Syllabus - What is “Normal?”
UGS2250-001, Block U: Medical Humanities, Fall 2021 (3 credit hours)
Mon, Weds; 1:25 pm- 2:45 pm; GC 4020

Instructor: Louise Pedersen (Philosophy Department)
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Course Type: In-person
Office Hours: TBA
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Course Description: What's normal? Are you normal? Medicine traditionally draws a clear line between the healthy and the diseased, the functional and the dysfunctional, the able and the disabled, the normal and the abnormal. These traditional dichotomies, however, are being challenged by science and culture. In other words, the humanities (the academic disciplines that study aspects of human society and culture) inform medical education and practice. For example, social attitudes and social developments influence our understanding of both mental illness and disability. Since the Enlightenment, the meaning of mental illness (what does it mean to be “mad?”) has changed dramatically, and subsequently, so have the ways in which those deemed mentally ill have been treated. When it comes to disability, many disabled people argue that there is nothing wrong with them per se, but rather, there is something wrong with society. For example, wheelchair users argue that it is the lack of curb cuts in cities that's the problem (not their disability), and members of the Deaf community vehemently defend their Deaf culture and argue that they do not suffer from hearing loss but instead benefit from "Deaf gain."

In the Medical Humanities Block U course, we will adopt a philosophical perspective and discuss specific cases like these related to mental illness and disability and embed them in larger questions about normalcy: Is there even such a distinction to be made between normal and abnormal? What does science and the humanities have to say about the matter? How can (or should) medicine intervene on the "abnormal"? And who decides on such interventions? The course is divided into three units:

- Unit 1: Medical humanities and the medical gaze
- Unit 2: Mental illness and society
- Unit 3: Disability and society
Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course, the students will:
- Advance their critical thinking/writing/argumentative skills by engaging with philosophical texts and literature from medicine and understand their importance in contemporary society.
- Be able to distinguish between and articulate the medical model and the social model of health and disease and explain the difference between a disease and its illness experience.
- Learn about historical attempts to determine and enforce "normalcy" and the experience of those who were/are deemed "abnormal" in the context of mental illness and disability.
- Become familiar with a variety of medical cases which challenge the traditional dichotomy between "normal" and "abnormal."
- Recognize the connections between the medical gaze, disease classifications, and networks of power.

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Materials:
- Required text for purchase (available at the campus bookstore or online):
- On reserve at the Marriott Library online:
- All other readings are available on Canvas as PDFs (see Files).

Relationship between the Fall and Spring semester of Block U, Medical Humanities: The Fall semester will feel more like a typical course, in which you will gain a basic foundation of knowledge on the topics noted in the course description. In the Spring, however, you will delve more deeply into a narrower topic (or coherent set of topics) that we work on as a group and develop into a project with the potential to reach the broader University community or beyond.

Expectations: In addition to the roughly three hours of in-class meetings every week, each student is expected to spend an average of twice the in-class time performing out-of-classroom activities like reading, preparing questions, researching and writing papers, etc. This brings the total weekly time investment for my class to nine hours, or 135 hours for the semester.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Participation (30% of final grade): We are approaching the topics in this class from a philosophical perspective, and philosophy is an interactive discipline. Therefore, you are expected to show up to class; to be prepared to contribute to the discussions; to ask questions during lectures; and to interact with your peers during student presentations. Throughout the semester we have 29 class meetings, and each meeting is worth one participation point. The way you get the point is to do one of the following:

- Answer a check-on-learning question at the end of class (after a lecture), and hand the answer to me on a piece of paper (don’t forget to add your name and the date). The question will simply check that you were paying attention in class.
• Participate in group discussions. On days that are more discussion based (rather than lecture based), each group will hand me a piece of paper with the names of the participants (don’t forget the date).

**Three Short Essays (30% of final grade (10% each))**:  
- Short Essay 1 due Sunday September 19 at 11:59 pm MST  
- Short Essay 2 due Sunday October 24 at 11:59 pm MST  
- Short Essay 3 due Sunday November 21 at 11:59 pm MST  
Essays are turned in through Canvas (and checked for plagiarism by Turnitin).

**“In the Media” Group Presentation (15% of final grade)**:  
The following dates are reserved for group presentations: 22 September, 3 November, and 1 December. Group size will depend on enrollment. For the presentation, each group must do the following:  
- Pick an online news article or a movie (or short film, documentary etc.) that is relevant to the topics discussed in this class. The source should be easily relatable to the normal/abnormal distinction that is the focus of the class.  
- Prepare a 20-minute presentation (you may use Power Point or make a handout) in which you explain what the article says/what the movie is about, how the content is relevant to our class, and why the topic is philosophically important and interesting for the medical humanities.  
- Prepare two questions pertaining to the article/movie. After your presentation, you will write the questions on the board and the class will discuss them together.  
- The grade for your presentation will be based on: 1) how well you present the information, 2) the quality/relevance of the topic, 3) how well you generate a lively discussion for the class.

**Ask A Question (10% of final grade)**:  
- On five different occasions, you must write down a question (on actual paper!) at the end of class about the material that we covered. Each question is worth 1 point.  
- The questions should ask for clarification about an idea or argument that we discussed or should concern something that the material we covered made you wonder about.  
- In order to get 5 points, you must turn in five questions. If you turn in fewer than five questions, you will get no points.

**Final Exam (15% of final grade)**:  
The final exam is scheduled for Monday 12/13, 1-3 pm. The exam is comprehensive (covers the main texts we have read throughout the course) and consists of 20 short answer questions and two essay questions. A study guide will be provided in advance to help you prepare for the exam.