American Medicine and the World

MHS 208
Spring 2013
T/Th 9:35-10:50am, Cohen 324

Professor Laura Stark
321 Calhoun
615-343-0916
Office hours:
Tues. 11-12 & by apt
laura.stark@vanderbilt.edu

TA Michael S Cross
michael.s.cross@vanderbilt.edu
Office hours: TBA

DESCRIPTION
The goal of the course is to introduce students to the social foundations of medical authority, and its effects in the US and across the globe. The course explores how the social settings of medical research, evaluation, and treatment affect health outcomes; how the credibility of medical expertise is created, defended, and challenged; and how inequalities are built into medical knowledge and diffused through global institutions. Students will develop skills in evaluating evidence and arguments about biomedicine; in comparing, critiquing and analyzing international health data in writing and discussion; and in using campus resources to explore social studies of medicine beyond the classroom. Materials will include historical documents, scientific articles, and publications by MHS faculty.

COURSE MATERIALS
There will be approximately 50 pages of reading per meeting, which should take students roughly 2.5 hours to complete. There is one required course book, which is available on reserve at Central Library and at Vanderbilt Barnes and Noble:


Reading assignments from sources other than the course book are available on OAK.

COURSE POLICIES
Students may use laptops in class with Professor Stark’s permission. Please email a request for permission and schedule a meeting to discuss the possibility.

It is mandatory to attend and participate in all class meetings. Excused absences will be accepted with a message from a health clinic or from students’ class deans for illnesses, life events, and observed holidays: http://as.vanderbilt.edu/docs/Religious%20Calendar%202012-13.pdf

Late assignments are not accepted.

Assignments based on collaborative work are graded individually, and should reflect each student's original work. The Vanderbilt University Honor Code is available online:
http://www.vanderbilt.edu/student_handbook/the-honor-system/#honorcode

Students may request a re-grade of any assignment by emailing a 500-word justification to Professor Stark within one week of receiving the original grade.
Final grades are based on the Vanderbilt University Grading System: 
http://registrar.vanderbilt.edu/transcripts/transcript-key/grading-systems/

GRADING
The course integrates grading with instruction. The aim of the grading process is to give students helpful feedback, evaluate students’ performance, and apply a fair standard of assessment across students and assignments.

Written assignments will be evaluated in four areas using the grading scale below. Paper markings will identify patterns of strengths and weaknesses, first through written comments, then through marks showing additional examples of the pattern that students will then be expected to recognize and address in future work. For feedback on drafts of written assignments, please visit Vanderbilt’s Writing Studio: http://www.vanderbilt.edu/writing/

Areas of assessment
- Completeness: Are all elements of the assignment fully addressed? Does the paper meet the goals of the assignment? Is the paper appropriately organized—with topic sentences (e.g., summaries, analytic statements, or arguments) followed by evidence (e.g., examples, refinements, or details)?
- Analysis: Does the paper synthesize detailed materials into broader points or arguments? Are broader points presented in students’ own words? Are strengths and weaknesses of evidence explored?
- Evidence: Is the choice of evidence appropriate? Is the evidence specific (e.g., cases, quotations, or subpoints)? Is the evidence accurate? Are sources of evidence cited?
- Writing mechanics: Does the writer correct or repeat mistakes flagged on earlier assignments? Is the paper free of typographical errors? Is the grammar correct?

Grading standard
A: excellent performance in all areas, and unexpectedly fine performance in some.
B: good performance in all or most areas.
C: adequate performance in many, but not all, areas.
D: inadequate performance in many areas.
F: incomplete performance in most areas.

ASSIGNMENTS
Reading responses (3 responses: each 5% of final grade)
Three reading responses of 800-900 words each are required during the semester. The aims of the assignments are to allow students to explore new concepts and arguments, document a thorough and thoughtful reading of the texts, and put readings in dialogue with earlier course material and current events. At the first class meeting, students will sign up for the days on which they will write responses. The papers should cover all of the reading assignments for one class meeting, and be uploaded to OAK by 5PM on the evening before the set of readings will be discussed in class. For an overview of how to read effectively to write a response, please see the Guide to Reading Social Science appended to the syllabus.

