



English 493/625: Rhetoric of Health & Medicine

Fall 2018
TR 2:30-3:45 PM
PAHB 317

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Office: PAHB 403
Office Hours: TR 12:00-1:00 and 4:00-5:00 PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

While most people recognize the science of medicine, its social, cultural, and persuasive dimensions also play central roles in defining health and treating illness. This course examines symbolic practices related to health and medicine, with a focus on rhetorical strategies employed by physicians, health professionals, patients, and advocates. Class readings will cover scholarship in various disciplines as well as popular writing from newspapers, websites, blogs, and social media. Discussions and assignments will emphasize connecting theories of rhetoric and communication with current health debates, including how discourses of medicine intersect with issues of race, disability, gender identity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status.

CLASS CONDUCT

During this course we will be having daily discussions and may encounter some sensitive issues. In spite of any differences in background or opinion, you are expected to treat your fellow students with respect. When you enter the classroom, be prepared to offer your focused attention and to speak thoughtfully. Your ideas, experiences, and opinions are valued and on equal ground with those of your peers.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Class participation is a vital element in the learning environment of this course and thus receives a considerable percentage of your final grade. We will spend the majority of our time together in active discussion about the texts we

read and writing we produce. Absent students cannot add to our conversation nor receive any advice, critique, or inspiration from their classmates. The short version: don't skip class.

Only students with valid, documented, university-approved permission may receive an excused absence and, if absolutely necessary, turn work in late. If you know you will be absent from class, let me know as soon as possible. Four unexcused absences (two full weeks) and above will result in a deduction to your final grade; six is grounds for failure of the course.

COMMUNICATION

I will communicate with each of you primarily through your university email account. **Please check your email inbox daily** to make sure you receive updates about assignments, possible class cancellations, or evaluations.

ACCESS AND ACCOMMODATION

I assume that all of us learn in different ways, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb; or you might feel more capable of participating in discussions online rather than during class. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services, including the Writing Center and the Learning Resources Center (<http://lrc.umbc.edu>), are available to all students. Disabilities can be visible and invisible, and I am dedicated to ensuring that all students succeed in my course.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County is committed to providing access to programs and services for qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and require accommodation to participate and complete requirements for this class, notify me immediately and contact Student Disability Services (410-455-2459 or disAbility@umbc.edu) for verification of eligibility and determination of specific accommodations. Visit the SDS website for more information: <http://sds.umbc.edu/>

NAMES AND PRONOUNS

Many people might go by a name in daily life that is different from their legal name. In this classroom, we seek to refer to people by the names that they go by. Pronouns can be a way to affirm someone's gender identity, but they can also be unrelated to a person's identity. They are simply a public way in which people are referred to in place of their name (e.g. "he" or "she" or "they" or "ze" or something else). In this classroom, you are invited (if you want to) to share what pronouns you go by, and we seek to refer to people using the pronouns that they share. The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity.

ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UMBC's scholarly community in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest standards of honesty. Cheating,

fabrication, plagiarism, and helping others to commit these acts are all forms of academic dishonesty, and they are wrong. Academic misconduct could result in disciplinary action that may include, but is not limited to, suspension or dismissal. To read the full Student Academic Conduct Policy, consult UMBC policies, or the Faculty Handbook (Section 14.3).

GRADES AND ASSIGNMENTS

“Think Piece” Informal Essays	35%
Critical Essay	35%
Discussion Board Posts	15%
Article Sharing and Context Description (1 class)	5%
Class Participation	10%

Look below for detailed descriptions of assignments and expectations.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Expect to receive a deduction for each class session an assignment is late. Common excuses such as a busy work schedule, memory lapse, or heavy traffic are not acceptable. Please keep multiple digital copies of your class writing on flash drives, email accounts, or cloud services like Google Drive.

If you have questions or difficulties with an assignment, see me or email me at least a day before the due date. If you expect to miss class on the day when an assignment is due, plan to turn it in early. Even if you have an excused absence, the late assignment policy will continue to apply.

REVISION POLICY

I have structured the semester’s schedule to give you ample opportunity to reflect on and revise each major assignment. You may want to put in extra work on a certain assignment to raise your grade—I will allow you to complete as many revisions as you would like, provided you give me notice of your intention to revise.

