SPH 559, Topics in Public Health  
Call Number 9989  
PUBLIC HEALTH in FILM and FICTION  
3 Credit Course  
Spring Semester, 2011  
Fridays, 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.  
Location: School of Public Health, East Campus, Rensselaer  
Films to be shown in the auditorium, discussions in Room 110A  
Instructor: Carol Whittaker, M.A., M.P.A., M.A.  
Phone: 402-0385  
E-mail: cxw02@health.state.ny.us  
Office Hours: By Appointment  

Course Description/Overview: This course explores public health themes represented primarily in works of fiction and film although students will also have the opportunity to review non-fiction and autobiographical works related to public health. Writers and filmmakers often select public health themes for their inspiration and subjects. They may be well-trained in the public health field and capable of representing their subject as a scientist and professional; however, some may not present their topics as a public health professional would. This course will explore how writers and filmmakers present public health material and ask students to provide analyses of these works from a public health professional’s point of view. Prerequisite: graduate standing.

Learning Objectives/Competencies:

Specific learning objectives include the development and demonstration of selected public health competencies; by the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Cite the public health significance of several major works of fiction and other writing produced for a general audience
- Describe the role of social and community factors in both the onset and solution of public health problems
- Identify and evaluate the impact of history, power, privilege and structural inequality in producing health disparities as depicted in literature and film
- Explain why cultural competence alone cannot address health disparity
- Engage in dialogue and learning from others to advance public health goals
- Explore the usefulness of art in creating public health awareness

Course Learning Activities:

Each class will require student discussion of the assigned reading material and the films to be shown in class. In addition to the seven required books, students will select two additional books from the list provided (or suggest alternatives that gain the instructor’s
The readings and films may contain several major concepts which will be further explored in the discussion and writing assignments.

The discussion questions are meant to evoke student interaction. Every student is expected to contribute to every discussion and students will be required to lead discussions from time to time. My job will be primarily to monitor the discussion and to keep it on track. I may, from time to time, offer an opinion or move the discussion along but, for the most part, it will be up to you to keep the discussion going. You may draw upon the reading and film assignments as well as supplemental readings and personal experience when contributing to the discussion.

The written assignments are meant to determine your level of understanding of the material presented; critical thinking is expected.

**How You Will Be Evaluated:**

We will meet 14 times during the semester. There will be a reading assignment for nearly every class and when we meet we will watch a public-health themed film and then hold a discussion of the reading and the film. Participation in the discussions will be a critical element of evaluation. There will also be two written assignments (one at mid-term and one at the end of the course). And each student will do an oral presentation related to a book selected from the list provided below.

Your final grade in the course will be determined by the following:

- Discussion/participation: 30 points
- Oral Presentation: 25 points
- Mid-term paper: 20 points
- Final paper: 25 points

Total points can add up to 100

Grading scale for final grade:

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<tr>
<th>Total points</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
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<td>83-86</td>
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<td>67-69</td>
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Discussion/Participation: You will be assessed on both the quality and quantity of your discussion contributions. You will be expected to attend each class and contribute to each discussion. The following criteria will guide you: **relevant** (your contribution should be relevant to the topic under discussion and the question raised); **important** (your responses should address a significant issue); **thought-provoking** (your response should indicate that some thought went into it and should not be a re-statement of another student's response); and **original** (clearly your contribution and not that of another student). Don't expect to "make-up" for discussions you missed.

My role in discussions is primarily to monitor what you, the class members, are contributing; I may not enter at all if you are able to carry the discussions on your own. One of the roles you may play is to help others stay "on track" related to the discussion topic. You may also want to summarize the leading points that have been made to clarify the issue. It is during the discussions that you get to know one another; if you go a bit "off track" once in awhile and, by doing so, discover important things about your fellow classmates, that's "healthy" and can help the class to know and gain respect for one another—but it shouldn't become a habit. (30 points)

Oral Class Presentation: The criteria for the oral presentation to the class include **effective organization** of the material, **originality**, evidence of **critical thinking**, relevant **analysis** of the topic, and an **appropriate conclusion**. (25 points)

Written Exercises: The mid-term and final papers will be evaluated based on a number of criteria. The paper needs, of course, to address the topic and be supported by rigorous argument and reflective of significant thought. It should be **well organized, free of jargon, and free of errors**. To get consistently high grades in these papers, you must write insightfully and complete the assignments on time.

