In the past hundred and fifty years, the West has come to think of illness and cure as matters of the body, not the soul, and Western medicine has probed beneath human flesh, studying systems, cells, and DNA. We tend to think of this development as scientific and objective; in fact, it is deeply rooted in cultural assumptions. This course is concerned with ideas of disease and cure, the effect of disease on human history, and the medical effects of assumptions about gender, sex, and childbearing. Hovering in the background are larger questions about the a powerful Western medical establishment whose cultural importance exceeds its ability to cure the sick and whose political importance allows it to choose which sick to cure and how to cure them.

-Course Policies-

**Credits:** this is a four-credit course. Students who sign up for it are expected to write all papers and all in-class assignments, unless other arrangements are specifically made during the first two weeks of term. Barring family emergency or serious health problems, *no credits may be dropped after the first week of classes.*

**Paper grades:** the base grade concerns the level of discourse -- the sophistication of the ideas put forward and the clarity with which those ideas are expressed. This grade can be obtained only by consulting with me in person. From the base, I subtract 1 point (out of 100) for each error in grammar, punctuation or spelling, and I record the total number of errors at the end of the paper. Subtracted points on papers 1-3 are re-added to the base grade if the errors are corrected with a tutor within a week of the paper's return. A paper that is going irredeemably wrong should be submitted *as is* on the day it is due, with a cover page that says HELP! This procedure assures the paper a 68 (D+) and a speedy reading, so the student can meet with me and resubmit it without penalty within three or four days.

Papers 1& 2 may be revised and resubmitted (once only). Revisions must be submitted on or before the revision due-date to be considered for higher grades. A revised paper will not be accepted unless the student has had a conference with me on the first draft.

**Late papers:** papers are always due at noon on the day for which they are assigned. A paper is not late if it gets to me before I have left campus. Timely submission of all papers and revisions raises the final grade 1.5 points out of 100. Late papers are penalized 2 points per day up to 24 points (twelve days). Thereafter, they receive an automatic 60, minus points reduced for errors; they may be revised, but not for a higher grade. One paper extension is granted per semester per student; no extensions on final paper.
**Attendance:** Perfect, prepared attendance raises the final grade by 1.5 points out of 100. Two (excused) absences are forgiven; a third excused absence lowers the final grade 1 point out of 100. Each absence after that lowers the final grade by 5 points out of 100. In general, I ask students who are chronically unprepared, or who miss more than five classes, to withdraw from the course. The only acceptable excuse for cutting a workshop or coming to one without a paper is a doctor-signed certification of bubonic plague.

**Conferences:** each student must sign up in class for one conference on each paper. The schedule of conferences will be posted on the door of D29A after everybody has signed up. Cutting a conference (as opposed to trading times with somebody else or changing times with prior – i.e., 24-hour – notice) is the equivalent of cutting a class.

**Office hours** are posted weekly (usually on Thursday afternoons) on the door of D29A; students should sign for appointments. If nobody has signed up, drop in at open hours.

**Texts** (at the bookstore, except photocopies marked with an asterisk [*], which will be passed out in class):
- Richard Selzer, "Raccoon," from *Confessions of a Knife* [*
- Atul Gawande, "Education of a Knife," from *Complications: a Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science* [*
- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale*
- Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*
- Hammond, *Historical World Atlas*

---

**Course Calendar**

Techniques of writing effectively
- September 12. Writing papers, right brains, and Black Angels
- September 14. Personal essays: what makes them work. Discuss Selzer and Gawande.

**Monday, September 18. Paper 1 due at noon, D29A**

Medicine, war, and cultural tragedy
- September 19. Fadiman, vii-118
- September 26. No class -- conferences Monday and Tuesday
- September 28. Fadiman, 210-288

Nuts and bolts
- October 3. Sentence structure boot-camp (*order Porter photocopies*)
- October 5. Defining paper topics: Handout

**Monday, October 9. Paper 2 due at noon, D29A**
Childbirth and its perils
   October 10  Ulrich, 3-71, and skim 72-102 (receive explication exercise)
   October 12. Ulrich, skim 134-161; read closely 162-203, 235-261
   October 17. Conferences -- no class
   October 19  Video of A Midwife's Tale
   October 24 Hendricks weekend
       Monday, October 30. Explication exercise due at noon D29A

Disease and history.
   October 32. Disease and culture: Porter photocopies, 14-43, 106-134
   October 32  Disease and invasion: Porter, 163-168, 462-480 (bring Hammond)
       Revised copies of papers 1 and 2 due by November 6

Medicine, global politics and the poor
   November 7. Kidder, 1-125
   November 9. Kidder, , 125-177
       Term paper topics, outlines due Wednesday, November 15
       November 16. More thoughts about research: sources.
       November 21. Still more thoughts about research: claims.
   November 23. Thanksgiving vacation

Term papers -- mostly conferences
   November 28. Conferences.
       Term paper drafts due Wednesday, November 29 at noon
       November 30. Bibliography workshop: bring Handling Sources to class.
   December 5. No class: conferences on term papers.

December 7. Term papers due at noon: no extensions, no mercy, no class.
   December 12. Last class. Portfolio checks, evaluations.

Portfolios are due December 14 at 8:30 AM in D 38
Paper topics


Write a 5-7 page personal essay in which you describe some encounter you have had with the medical profession. The encounter can be as simple as a childhood visit to the doctor's office, or as complex as discovering that a close relative has a fatal disease. What you should strive for is an intense, dramatic presentation of the truth that interests and affects your reader.


In Chapter 2 of the *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Fadiman tells a story about fish soup. The story is central both to her understanding of the Hmong and to the structure of the book. Write a 5-7 page analytical essay on the way Fadiman's structural choices deepen the reader's understanding of the complex phenomena she is describing.

Explication exercise. To be handed out in class. Due Monday, October 30.

Term paper.

   Topic and outline due Wednesday, November 15.
   Draft due Wednesday, November 29 at noon.
   Final draft due December 7 at noon. No extensions.

Write a 10-12 page research paper about some epidemic or serious disease, bearing in mind its social and cultural implications. Part of the exercise is devising a research topic that can be written about effectively in the space allotted. Do not write a report: you must have an argument to present and substantiate. Think also of creative ways to make the paper interesting to a general reader. You must use at least four sources besides the books assigned in class, and the paper must have a bibliography and footnotes.