

COM 445: Narrative Performance
Topic - Health & Illness Narratives in America

“Listening is hard, but it is a fundamental moral act... in listening for the other, we listen for ourselves. The moment of witness in the story crystallizes a mutuality of need, when each is for the other.”

“Human communication with the world, and the communion this communication rests on, begins in the body.

Arthur Franks (1995) *The Wounded Storyteller*

Instructor:

Email:

Office Hours:

Contact: Email is my preferred method of contact. Please include COM 445 and your last name in the subject line. Please allow up to 48 hours for response and if you do not hear back from me, please resend your message. You may also leave a message for me in the Hugh Downs School front office at (480)965-5095. I will make every effort to provide timely feedback throughout the course including replies to email and phone messages.

Course Description:

This course covers the theory and practice of performing narrative texts (e.g., prose fiction, oral histories, diaries, essays, and letters). It includes scripting, directing, and the rhetorical analysis of storytelling.

For fall 2014, the course also features a special topic area which invites students into the ongoing discussion of the meaning of health and illness narratives in America. Students will write their own health and illness stories, learn to critically analyze the stories of others, and use their bodies, voices, and imagination to communicate these interpretations to audiences, (fellow classmates). The course explores storytelling from a playful, creative, aesthetic, and physical approach centering on the universal topics – health and illness through a social justice lens.

Required Course Materials:

Franks, A. (1995). *The Wounded Storyteller*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Additional readings, video and web links, and other resources on our course site in Blackboard.

Working knowledge of either APA or MLA writing style (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>)

Information about the Empty Space performance venue:

The Empty Space, located at the NE corner of Rural and University, is the creative workshop space for The Hugh Downs School of Human Communication. It is available to faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students who are interested in presenting performance scholarship to the public. You will find more information about performances at The Empty Space by visiting our website: <http://www.asu.edu/clas/communication/events/emptyspace/>

Look for additional outside performance opportunities on our Blackboard course site.

Also, the Empty Space now has a Facebook page so please like it!

Instructor Teaching Philosophy – Environment of Play:

For some students, this class will offer your first opportunity to perform in front of an audience, your classmates. My goal as your instructor is to provide an exciting, creative, and fun environment where you feel safe to play, risk, and experiment. Performance provides a unique opportunity to explore the complexities of human communication, through the roles of performer and audience member. To play is exciting, new, free, and implies a level of uncertainty. Allow yourself the freedom to have fun! No acting background is needed for this Communication course – just willingness to be open, to have fun, explore, and participate in a class that gets you out of your seat!

Course Objectives:

This course is designed to assist students in understanding how health and illness narratives function as everyday performances in society and in your own lives. The texts studied range from stories in everyday conversation, literary prose, to staged personal narratives.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

1. Improve verbal and nonverbal communication skills as performers and audience members who bear witness to health and illness issues
2. Reflect thoughtfully on health and illness issues that affect their own lives
3. Read, watch, and think critically about health and illness narratives and performance
4. Develop and perform original, personal narratives about health and illness that engage audiences in cultural exploration and/or social commentary
5. Interpret and adapt literary narratives into performance

Grading Guidelines:

It is your responsibility as a student to set goals and contribute to the experience of earning a chosen grade. It is my responsibility as a teacher to set a clear standard for determining that grade. Here are the guidelines I use to evaluate your work:

A = when you have excellent attendance and participation and show significant preparation for class discussion, exams, and performance. You must turn in written work that indicates elevated thinking and conscientious presentation, as well as offering inspired contributions to classroom atmosphere through your interactions with fellow students, and the instructor.

B = when you turn in “above average” written work and demonstrate responsible preparation including having completed assigned readings prior to class discussions and good effort in performance. You must have consistent attendance and be a thoughtful participant during class to earn this grade.

C = average work. This means that you have met the minimum requirements asked of the performance and written assignments in this course. Attendance and participation is adequate.

D = you have not met all the requirements of the course. This grade might reflect poor work on one or more assignments, poor preparation for class participation and exams, or poor attendance.

E = Well below requirements, containing many errors. This grade might reflect failed exams, written work, group work, failure to participate in classroom activities and more than **four missed classes**.

Grade Point Scale:

A+= 582-600 A=552-581 A-=540-551 B+=522-539 B=492-521 B-=480-491 C+=468-479
C=420-467 D=360-419 E=359-below

Course Assignments and Grade Point Values:

Attendance:	50 points (2 points per class)*
Participation:	50 points (2 points per class)*
Midterm Exam:	75 points
2 Outside event critiques	50 points (25 points each)
Performance 1 (your health/illness narrative)	25 points
Performance 2 (loved one’s health/illness narrative)	50 points
Performance 3 (adapted health/illness narrative - group)	100 points
Performance 4 (health/illness societal narratives)	75 points
Final Paper (in lieu/in Lou of (my bad joke) final exam)	125 points
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Total Points:	600 points

**Not counting mid-term exam day and final class period*

24/7 Grievance Policy:

I am more than willing to discuss any grade with you. However, I ask you to refrain from approaching me about the grade for a full 24 hours, but within a week, after receiving it.

Missed/late work:

Only students with documented, excused reasons for missing a performance **and** who make alternative arrangements in a timely fashion can earn credit for missed work. (No make-up performances or quizzes unless an absence is excused). All written assignments are due at the start of the class period, submitted in your folder. After that, I will accept them by the next class session with a 20% late deduction.

