

HCB 510 Literature, Compassion, and Health Care
Stony Brook Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care and Bioethics, Fall 2024
3 Credits

Class Meetings: Thursdays, 6 PM, from Aug 29, 2024 through Dec 12, 2024.

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OVERVIEW

How does literature help us understand the nature of human illness and suffering? Can written works of art, classic and contemporary, that depict moments of compassion and compassionate acts lay bare the moral, spiritual, psychological, and physical reality of suffering? There is a long association between literature and Medicine, from the viewpoint of physician-writers, such as Anton Chekhov, William Carlos Williams, and Richard Seltzer whose literary skills have eclipsed their Medical backgrounds. Understanding how physicians are portrayed in literature, theater, film, such as in Henrik Ibsen's play, *An Enemy of the People* and Christian Pelzold's film, *Barbara*, can help us explore the relationship between patient and doctor, between doctor and society, and the nature of healing. What is your role in healing, and how does reading and reflection help you in this role? In this full semester course, we will study these relationships through the reading of poetry, drama, fiction, Memoir, and essay and reflect on the nature of suffering, the intrinsic human need for compassion, and the implications for health and healing.

Educational objectives: Students who successfully complete this course will be able to

1. Discuss and demonstrate the use of literature as one method of enhancing empathy, imaginative identification, and the moral imagination.
2. Understand and explain literary, cultural, and religious attempts to find meaning in human suffering.

3. Demonstrate enhanced skills of “reading” patients and clinical situations through close reading of literary texts.
4. Describe how the arts and humanities provide insight into the human condition, suffering, and compassion, and can contribute to the professional identity formation of physicians, other clinicians, health care leaders, and caregivers.
5. Demonstrate an understanding of clinicians’ responsibilities to patients, colleagues, and themselves.

READINGS

Required Texts:

- Lisa See, *Lady Tan’s Circle of Women*, Scribner 2023.
- Richard Reynolds, MD & John Stone, MD (Eds.) *On Doctoring (New, Revised and Expanded Third Edition)*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2001.
- David Rabe, “A Question of Mercy: A Play Based on the Essay by Richard Selzer,”
- Victoria Sweet, *God’s Hotel: A Doctor, a Hospital, and a Pilgrimage to the Heart of Medicine*, Riverhead Trade, 2013 (selected chapters, circulated as pdf).
- Heinrich Ibsen. *An Enemy of the People* (the edition will be circulated as a pdf).
- Additional poems, stories, excerpts and articles will be distributed as a pdf if required.

Reading Assignments:

The main text for this course is *On Doctoring (New, Revised and Expanded Third Edition)*, Richard Reynolds, MD & John Stone, MD (Eds.), New York, Simon & Schuster, 2001. You should be able to find a used copy online, but please make sure you order the *New, Revised and Expanded Third Edition* from 2001. Same with the David Rabe play *A Question of Mercy*, the novel, *Lady Tan’s Circle of Women*, and the memoir, *God’s Hotel*, by Victoria Sweet, which should all be available through Amazon or other discount booksellers.

The required readings average about 50 pages per week, although they vary dramatically from zero (the poetry workshop, and the movie, *Barbara*) to several hundred (*Lady Tan’s Circle of Women*).

It’s always a good idea to start reading the longer works early in the semester. We also encourage you to read additional material from *On Doctoring* if you have the time and interest. Most of the topics are interrelated and align with themes mentioned in our objectives and syllabus. The more you read the more you can practice “close reading”

and “reflection.”

Most classes will begin with an open discussion of the reading assignments and (briefly) the authors. This discussion will be driven by the first three elements of close reading outlined here:

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University Reading Guide for Reflective Practice

Observation

Signs of perceiving--seeing, hearing, smelling, touching. Details, descriptions, sensory aspects of the scenes.

Perspective

Were multiple perspectives represented, explored, guessed at? How were these perspectives conveyed?

Form

What is the genre--story, poem, play, screenplay, parable, cautionary tale, ghost story, black comedy? Notice any use of Metaphor or imagery. Describe the temporal structure of the text—are events told in chronological order, in reverse, in chaotic sequence? Are there allusions to other stories or texts? Are there inserted texts (like quotations, letters, sub-stories)? What is the diction--formal, breezy, bureaucratic, scientific?