Responses may treat each reading in turn or integrate readings. Responses should accomplish four things:
- **Summarize** the main argument of each reading in one paragraph.
- **List** the authors’ key conceptual / theoretical terms (two to three total). For each term, explain in one sentence why it is important.
• **Describe** an example or counter-example that relates to the theme of the readings. These may be based on current events, previous readings, or personal experience.

• **Ask** a critical or exploratory question for the author(s).

**In-class quizzes (3 quizzes: each 10% of final grade)**
Three short quizzes will allow students to demonstrate they have completed the readings, understood course materials, and engaged with class discussions. The quizzes are cumulative: they will cover all lecture and reading materials to date but emphasize material from the most recently completed section.

**Exploratory research assignments (5 assignments: each 5% of final grade)**
Five short research assignments will be due at the start of class, as noted on the schedule. The aims of the assignments are to introduce students to domestic and international health datasets and documents, and to develop the critical skills needed to evaluate health data and documents as scholarly evidence. Detailed instructions will be given in class one week before assignments are due. Research assignments will culminate in the final book review (see below).

**Final book review (20% of final grade)**
A final book review will be due on Thursday, April 25 2013. Instructions for the review will be available on Moodle at mid-term. Students may choose to review one of the following three books, which are on reserve at Central Library:

- Susan Sontag. 2001. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*.

**Participation (10% of final grade)**
Course participation accounts for students’ efforts to engage in class discussions; contributions to final work teams; attention to current events in healthcare; and quality of work on a 500-word reflection posted to OAK within two days of attending the following event:

- **Public Lecture** by Melissa Harris-Perry Monday, February 18, 2013 at 4PM

**SCHEDULE**

January 8: Welcome

**COMMUNITIES OF KNOWLEDGE**

January 10: Causes as consensus

Read prior to this session:

- Pinch, Trever and Harry Collins. “Yuppie Flu, Fibromyalgia, and Other Contested Diseases,” *Doctor Golem*.

**Optional**

January 15: Independent work for Research assignment 1
Research assignment 1 due at 5PM. Upload to OAK.

PROFESSIONS
January 17: Professions as monopolies
Read prior to this session:

January 22: Consolidating medical authority
  • Tobbell, Dominique. 2012. “‘Eroding the physician’s control over therapy’: The post-war politics of the prescription,” in Elizabeth Watkins and Jeremy Greene (eds.) *The Prescription in Perspective: Therapeutic Authority in Late 20th Century America* (Johns Hopkins University Press).

January 24: Locating medical authority: buildings and bodies

January 29: Art or science? Judgment and evidence in healthcare
Read prior to this session:
  • Collins, Harry and Trever Pinch. “Diagnosis and Dealing with Uncertainty,” *Dr. Golem.*
Research assignment 2 due at the start of class. Bring hardcopy to class and upload to OAK.

January 31: Standards and routines; tools and practices
Read prior to this session:

February 5: Division of labor in healthcare and its consequences
Read prior to this session:

February 7: Quiz 1
MEDIA

February 12: Public stories, public health
Read prior to this session:


February 14: Communication and the corporate media
Read prior to this session:


February 18: Public Lecture by Melissa Harris-Perry

CORPORATIONS

February 19: Drug industries
Read prior to this session:


February 21: CROs and hospitals
Read prior to this session:


Research assignment 3 due at the start of class. Bring hardcopy to class and upload to OAK.

GOVERNMENTS

February 26: Rights and requirements
Read prior to this session:


February 28: Regulating healthcare

March 5 & 7: No class, spring break

March 12: Regulating research
Read prior to this session:

March 14: In-class training: Final book reviews
Research assignment 4 due at the end of class.

March 19: Regulating products
Read prior to this session:

March 21: Quiz 2 in class.

CIVIL SPHERE
March 26: Who is the public in “public health”? Creating citizen-consumers in global health
Read prior to this session:

March 28: Health, inequality, and social interactions
Read prior to this session:
  • Meldrum, Marcia. 2012. “Chapter 8: The Prescription as Stigma,” in *Prescribed*.