COMPLETION OF ASSIGNMENTS

I will collect most of your assignments through the Blackboard assignment system; a separate assignment link will be created for any first drafts or required revisions. For individual online projects, which may occur in different formats, they should be posted and updated in whatever platform you use.

You **must** turn in every assignment to pass this course. I will notify students who have not turned in a certain assignment. If you are missing a grade or suspect something got lost in cyberspace, please send me an email as soon as you notice the problem.

Formal papers should be written in the Modern Language Association (MLA) documentation style according to the most recent 8th edition, published in 2016. Most writing handbooks have a description of MLA style, and you can also find resources online at the Purdue OWL website.

DUE DATE CALENDAR (subject to changes)

A full calendar, including weekly readings and written assignments, will be posted and updated via Blackboard. Unless otherwise stated, **assignments are due at class time.**

Unit 1 Think Piece	September 22
Unit 2 Think Piece	October 13
Unit 3 Think Piece	October 25
Unit 4 Think Piece	November 8
Critical Essay Draft	November 17
Unit 6 Think Piece + Critical Essay Revision	December 18

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

“Think Piece” Informal Essays - 35%

After Units 1-4 and Unit 6, you will write a “think piece” related to the unit’s topic--an informal essay that connects ideas between sources and includes some of your own analysis. For these essays, you will identify a theme--a pattern, keyword, shared influence, etc.--in the readings for that unit and discuss how **at least three** of the readings relate to that theme. You must also relate that theme to a text, event, idea, or term that you have encountered outside of class. (For instance, a recent web magazine article on cancer research or a campaign by a disease advocacy group.)

The think piece should be coherent and thoughtfully constructed, but it does not need a formal thesis statement. I expect you to engage deeply with each of the readings you reference, by effectively summarizing their arguments, using direct quotations, identifying commonalities, and applying their ideas to an example of your own. **You are not writing a simple reading response.**

I will be evaluating your think pieces for **knowledge** of the readings, **synthesis** of readings and class discussions, and **application** of key ideas and terms. Think pieces should 800-1000 words in length (about 4 pages).

Critical Essay / Multimodal Composition - 35%

The critical essay must address rhetorical dynamics in (a) construction of medical knowledge, (b) genres or documents, (c) patient reception, and (d) public circulation. *How* you address these elements is up to you, but **you must choose one dynamic as a focus**. More information and a formal assignment sheet will be distributed later in the semester.

You may choose to complete this assignment either as a traditional academic paper or as a multimodal composition. (Both options have a substantial writing component and revision process.) Multimodal compositions may be a video or radio show/podcast, and first drafts will be written scripts of your composition. The writing requirement of multimodal compositions is lower to compensate for the labor of gathering, recording, and editing the final product.

Discussion Board Posts - 15%

Each week, you will post a response on Blackboard BEFORE CLASS on the day of your choice (i.e., choosing Tuesday or Thursday). Your post must engage ALL the readings, but can include any variety of content: your personal impression of the readings, how the readings relate to a cultural or political issue, connections/contradictions between the readings and our class discussions, connections/contradictions between the readings and your lived experience, etc. By the end of the semester, you will have 15 responses.

I encourage you to consider these short posts as exploratory writing for your Think Pieces and the Critical Essay. Feel free to adapt your discussion board entries for these papers.

On Thursday, November 15 you will write a response for the W.E.B. DuBois lecture by Dorothy Roberts, "Race, Racism, and the New Racial Science." The lecture will be held in the University Center Ballroom on the UMBC campus, Wednesday, November 14 at 6:00 PM. If you cannot attend the lecture, please email me the reason and we will arrange a related alternate assignment.

Article Sharing and Context Description - 5%

Undergraduates:

On Blackboard, each student will choose ONE class session to share an article related to the readings and provide a short description of how it connects with our class topic. Your summary and an article link should be posted in our course blog (on Blackboard) and will be open to comments from your classmates. **Due 24 hours before class time.**

Graduate students:

You will prepare an in-depth summary of a graduate students-only reading to share on the course blog. Sharing a connected article is encouraged but not required. **Due 24 hours before class time.**

Class Participation - 10%

Individually appropriate participation in class is a requirement of this course. This portion of your grade includes any in-class writing, quizzes, and class-wide or small group discussions.