**Mid-term Paper:** Approximately 5-6 pages, double spaced. (20 points)

**Final Paper:** The final paper will be approximately 10-12 pages, double-spaced. (25 points)

Required Books and Readings:

There are nine required books to be read for the course:

- **Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague**
  - Geraldine Brooks

- **The Jungle**
  - Upton Sinclair

- **Ship Fever**
  - Andrea Barrett
Cider House Rules  
John Irving

The Constant Gardener  
John Le Carre

Nemesis  
Philip Roth

The Hot Zone  
Richard Preston

And The Band Played On  
Randy Schultz

Push  
Sapphire

The discussion questions, oral presentation, and the written assignments will draw upon your understanding of these books, the films we watch, and additional research that you will conduct.

The books are readily available through your local libraries or you may order or purchase them on Amazon.com, directly from the publishers, or through a local bookstore.

In addition to these works of fiction, you will be asked to read and report on three or more of the following for your oral class presentation, mid-term paper, and final paper (this group represents not only works of fiction but also memoirs, autobiographies, and non-fiction):

The Last Town on Earth  
Thomas Mullen

So Much For That  
Lionel Shriver

The Plague (La Pest)  
Albert Camus

Arrowsmith  
Sinclair Lewis

The Butter Battle Book  
Theodore Geisel/Dr. Seuss

The Air We Breathe  
Andrea Barrett

Moloka‘i  
Alan Brennert

Still Alice  
Lisa Genova

A Fierce Radiance  
Lauren Belfer

The Diving Bell and Butterfly: A Memoir  
Jean Dominque Bauby
Fast Food Nation
Eric Schlosser

The Great Mortality
John Kelly

Flu
Gina Kolata

Living Downstream
Sandra Steingraber

The Great Influenza
John Barry

The Ghost Map
Steven Johnson

The Painted Veil
W. Somerset Maugham

**Standards of Conduct:** All students should be aware of the University at Albany’s standards of conduct as described in the booklet entitled “Community Rights and Responsibilities.” In addition to other standards, the standards related to academic dishonesty are defined as follows:

“Conduct including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, multiple submission, forgery, sabotage, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, bribery or use of purchased research service reports without proper notation; and theft, damage or misuse of library or computer resources. Attempts to commit such acts shall . . . constitute academic dishonesty. Students assume full responsibility for honesty in academic exercises.” (p.4.) Appendix C of the document provides a complete definition of each type of misconduct as well as the penalties for violations of academic integrity (pp. 11 and 12).

**Course Schedule:**

*January 21st- January 28th Human Experimentation*

**January 21, 2011**
In-Class Film: *Miss Ever’s Boys*

**January 28, 2011**
Reading Due: *The Constant Gardner* by John Le Carre
In-Class Film: *The Constant Gardner*
February 4th - February 11th Food Contamination and Infectious Diseases

February 4, 2011
In-Class Film: FOOD,Inc.
Reading Due: The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

February 11, 2011
Reading Due: Ship Fever by Andrea Barrett

February 18, 2011
Reading Due: Nemesis by Philip Roth

February 25, 2011- NO CLASS (WINTER BREAK)

March 4-Abortion

March 4, 2011
Reading Due: Cider House Rules
In-Class Film: Cider House Rules

March 11- March 25th Containing Outbreaks

March 11, 2011- First Paper Due
In-Class Film: I am Legend or 28 Days

March 18, 2011
Reading Due: The Hot Zone by Richard Preston
In-Class Film: Outbreak
Class Presentations

March 25, 2011
Reading Due: Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague by Geraldine Brooks
Class Presentations

April 1- April 15 HIV/AIDS in Film

April 1, 2011
Reading Due: And the Band Played On by Randy Schultz
In-Class Film: And the Band Played On
Guest Discussion Moderator, Prof. Punkin Clay Stephens, HIV/AIDS Researcher

April 8, 2011
In-Class Film: Philadelphia
Class Presentations
April 15, 2011  
In-Class Film: Life Support  
Class Presentations

April 22, 2011-NO CLASS (SPRING BREAK)

April 29, 2011- Last Day of Class  
Reading Due: Push by Sapphire  
In-Class Film: Precious

May 6, 2011-Final Paper Due