pieces, 3 of 3 online responses, 1 sustained story in a format of your choosing, and attendance and meaningful participation in 9 of 10 seminars. If you fail to meet the required number of assignments/attend the required number of sections, you will receive a grade of “unsatisfactory.” If you submit an assignment but the submitted work does not fulfill the spirit of the assignment, we will notify you and you will have an opportunity to re-submit that assignment within one week of the original due date. Until the assignment is completed to a satisfactory level, it will not count towards successful completion of the course.

Textbooks

There are no textbooks required for this course. All required readings will be available on Canvas as pdfs.

Academic integrity

By enrolling in this course, you assume the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to studentconduct.wiscweb.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

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. You are expected to inform us of your need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third day of the course, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. We 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.

Diversity and inclusion

Diversity is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals. The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background—people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.

Course schedule: week one

1. What is narrative medicine?

Reading: Rita Charon (2001) "Narrative medicine: a model for empathy, reflection, profession, and trust." *JAMA* 286(15): 1897-1902.

Ranjana Srivastava (2015) "Nourishment." *NEJM* 373: 2100-2101.

Explore www.narrativemedicine.org or the @NarrativeMed Twitter feed to get a sense of the field.

Writing: Re-read your personal statement from your med school application, and reflect on how your story has evolved over the past several years. Then, write a retrospective application statement, telling the committee what they should know about you from the perspective of who you have become now. When you are finished, post your statement in the Canvas forum (you can post your original statement as well, if you feel comfortable).

Responding: Read your classmates' reflections, and respond to one post that feels similar to your experience and another that feels different.

2. Patients' stories

- Reading: Allan Peterkin (2012) "Practical strategies for practising narrative-based medicine," *Canadian Family Physician* 58(1): 63-64.
Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw (1995) "Writing up fieldnotes II: creating scenes on the page." In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, University of Chicago Press, 66-84.
- Observing: Sit in the surgical waiting area at UW hospital, observing the space and the people in it.
- Writing: Write an ethnographic "thick description" of the scene you have observed that will help the reader understanding the impact of illness on a patient's loved ones.

3. Providers' stories

- Reading: Choose one of the following volumes based on your clinical interests, and read 2-3 stories from that volume:
Mark Tyler-Lloyd (2009) *The Real Life of an Internist*, Kaplan Publishing.
Perri Klass (2009) *The Real Life of a Pediatrician*, Kaplan Publishing.
Arthur Perry (2009) *The Real Life of a Surgeon*, Kaplan Publishing.
- Observing: Pair up with one of your classmates, and interview each other about an experience from your medical training that has stuck with you, that you thought about after you went home, that bothered you somehow, even though you may not know why it did.
- Writing: Write about your partner's experience using a format/technique that feels appropriate for the story.

4. The "sociological imagination"

- Watching: Sociological imagination (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BINK6r1Wy78>)
The Pursuit of Happiness (2007)
- Writing: Choose a public health problem, and write about it from two perspectives: one which portrays the problem as a personal problem, and the other which portrays it as a public issue.
- Responding: Choose one of your classmates' narrative pairs, and discuss the narrative devices that the author uses to create the contrast the two pieces.

5. The private experience of public health

- Reading: Read one patient narrative and one commentary from the special issue of *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics* on the American Medical Association's decision to classify obesity as a disease (<https://muse.jhu.edu/issue/30481>),

Writing: Brainstorm ideas for a piece of writing, film, or graphic narrative that you would like to work on over the rest of the course. Sketch out several possible ideas before choosing one, and consider your motivations or reasons for taking on a particular piece. You may choose to do this in collaboration with a classmate, so that you can bounce potential ideas off of each other.

Writing: Begin writing a draft of your sustained story.

Course schedule: week 2

6. Access

Reading: Alice Goffman (2014) "The art of running." In *On the Run*, Picador Press, 23-53.

Observing: Spend two hours either 1) running your errands using public transit or a bicycle or on foot, if you normally use a car; or 2) on the HealthCare.gov marketplace exploring the insurance options available for a family of 4 with a monthly income of \$2,000.

Writing: Create a visual representation of your observation activity (eg a comic, short film, photo essay, etc).

7. Stigma, shame, and blame

Reading: Joyce Farmer and Lyn Chevli "Abortion eve" and Ryan Alexander-Tanner and Jessica Zucker "Overwhelmed, anxious, and angry: navigating postpartum depression" (2018). In *Graphic Reproduction: A Comics Anthology*, edited by Jenell Johnson, Penn State University Press.

Observing: Pair up with a classmate and discuss with each other the harmful and beneficial aspects of powerful emotions such as embarrassment and shame, and strategies for talking and listening when these emotions are in play in clinical encounters.

Writing: Work on your sustained story.

8. Risk

Reading: Kelly Quirino (2013) "Why I keep coming back to smoking." *The Atlantic* (<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/12/why-i-keep-coming-back-to-smoking/281938/>).

Writing: Write a piece that will help the reader understand someone might knowingly engage in an activity that could have negative consequences for their health (smoking, using illicit drugs, taking a dangerous job, having unprotected sex, etc).

Writing: Work on your sustained story

9. Narrative in clinical context

- Watching: Observe 3-4 of the provided videos of clinical encounters. Think about moments where changes in narrative flow may or may not have changed the outcome, either in terms of further evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment.
- Writing: Rewrite one of these clinical encounters, imagining how a different way of asking questions, responding, or listening might have altered perceptions—yours or someone else’s—about what a patient’s diagnosis or treatment would be.
- Writing: Finalize your sustained story and post it on Canvas.

10. Stories for social change

- Reading: Dipesh Navsaria (2011) “Don’t cut budget for family shelters.” *The Cap Times*, https://madison.com/ct/news/opinion/mailbag/dipesh-navsaria-don-t-cut-budget-for-family-shelters/article_5fef05b0-2f84-51c3-9ecb-33cf636222b1.html
- Mona Hanna-Attisha (2018) “How a pediatrician became a detective.” *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/09/opinion/sunday/flint-water-pediatrician-detective.html>
- Writing: Write a draft op-ed about a public health topic of your choosing.
- Responding: Read a selection of your classmates’ sustained writing projects in preparation for the final seminar.