

Narrative Medicine, Social Justice, & the Arts Syllabus

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What is Narrative Medicine?

“Practicing medicine involves the intersection of science and art. A patient has not only symptoms but a story which includes and helps explain these symptoms. The W&M-EVMS pilot has exciting possibilities for the training and practice of healthcare providers, and demonstrates the value of the partnership between our two institutions.” — W&M Provost Michael R. Halleran

“Medicine, Arts and Social Justice” explores routes to freedom and equality for those who have been voiceless and whose communities are often under-represented in the medical professions. Our work brings together faculty and students from across the disciplines—both at William and Mary and Eastern Virginia Medical School to increase awareness of inequities in the American health care system. It also seeks to augment the creativity and the reflective capacity of students who may be exploring entering medical and health professions and to improve their abilities to “read,” listen to, and respond to others as well as to become reflective and resilient practitioners. Together we will examine the nature of inequalities both in our communities and in the health professions and explore selected modalities of intervention currently being researched and taught at Columbia, Stanford and Duke Universities, among others. We will further explore pathways for literary scholars, storytellers, activists, helpers and healers to address these issues

through science, technology, engineering, mathematics and the arts in the spirit of what Dr. Kelly Crace has defined as “authentic excellence.”

In addition to reaching out to possible pre-med students and those exploring careers in nursing and public health, this course offers opportunities for creative writing, literary and film students to explore emerging fields in the healthcare professions, for all participants to cultivate cultural competency through engagement with literature, film and rituals of diverse cultures. Visiting lectures include faculty from Eastern Virginia Medical Schools and Emory University. Course materials include materials from Ethics, Neuroscience and Biology as well as literature and the arts, especially creative writing.

Who is this course for?

This course addresses issues of health equity and originates in Africana Studies. It has been developed as part of the W&M-Eastern Virginia Medical School Narrative Medicine for Excellence Project. “Medicine, Arts and Social Justice” is for those who crave diversity and intellectual stimulation in a classroom setting that is authentically multi-disciplinary and inter-cultural. It is for artists seeking careers that overlap with the healing arts as well as pre-med types who love stories, especially stories from the experiences of African, Asian-American and African-American people. It is for scholars of Ethics and/or Religious Studies exploring careers they haven’t fully imagined yet. It is for scientists who want to discover how literature can inform methodology, for folks who are ready to be creative and to think and play outside the box. It is for inquiring minds seeking solutions to health problems that plague our diverse and varied communities and who want to be in conversation with other like-minded people grappling with similar theoretical and practical problems.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation, including in-class creative writing assignments 10%
Sustained Cumulative Assessment in the form of 6 blog posts 30%
5 Page mid-term paper or personal blog site 20%

Final Project: Paper, Verbatim or Creative Project 20%

Final Examination (in class presentation of paper, personal blog or project)
20%

The six cumulative assessment blogs are to be posted to the class site to which you have been invited by the instructor. Mid-term blogs and final blogs presented in lieu of traditional papers are to be posted to your personal blog site. If you wish to present a personal blog as your final creative project, you must do a personal blog in lieu of your mid-term paper. However, if you do a mid-term blog in lieu of your mid-term, you may choose a different project for your final. Personal blogs submitted for major requirements are in addition to the 6 blog posts required of everyone for cumulative assessment. Taken together, these 6 posts, which must be a minimum of 600 words each and show engagement with course material, replace the traditional mid-term exam. Students are encouraged to blog on their personal sites throughout the semester and to revise, edit and update frequently. It is recommended that students blog at least once weekly. You may expand shorter blogs from your personal site for posting as one or more of the required 600 word blog posts. Final projects should teach, illuminate, or raise a call to action.

Unique Opportunities for Engagement: Students are encouraged to seek a conference with the professor at least 2-3 times during the semester. The purpose of these conferences is twofold: 1) Students can ask questions, explore new directions and deepen their understanding of the materials in the course. 2) The professor values student feedback for quality improvement throughout the semester. The professor's weekly office hours are posted, and you may drop in for a conference during office hours. In addition, W&M-EVMS Narrative Medicine for Excellence Team Members Gameda, Sriraman, Babineau, Hinton, Sher, Green and Tanglao-Aguas may be available for special consultation and mentorship on request. Students are encouraged to explore their creativity.

Objectives:

- Application of the methodologies of New Criticism to understanding specific texts.
- An improved their ability to "read," listen to, and to respond to others.
- Increasing creativity and expressiveness, as well as the capacity for

analysis and reflection across the disciplines.

- Engaging students with scientists, artists and medical professionals who appreciate the practical necessity of narrative competence and the healing power of story.
- Cultivating cultural competency through engagement with literature, film and rituals of diverse cultures, with an emphasis on, but not limited to, Asian-American and African-American contexts and inter-cultural dialogues.
- Theorizing and Practice of the Ethical Principles of Social and Restorative Justice.

Guest Lecturers:

Brian Dias, Postdoctoral Research Scholar, Neuroscience, Emory University

Mekbib Gameda, Vice President for Diversity, EVMS

Natasha Sriraman, M.D., Pediatrics Faculty, EVMS

Theresa Babineau, M.D., Family Medicine, Director of the HOPES Clinic, EVMS

Others, TBA

Required Readings:

Alexi Auld, Canto Tonto Pocahontas (coming of age story)

Rita Charon, Narrative Medicine (e-book recommended)

Toni Morrison, Home

David Small, Stitches

Rosalyn Story, Wading Home

Abraham Verghese, Cutting for Stone

Short Texts on Blackboard:

Tim Cunningham, “Fatima,” blog post

Brian Dias, Ph.D. , 3 Scientific Essays (Neuroscience)

Anne Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, excerpt

Sayantani Das Gupta, Her Own Medicine: A Woman’s Journey, excerpt

Henry Dumas, “Ark of Bones,” title story, Ark of Bones

Jennifer Lee, “Terminal Device,” short story
Toni Morrison, “Baby Suggs Sermon” from *Beloved*
Jacques P. Thiroux and Keith W. Krasserman, *Ethics*, excerpt
Quincy Troupe—3 poems, “The Times We Live In,” “A Poem for All So-Called Half-Breeds,” and “Memory as a Circle”
Laura van Dernoot, *Trauma Stewardship*, excerpt
Alice Walker, “The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff,” short story
Walton and Cohen, “A Question of Belonging: Race, Social Fit and Achievement.”