Voice

Whose voice tells the story? Is the narrative told in a first-person, second-person, or third-person voice? Is the teller near or far, intimate or remote? Can you feel the teller's presence as you read? Is the telling self-aware? Reliable?

Mood

What is the mood of the text? What mood does reading it leave you in?

Motion

What does the story do? Does the teller seem to move from the beginning to the end? Does the story bring you somewhere in its course?

Reflective writing sessions:

During most of our classes, the close reading discussion will be followed by time to write, engage in personal reflection

and share with our group as a whole. The prompts will be introduced in class, and 10-15 minutes will be taken to privately reflect and respond in short form writing. The prompts will be related to the readings for that week, often more than one, and designed to elicit creative responses based on the final three elements of the list below:

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University Reading Guide for Reflective Practice

Observation

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CLASS CALENDAR

Date	Topic	Readings
Aug 29, 2024	Introduction to Course	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Film: <i>Healing Words: Poetry and Medicine</i>. 2. Course Syllabus (handout) 3. Presentation: Close Reading and the Uses of Literature in Medicine. 4. Poems for discussion (handout)
Sept 5	Healer-Patient Relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Stories)</i>: William Carlos Williams, “Girl with the Pimple Face”; Susan Mates, “Laundry,” Abraham Verghese, excerpt from <i>My Own Country</i> 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: Dannie Abse, “Case History”; Rafael Campo, “What the Body Told” 3. Frank Huyler, “Sugar” (pdf) 4. Jack Coulehan, “Take Off Your Clothes” (pdf) 5. Richard Bronson, “I Shall be Your Vasari” (pdf)
Sept 12	Experience of illness and suffering	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Stories)</i>: Anatole Broyard, “Doctor, Talk to Me”; Zora Neale Hurston, “My Most Humiliating Jim Crow Experience,” Doris Grumbach, “Coming into the End Zone” 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: James Dickey, “Diabetes” and “The Cancer Match”; Mary Oliver, “University Hospital, Boston” 3. Louise Aronson, “An American Problem” (pdf) 4. Maria Basile, “Oatmeal Love” (pdf) 5. Jack Coulehan, “Heart Blockages” (pdf) 6. Richard Bronson “Another Country” (pdf)
Sept 19	Tyranny of the Normal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poems: Jack Coulehan, “The Six Hundred Pound Man”; Patricia Goedicke, “Weight Bearing”; Sharon Olds, “The Pull”; Marilyn Davis,

		<p>“Song for My Son”; and Miller Williams, “The Ones That Are Thrown Out”</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Andre Dubos, “The Fat Girl” (short story, pdf) 3. Raymond Carver, “Fat.”
Sept 26	The Healer’s Vulnerability (Less Than Perfect)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring</i> (stories): David Hilfiker, “Mistakes”; Mikhail Bulgakov, “Baptism by Rotation” 2. Susan Mates, “The Good Doctor”(pdf) 3. Jack Coulehan, “The Silk Robe” (pdf) 4. Sylvia Plath “<i>The Surgeon at 2a.m.</i>” (pdf) 5. Maria Basile “To Sylvia” (pdf)
Oct 3	Mental Health	<p>Pdfs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ernest Hemingway, "Soldier's Home," 1925 2. John Cheever, "The Swimmer," 1964 3. David Foster Wallace, "The Depressed Person," 1998 4. Marin Sardy, "My Brother Tom's Schizophrenia," 2019
Oct 10	Poetry Workshop STUDENT POEMS DUE	Student poems
Oct 17	Death and Dying	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring</i> (Poems): Emily Dickinson poems; Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle”; Denise Levertov, “Talking to Grief”; Raymond Carver, “My Death” 2. Raymond Carver, “What the Doctor Said” (poem)

