

## **MA Specialisation History: Medical and Health Humanities (2019-2020)**

There are four courses offered: Introduction to Medical and Health Humanities (Block 4), Knowing by Sensing (Block 4), Objects of Knowledge (Block 5) and Research Seminar: Medicine in Society (Block 5). Students who wish to complete the full track are required to take all four courses, and also complete an MA-level thesis under the supervision of participating core or guest staff. Other students may enroll in just one, two, or three of the courses offered.

### **COURSE 1: INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL AND HEALTH HUMANITIES (Block 4, Feb-March)**

#### **Course Content**

Classes focus on major issues in healthcare today, and can include topics of specific interest to students in the class as well as those that are in the news. Exploring subjects such as addiction, sexual health, and mental illness, course readings and discussions will draw on a range of perspectives, including History, Mad Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Science and Technology Studies. Looking at examples of projects that weave humanities approaches into medical education, patient care, and healthcare activism, we will consider how these activities are transforming the way we think about health and illness, and examine the uses of art, music, design, history, and digital media in health and medicine. The course prepares students to take an interdisciplinary approach in their own work and to be able to critically evaluate examples of medical and health humanities in practice.

#### **Course Objective**

Students are introduced to interdisciplinary approaches to health, medicine, disease, and disability, to examine how these different perspectives can shift our understanding of the issues at stake. Students learn to integrate competing viewpoints and to evaluate the impact of humanities ideas on medical research, patient treatment, and public health policy.

#### **Teaching Methods**

1 seminar per week. Students are expected to prepare for class by completing the assigned readings and/or viewing assignments such as watching short videos online. Regular attendance is required.

#### **Method of Assessment**

1 short paper reviewing one of the health humanities projects discussed in class, and 1 longer paper due at the end of the course analyzing a case study chosen by the student.

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### **COURSE 2: KNOWING BY SENSING (Block 4, Feb-March)**

#### **Course Content**

The senses offer scholars intriguing topics that transcend disciplinary, chronologic and geographic boundaries. But beyond this the senses are valuable methodological tools, that provide us with different types of knowledge than text and image alone can provide. In our digital and visually oriented age of social media and the internet, the senses and the body are undervalued and underestimated – especially in academia. Even when scholars study the senses, they are hesitant to engage with them: they remain the object of study, but aren't considered informative in themselves.

This course teaches students to include the different senses in the production of knowledge, to train their sensory gaze, and to be able to describe sensory phenomena. The course addresses disciplines such as medicine, medical history, archaeology, (art-)history and non-academic topics such as gastronomy, art and dance. An inter-disciplinary team of experts will address the sense of touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing, synesthesia and even our interoceptive senses (balance, weight, etc.). It challenges the classical hierarchy of the senses in which only sight and hearing are considered aesthetic and informative tools. Senses, body and mind will work together to fundamentally transform the way in which we know, study and understand.

Students will participate in a wide variety of lectures, workshops and experiments offered by specialists, including visits to the Rijksmuseum and Oosterdok, and a wine tasting. They will keep track of their experiences and progress in a multi-sensory 'sense-log', and (learn to) present their research in a multi-sensory presentation.

### **Course Objective**

This course teaches students to use the senses and as analytical tools in academic study, and even in daily life. They will learn to use different kinds of knowing through sensing and enhance sensory skills, to use this sensory information analytically, enlarge their sensory vocabulary and (re)construct sensory objects and (re-)enact sensory events on an accessible level.

### **Teaching Methods**

The course consists of lectures, experiments, excursions and workshops, including visits to relevant institutions and laboratories. During the course, students will keep a 'sense log' in which they record their experiences.

### **Method of Assessment**

The course will be concluded with a multi-sensory presentation and a paper. The final grade will be determined on the basis of the sense-log (20%), presentation (40%) and paper (40%).

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## **COURSE 3: OBJECTS OF KNOWLEDGE (Block 5: April-May)**

### **Course Content**

Classes focus on the production and use of historical medical artifacts, and their interpretation today by scholarly researchers, museum curators, and public audiences.

Sessions include visits to medical museums, curator's tours of exhibitions and collections depots, and hands-on classes working directly with objects and archival materials. Course readings and discussions address the histories of collecting different types of medical heritage, such as human remains or medical technologies, and the challenges and benefits of preserving and displaying them. Students are also encouraged to consider how the presentation of the past reflects contemporary concerns, and conversely, how historical objects might be used to engage with current issues, such as anti-vaccination or disability rights.

### **Course Objective**

Students engage with the material culture of medicine to investigate how museums collect and interpret medical history. The course trains students to analyze diverse sources from previous centuries, from wax anatomical models to surgical instruments, patient photographs, and public health films, and to consider the meanings derived from such materials in different historical moments and contexts.

### **Teaching Methods**

Weekly seminar (either at the VU or at a participating museum in Amsterdam or nearby in Leiden, Utrecht, or Haarlem). Students are expected to prepare for these sessions by completing the required reading and/or viewing museum websites and online exhibitions. Regular attendance is required.

### **Method of Assessment**

1 short paper reviewing the student's own responses to interactive sessions with objects, and 1 longer paper due at the end of the course presenting the student's own findings about an object they have selected for their own research.

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## **COURSE 4: RESEARCH SEMINAR: MEDICINE IN SOCIETY (Block 5: April-May)**

### **Course Content**

Medical theories and practices reflect the society in which they were formed as well as reshaping the world around them. In this seminar, this dynamic relationship between medicine and society is examined through a focus on the most innovative and exciting new approaches emerging in current research. An international group of professors and scholars from universities and institutions around the country will discuss their own work and the implications of their projects for understanding the history of health and medicine as well as contemporary issues. How does our interpretation of the history of medicine shift when we combine the different perspectives of healthcare practitioners and patients, for example? What can we learn when we examine local public health issues in broader global contexts, from international drug trades and the treatment of addiction to emerging infectious diseases and public health surveillance and quarantine?

### **Course Objective**

Engagement with new approaches to the history of medicine and the medical and health humanities more broadly. Develops students' ability to design and conduct interdisciplinary

research in an independent research project of their own choosing, to critically evaluate existing historical scholarship in the field, and to consider the impact of emerging trends on our interpretation of the past.

**Teaching Methods**

Lectures and seminars.

**Method of Assessment**

Paper on the basis of individual research.

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