April 2: Health disparities: biological or social?
Read prior to this session:

April 4: Class and inequality
Read prior to this session:

Research assignment 5 due at the start of class. Bring hardcopy to class and upload to OAK.

REligion
April 9: Organized Religion and the State
Read prior to this session:

April 11: Healing faith
Read prior to this session:

social Movements
April 16: Health social movements and the future of medical authority
Read prior to this session:
• King, Samantha. Selections from *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*

April 18: Quiz 3 in class and course wrap-up
Faced with a long list of readings, you need to learn to read extensively as well as intensively, in as efficient a manner as possible. It is rarely practical to read everything word for word and line for line. Although close textual reading and interpretation is part of social science tradition, it is often not possible, nor advised, especially in undergraduate courses. Some social science texts that are still in use were written more than a century ago and were intended for very different readers. Instead of trying to read every line and word, consider the following suggestions for more efficient and effective course reading.

1. Begin any reading assignment by reading the abstract, preface, introductions, and conclusions. These are often the most important parts of a text because the author frequently signals his or her major themes and arguments. You should also look over the text to discover key words and obtain an idea of the kind of evidence being provided to support the major themes and arguments. Often the topic (first) sentences of paragraphs provide the links in the author’s argument.

It can be helpful to formulate what you think you know about the issues being addressed. What do you consider the essential points and key explanatory factors? Or, if you feel you know nothing about the topic, devise a list of what you need the author to tell you in order to become informed.

2. Mechanics of reading and note-taking: Read the text and make marginal notes (on post-its or a separate piece of paper if the text is not a photocopy) indicating what seems like the strongest parts of the text. When you have completed a once-through—skimmed—the text, go back and take notes in outline form, by paraphrasing key sentences or paragraphs. Do not rely or underlining or highlighting. In order to “know” a text you need to move from passive to active reading, which is done by converting it into your own words and formulating your own organization of the text. The text needs to be processed several different ways in your brain.

Do not get “bogged down.” If there are words you don’t understand, names mentioned you’ve never heard of, inadequate and incomplete references to places or ideas, skip over them and keep skimming until you come to a familiar key word or phrase. All authors of the texts we’re reading assume that the reader knows things that you don’t. Clearly this
course is not going to pay attention to these features of the readings, so don’t worry about them.

Analytical reading

1. Classify the essay according to kind and subject matter. Into what paradigm or research program (genre) does it fit? What is the essay about as a whole?

2. Enumerate the major parts in their order and relations and outline these.

3. Define the specific problem or problems the author has tried to solve. What question does the author claim to address? You might also want to think about how this reading fits into the course. Why is this text located at this point in the syllabus? What is the topic for this week and how does this text provide an answer or information on this topic?

4. What theoretical statements does the author make? A theoretical statement proposes a relationship. For example, structural theories of deviance suggest that deviance (what needs to be explained) is a consequence of some part of the structure (organization of the parts) of a society. “Social structure produces deviance” is the generic theoretical statement in this example.

5. What are the concepts used? Become familiar with the author by defining key words. What are the crucial details of the argument? In the example above, what is social structure? What is meant by “deviance”?

6. How does the author’s argument/position compare with that of others who address the same or related question? What are the points of similarity and difference?
7. What normative statements (value judgments) does the author make? What values does the author assume readers will share? What assumptions does the author make that may be contestable?

8. What is the author’s methodology? (Here you should be concerned not only with the methods used but the kinds of arguments implied or given about what methods are more or less appropriate.) What constitutes evidence in this reading? Know the author’s arguments by finding them in, or constructing them out of, sequences of sentences.

9. What problems the author presented have been solved, and which ones remain unsolved? Which of the unsolved ones does the author acknowledge? Does the evidence support the argument? If you disagree with the author, on what do you base your disagreement? Is the author uninformed, misinformed, illogical, imprecise, inconsistent (i.e., internal contradictions in the text) or sloppy (the text is incomplete)? You need to criticize fairly; no “flaming” allowed, no *ad hominem* arguments (attacking an author’s personal characteristics rather than the text itself) allowed.

**Abstract**

Full bibliographic citation.


Details: 3-4 well constructed paragraphs.

Themes: 3-4 bullet points defining and using authors’ key concepts