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Ethan Canin, “We Are Nighttime Travelers” (short story, <i>On Doctoring</i>) 4. Frank Huyler, “The Dead Lake” (short story, pdf) 5. Richard Selzer, “Tom and Lily,” (short story, pdf)
Oct 24	Death and Dying	David Rabe, <i>A Question of Mercy</i> (play)
Oct 31	Medicine and Society	Selections from <i>God’s Hotel</i> (Memoir)
Nov 7	Public Health	“Enemy of the People” (drama)
Nov 14	Women’s Health and Women in Medicine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>On Doctoring (Memoir and Poems)</i>: Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, “HOSPITAL SKETCHBOOK: Life on the Ward Through an Intern’s Eyes” 2. <i>On Doctoring (Poems)</i>: Linda Pastan, “Notes from the Delivery Room”; Sharon Olds, “Miscarriage” and “35/10”; Lucille Clifton, “the lost baby poem” and “poem to my uterus” 3. Maria Basile, “Goodnight, Womb,” “Cracked Hands.” (pdf)
Nov 21	Society and Medicine	“Barbara” (film, directed by Christian Petzold)
	THANKSGIVING WEEK	THANKSGIVING WEEK

Dec 5	Synthesis and Analysis FINAL PAPER DUE	<i>Lady Tan's Circle of Women</i> (novel)
Dec 12	EXAM WEEK – NO CLASS	

A note about virtual access to classroom and attendance (Zoom):

This class is intended to be an interactive, in-person class. Situations may arise for students or faculty to join our class remotely. Arrangements will be made in advance whenever possible. Any student or faculty Member who is joining the class virtually will be expected to join from a desktop or laptop computer with audio and video capabilities.

Please call or text Dr Maria Basile if you anticipate a situation that may require joining the class by videoconference. All absences will be considered in the final grade (see below section “Grading Policy”).

OTHER WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

In addition to reading and in-class writing and discussion, there are two written assignments in this course.

1. **Poetry Workshop** – choose a piece that you’ve written in class or write a new one that you’ll share with others in the workshop in an effort to improve the poem, it’s effectiveness, and it’s beauty. (10 % of Grade)
2. **Final essay.** The final assignment (due December 5) is a 3 to 5-page essay, in which you reflect on your close reading of Lisa See’s novel, Lady Tan’s Circle of Women. (20% of Grade) In this essay, you will demonstrate your mastery of the elements of close reading by selecting one of the following topics:

- a. **Discuss and demonstrate the use of literature as one Method of enhancing empathy, imaginative identification, and the moral imagination.**
- b. **Explain the literary, cultural, and religious attempts to find Meaning in human suffering.**
- c. **Demonstrate enhanced skills of “reading” patients and clinical situations through close reading of literary texts.**
- d. **Describe how the arts and humanities provide insight into the human condition, suffering, and compassion, and can contribute to the professional identity formation of, other clinicians, health care leaders, and caregivers.**
- e. **Demonstrate an understanding of clinicians’ responsibilities to patients, colleagues, and themselves.**

Feel free to cite other works from our class to further illustrate your points, if necessary.

GRADING POLICY

Your grade for the course will be based on 110 points:

4. Participation in class discussions (70 points, 75% of your grade). This aspect of the course may require some explanation since students often consider discussion grades to be subjective or arbitrary. We expect students to demonstrate that they have read the material by speaking up, offering their interpretations, by demonstrating elements of close reading, and defending their points of view. We are looking for quality of thinking and expression, and use of close reading.
 - a. If you must miss a class, remediation is as follows:
 - b. First, you will be given a 500-word written assignment documenting close reading of your choice of two works from the assigned reading material. You must include in your essay, Mention of the principles of close reading of texts, which you like to use more. This assignment will be due at the next scheduled Meeting (of our HCB510 course). This remediation is available for a maximum of two absences. Following three, or more absences, letter grades will be adjusted as follows:
 - i. 3 absences (with max remediation) → Grade is reduced to A-
 - ii. 4 absences (with max remediation) → Grade is reduced to a B.
 - iii. Absence from more than 4 classes → Final grade is F.