Recommended

Laurie Kaye Abraham, *Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America*
Belinda, “The Cruelty of Men Whose Faces Were Like the Moon”
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (graphic novel)
Tom Feelings, *Middle Passage*
Mindy Fulllove, *Root Shock*
Mindy Fulllove, *Urban Alchemy*
Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*
Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
A.K. Summers, *Pregnant Butch*
Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*
Abraham Verghese, *My Own Country*
Abraham Verghese, *The Tennis Partner*

Schedule

August 27 — “Narrative Healing and Social Justice,” Course Introduction.

September 1 “Writing in the Shadow/Writing in the Clearing: How Do Stories Heal?”

- Charon, “What is Narrative Medicine?” and “Close Reading,”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24kHX2HtU3o>.

September 3 — Understanding Difference.

- Walton and Cohen, “A Question of Belonging: Race, Social Fit and Achievement.” *Journal of Social Personality*, 2007, Vol. 92, 82-96
- “Langston Hughes on the White Campus,” Braxton

September 8 — “Understanding Health Equity and Why it Matters to All of Us.” Mekbib Gemed, VP for Diversity at Eastern Virginia Medical School.

- Gemed, “Crossing Cultures: Reflections on Language,”
- Charon, “Bridging Health Care’s Divides”
- **Note:** If you are struggling with the amount of reading, read the Gemed essay first and come back to the remaining material when you can.

September 10 — “How Does Narrative Medicine Heal the Healer?” Natasha Sriraman, M.D., Pediatrics Faculty, EVMS.

- **Note:** The readings for this day are all review, and Dr. Sriraman will be reviewing some of the material you have already covered.
- Review Charon’s “Narrative Medicine” and “Close Reading.”
- Also review first day PP.

First blog post due to class site. Consider posting your revised 600 word engaged definition of NM. Respond to at least 3 other posts. Responses should be at least 100 words. Complete the responses any time before September 15.

September 15 — Required Close Reading: Verghese, *Cutting for Stone*, Parts One and Two. Write one post “in the shadow of” Part One and a second “in the shadow of” Part Two.

September 17 — Required Close Reading: Verghese, *Cutting for Stone*, Parts Three and Four.

September 22 — Guest Lecturer, Timmy Cunningham.

- Cunningham, “Fatima”

Second blog post due to class site. Respond to at least 3 other posts.

September 24 and September 29 — “Close Readings of Toni Morrison’s Home: Intersectionality and Intersubjectivity.”

- Toni Morrison, Home. “Writing in the shadow”
- Soul Repair by Lettini and Brock

October 1 — Class Visit by Dr. Brian Dias, Reves Center Distinguished Visiting Lecturer and Prof. Shanta’ Hinton, W&M Biology Department and Narrative Medicine for Excellence team member.

- Essays by Brian Dias:
 - “Towards New Approaches to Disorders of Fear and Anxiety,”
 - “Parental Olfactory Experience Influences Behavior and Neural Structure in Subsequent Generations”
- Dr. Dias’ blog about his work with Tibetan Monks.
- “Blackburn, et. al. “Can Meditation Slow the Rate of Cellular Aging?”
- “DNA and Trauma: Epigenetic Approaches to Understanding Fear.”
- “The Ghost in Your Genes”

October 6 —

- Henry Dumas “Ark of Bones”
- Walker’s ‘The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff.’

October 8 — **TBA.** Mid-term paper or project due.

October 9-12 — **Enjoy fall Break! Optional visit, Hopes Free Clinic, EVMS (TBA)**

October 15 — Post your “writing in the shadow” blogs by October 14. Your critical commentary and questions will shape our classroom discussions.

- Rosalyn Story’s Wading Home. *What are the multiple meanings of “wading” and “home” in this work?*

- Spike Lee's "When the Levees Broke"

Third blog post due to class site. Respond to at least 3 other posts.

October 20 — "Each One Teach One: How to Develop a Creative Writing Prompt From Any Text. The professor will model Wading Home writing prompts. Post your second "writing in the shadow blog" by October 19.

- Rosalyn Story's Wading Home.

October 22 —

- Stitches, by David Small.
- "Welcoming the Unbidden: The Case for Conserving Human Biodiversity," Rosemarie Garland-Thompson.

October 27 —

- Stitches, by David Small.
- Summers, Pregnant Butch.

Fourth blog post due to class site. Respond to at least 3 other posts.

October 29 — TBA.

November 3 —

- Laurie Kaye Abraham, Mama Might Be Better Off Dead: The Failure of Health Care in Urban America, Chapters 6 and 7.
- Abraham Verghese, Cutting for Stone, chapter 40, "Salt and Pepper."

November 5 —

- The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down

Fifth blog post due to class site. Respond to at least 3 other posts.

November 10 — Short stories and poems from the required list, TBA.

November 17 and 19 —

- Alexi Auld, Tonto Canto Pocahontas.

December 1 — Short stories and poems from the required list, TBA.

Sixth and final blog post due to site. Respond to at least 3 other posts.

December 3 — Closing Discussion. Final paper or project due.