USem 78A. Praying for a Cure?
Religion, Health, and Healing in America
Brandeis University
Fall 2007

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Office Hours: Monday 1-2pm, Wednesday 9-10am, and by appointment
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Class Meetings: Monday and Wednesday 2:10-3:30pm, Brown 316

Course Description

Does spirituality promote health as the cover of Time magazine asks? Should pharmacists be required to dispense birth control when they feel it conflicts with their religious beliefs? What have scientists learned about the influence of prayers on health? What is it like to be a hospital chaplain? Does religion or spirituality influence the work of doctors and nurses? What do Muslim community healthcare organizations do? How do leaders of local churches, synagogues, mosques and temples respond to the health needs of their congregants?

This seminar investigates these questions and others by looking at the relationship between religion, health, and healing in the contemporary United States. We explore how a wide range of religious and medical organizations understand these relationships and focus specifically on contemporary tensions between religious and medical beliefs. Course materials include academic and popular writings, films and guest speakers.

Course Readings

The following required books are available in the university bookstore.


These books are also on reserve in the university library. All other required course readings are available on-line via LATTE.

Course Requirements

1. Attendance is required. Everyone starts with a class attendance grade of an A. If you miss two classes you will earn a B, three classes a C, four classes a D and five
or more classes an F. The only absences that will not influence your grade are those for religious holidays that you email me about at least one week in advance. Your class attendance comprises 5% of your final grade.

2. **Class participation** is required. This is not a lecture class but primarily a discussion seminar based on your careful reading and preparation for class. You will get out of this class what you put in, and the course will be more enjoyable for all of us if you are actively engaged. If you do not feel comfortable speaking in class, I encourage you to talk with me about class materials during office hours, send related information to the class through the class email list, and otherwise creatively engage with this material. Your class participation comprises 15% of your grade.

3. **Reading** is required. All course readings must be done for the Monday of each week, unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. In addition to your reading, you are required to select *one reading for each week indicated* and write a two-paragraph singled space response to it, due at the beginning of class on the dates noted (**September 17, October 1, October 22, October 31, November 11, November 28**). You should assume that your reader has read the material and asked you a question like, “What was this author’s main point? Did you agree or disagree? Why?” You should end your response with one or two questions that the reading raised for you that you would like to discuss. I will grade these on a check minus, check, check plus basis. Check pluses will improve your final grade in the course, checks will hold your final grade constant and check minuses will lower your final grade. My goal is for these reading responses is to help you understand and think about course material before coming to class and to improve your final grade. Your reading responses will count for 15% of your final grade.

4. **Written Assignments.** You will write two short (4-6 page) papers in this class in response to specific questions I will distribute well in advance of the paper deadlines, as indicated in the syllabus (**Paper assignment 1 will be distributed on October 3, due October 17; Paper assignment 2 will be distributed on November 7, due on November 19**). I am more than happy to work with you on your papers by talking over ideas, helping you to outline your paper, and / or reading and commenting on drafts of papers you submit to me at least four days before the final deadline. Final deadlines must be respected. You will lose one full letter grade for each 24 hours after the due date the assignment is turned in (i.e. if you would have received an A but your exercise is turned in within the first 24 hours after it is due, you will receive a B, etc.). I expect you to properly cite and reference any articles you refer to when completing your paper. We will talk in detail about this when the first paper assignment is distributed. If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to ask. You are encouraged to visit the Writing Center for additional support and guidance. (http://www.brandeis.edu/programs/writing/writingcenter/index.html) The first paper will be worth 15% of your final grade and the second paper 20%).
5. **Final Exam.** You will have a take-home final exam. The exam will be designed to assess what you have learned in discussions and course readings and to see how well you can apply what you have learned to new questions and problems. You may use your lecture notes and course materials when completing the exam. The final exam will be distributed on December 5, due by 5pm on December 13. Your completed exam can be no more than ten double spaced pages. The final exam will be worth 30% of your final grade.

6. **Final Grades** will be based on your class attendance (5%), your active class participation (15%), your reading responses (15%), paper 1 (15%), paper 2 (20%), final exam (30%). The grading scale, as outlined by the University in the Bulletin (p. 35) is as follows:

“The following grades will be used with plus or minus where appropriate:”
A: “High Distinction”
B: “Distinction.”
C: “Satisfactory.”
D: “Passing, but Unsatisfactory.”
F: “Failure.”

**All written work must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**

5. **University Policy on Academic Accommodations:** If you are a student who has academic accommodations because of a documented disability, please contact me and give me a copy of your letter of accommodation in the first two weeks of the semester. If you have questions about documenting a disability, please contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, brodgers@brandeis.edu). Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.
Course Outline

I. Introductions and Initial Considerations

Week 1. September 3 (no class), 5; Week 2. September 10, 12. What is religion? What is health? What is healing?

Wednesday September 5: Introductions

Monday September 10:


Week 3: September 17, 19: What is (and should be) the relationship between religion and health?

- Reading Response #1 Due on Monday (* Consider in your response whether you agree or disagree with the arguments Sloan or Berlinger is making and why. How do you think Jerome Groopman would respond?)

Week 4. September 24, 26 (no class): Contemporary Debates: The Case of Intercessory Prayer

Week 5: October 1, 3: Contemporary Debates: Two More Cases

For Monday October 1: The “Obligations” of Medical Professionals?

- Reading Response #2 Due on Monday

For Wednesday October 3:


**Paper 1. Distributed October 3, due October 17**

Week 6. October 8, 10: Contemporary Debates: The Spirit Catches You (continued)


II. Religion / Spirituality in Medical Institutions

Week 7: October 15, 17: Religion and the Rise of the Hospital


Week 8. October 22, 24: The Experiences of Hospital Chaplains


• Reading Response #3 Due on Monday

• **Wednesday, Guest Speaker**, Katherine Mitchell, Staff Chaplain, Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Boston, MA.

**Week 9. October 29, 31: The One Family’s Experience**

• On Monday we will watch the film, *Hold Your Breath: A Journey Into Cross-Cultural Medicine*. For more information see: http://medethicsfilms.stanford.edu/holdyourbreath/

• Reading Response #4 (your response to the film) due on Wednesday

• (Since there is no reading this week, it would be a good idea to start reading the book for next week).

**Week 10. November 5, 7: One Physician’s Experience**


• Reading Response #5 due on Wednesday

**Paper 2. Distributed November 7, due November 19**

**III. Health and Healing in Religious Organizations**

**Week 11. November 12, 14: Praying for a Cure?**

**Monday November 12:**


**Wednesday November 14:**


**Week 12. November 19, 21 (no class): Parish Nursing**

**Monday November 19:**

Wednesday: No class.

• Over the break, ask someone the question we have talked about in this course so far that most puzzled you or most led you to reconsider your beliefs / opinions. Be prepared to share your question and the response the person you spoke with gave in class on Monday.

Week 13. November 26, 28: Should religious organizations be used as places for public health campaigns?

• “Engaging Faith Communities as Partners in Improving Community Health.” 1999. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Practice Program Office.
• *Reading Response #6 due on Wednesday*

IV. Conclusions


Monday December 3: Muslim Community Healthcare Organizations
• *Guest Speaker, Lance Laird*, Fellow in General Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine, Senior Consultant, Boston Healing Landscape Project

Wednesday December 5: Conclusions

**Final Exam Distributed December 5 in class, due to my mailbox in Pearlman Hall by 5pm on December 13**