2. The poem (and your workshop participation) = 15 points.
3. Final paper = 25 points. Failure to submit a final paper will result in a final grade of F for the course.
4. Scoring system:

POINTS	GRADE
92 – 110	A
85 – 91	A -
72 – 84	B
65 – 71	C
Absence from more than 4 classes (with or without remediation), or Failure to submit a final paper, Meeting the above criteria.	F

5. Students will be notified at midsemester if faculty observes signs of struggling with the content, workload, or seminar participation. Students are also encouraged to reach out to Me if they have similar concerns for themselves or their classmates.

Student Success Resources: How to Be a Successful Student in This Course

There are multiple resources, university offices, and help desks that are available to assist you with everything from advising, tutoring, accessibility and much more.

Review some [Academic Success Strategies](#) and visit the [Student Resources](#) page for links to resources on campus.

Wellness & Support Statement

Stony Brook values student well-being, including Mental health, and recognizes that a variety of factors can impact emotional wellness and academic success including stress, anxiety, depression, substance use, sexual violence, family or relationship concerns, and political conflict. [Resources are available](#) if you experience challenges or wellness concerns that affect your ability to be successful in class, and you are encouraged to reach out for help when you need it.

Technical Requirements and Assistance

[D2L Brightspace](#) is Stony Brook University's digital learning environment. It is used for the facilitation of communications between faculty and students, submission of assignments, and secure posting of grades and feedback in your courses. To [access Brightspace](#), go to mycourses.stonybrook.edu and use your SBU NetID and password. If you are unsure of your NetID, visit [Finding Your NetID and Password](#) for more information.

Sometimes submitting coursework via a tablet and/or mobile device can be challenging. Computers equipped with the appropriate software are available for use at the various [SINC site computer labs](#). Both physical and virtual labs are available. You can also borrow a computer through [SBU's Laptop Loan Program](#).

Visit the [Technical Requirements page](#) for additional information regarding hardware and software options.

Please use the following information if you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a problem with Brightspace:

Brightspace Support via SUNY Helpdesk

- Phone: 1-844-673-6786
- Submit a [ticket or chat online](#)

Stony Brook University: Academic Technology Services

- Phone: 631-632-9800
- Email: AcademicTechnologies@stonybrook.edu

Privacy Policies

This course utilizes various educational technologies to enhance the learning experience. You can access links to the [privacy policies](#) of the tools and platforms used at Stony Brook University on the Syllabus Addendum webpage.

University Policies

Student Accessibility Support Center Statement

If you have a physical, psychological, Medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact the Student Accessibility Support Center, Stony Brook Union Suite 107, (631) 632-6748, or at sasc@stonybrook.edu. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and the Student Accessibility Support Center. For procedures and information go to the following website: <https://ehs.stonybrook.edu//programs/fire-safety/eEmergency-evacuation/evacuation-guide-disabilities> and search Fire Safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

Academic Integrity Statement

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty is required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Professions, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/academic_integrity/index.html

Critical Incident Management

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. Further information about most academic matters can be found in the Undergraduate Bulletin, the Undergraduate Class Schedule, and the Faculty-Employee Handbook.

Understand When You May Drop This Course

If you need to drop or withdraw from the course, it is your responsibility to be aware of the tuition liability deadlines listed on the registrar's [Academic Calendar](#). Before making the decision to drop/withdraw you may want to [contact Me or] refer to the University's policies:

- [Undergraduate Course Load and Course Withdrawal Policy](#)
- [Graduate Course Changes Policy](#)

Incomplete Policy

Under emergency/special circumstances, students may petition for an incomplete grade. Circumstances must be documented and significant enough to Merit an incomplete. If you need to request an incomplete for this course, contact Dr Basile for approval as far in advance as possible. You should also read the University's policies that apply to you:

[Undergraduate Bulletin](#)

[Graduate Bulletin](#)

Course Materials and Copyright Statement

Course material accessed from Brightspace, Zoom, Echo 360, VoiceThread, etc. is for the exclusive use of students who are currently enrolled in the course. Content from these systems cannot be reused or distributed without written permission of the instructor and/or the copyright holder. Duplication of materials protected by copyright, without permission of the copyright holder is a violation of the Federal copyright law, as well as a violation of Stony Brook's Academic Integrity.