Academic Integrity:

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication strongly believe in academic integrity; thus, instructors in the College and School do not tolerate cheating and plagiarism. Instructors who find compelling evidence of academic dishonesty will actively pursue one or more of the following actions: assigning a grade of XE (“failure through academic dishonesty”) to the student, advocating the suspension or expulsion of the student from the College, and/or referring the student to Student Judicial Affairs. If a student who is charged with academic dishonesty is found to be in violation, then one or more of these disciplinary actions will be taken. For further information, please read the Student Academic Integrity policy and code of conduct for the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at: <http://humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/undergraduate/major-information>

Course Assignments:

Performances

This is a *performance* class. This does not mean that this is an acting class, though those with previous performance or acting experience are well. The course provides an introduction to personal narrative performance, and, as such, you need not have previous experience acting or performance studies experience to be successful. You do need to have a willingness to perform as you will be asked to complete four graded performances this semester. There will also be in-class performance workshop sessions that will be included in your participation grade.

For each of the following performance assignments you will be given a handout that will explain my expectations for the assignment. It will include instructions on choosing or developing narrative material you will perform, guidelines for written assignment components, time limitations, presentation format, due dates, and other requirements.

Performance 1 (your own health/illness narrative): You will share a story about one of the following: 1) a time when you had a significant health challenge 2) a time when you felt particularly healthy. Draw on your own health and illness experiences. You may choose to write/perform about something very weighty, though you do not need to. Sometimes, being laid up with the common cold can be challenging! We will have time in class to brainstorm on this and workshop it prior to your performances. You must work alone for the actual performance.

Performance 2 (health/illness narrative of a loved one): You will share a story about one of the following: 1) a time when a loved one had a significant health challenge 2) a time when a loved one feels or felt particularly healthy. You should draw on your own health and illness experiences in relation to the person you are telling the story about. When appropriate, you may consider interviewing the person you are writing/performing to get their perspective. This may help you develop your narrative. Again, you may choose to write/perform about something very weighty, though you do not need to. We will have time in class to brainstorm on this and workshop it prior to your performances. You must work alone for the actual performance.

Performance 3 (adaptation of health/illness focus groups into narrative): This semester the class will be lead in 2 focus group experiences on issues relevant to the health and illness of college students. During these focus group classes, I will lead you in an interview about issues that matter to you regarding your health and well-being as a group of university students. You will be asked to work in teams and/or small groups to create two contrasting performances that you adapt based on the focus group transcripts. One performance should be adapted from the health focus group, and one from the illness focus group.

Performance 4 (health/illness societal narratives): From your work in this course, what is a problem/issue/social injustice you see with the American healthcare system? Think big! Start with this problem. From there you will research this problem in the media, news, and scholarly literature. You will come up with at least 5 original sources from which you will create a performance from this material and your own experiences. We will have individual meetings so I can help you with sources and make sure you feel confident/on track with this process. This is your culminating project of the semester and you will write/develop your final paper in conjunction with the research for this performance.

Final Paper

This 8-10 page paper is in lieu of a final exam. The paper is tied to Performance 4. Your paper should consist of 4 parts that address:

- A. **Introduction (1-2 pages):** What health problem/issue were you drawn to? Why did you pick your performance topic? What did you find in researching this issue?
- B. **Literature Review (3 pages):** For this paper, you are asked to use at least 5 outside sources that relate to your topic (apart from class readings). Additionally, you must use at least 1 reading from the course as a framework/example for how you put your performance piece together. (For example, did you model your performance after Franks (1995) Restitution, Chaos, and Quest Narratives?) For the literature review, write about why these different sources are relevant to the problem your performance addresses. Also, how the narrative model from our course readings provides a helpful model for your own performance. How did each source contribute to the way you put the *story* or *narrative* together for your performance?
- C. **Adaptation Process (3 pages):** How did you go about selecting which research

material to use for your performance? How did you make selections within the pieces? How did you choose which narrative model to use as an example? This section should be all about describing/detailing the process you took in putting your performance piece together.

- D. **Conclusion (1-2 pages)** As you conclude your paper, make a case for why creating a narrative performance is a worthwhile endeavor for addressing the societal issue in American healthcare that you have chosen to address. Imagine and talk about which audiences you think would benefit from seeing your work. Finally, what have you learned from this process and how did it make you feel.

Mid-Term Exam: You will have 1 exam in this class that will cover any/all assigned readings and class lectures up to that point in the semester.

Readings: You are expected to complete the assigned reading from *The Wounded Storyteller* as well as articles/texts on Blackboard by the due dates given in the working schedule at the end of this syllabus.

Written work: I will give a detailed handout with guidelines for written assignments. All written material should be typed and double-spaced (scripts & outlines can be single spaced).

Outside Critiques: You are required to attend two outside performance events and write a 2-3 page (typed/double spaced) evaluation of each performance. Your critique should evaluate the text, performance choices, and overall impact of the performance. You should utilize ideas from class in your critical discussion of the performance. It is ideal if you attend health/illness related performances but this is not necessary. Please attach your ticket or program to your essay. All outside performance events must be approved by me. I will email you about performances as I receive information and at least one of the performances you attend must be at The Empty Space on the ASU campus.

Classroom Environment:

Attendance Policy

In order to succeed in this class, attendance is necessary. As a performance class, your embodied presence is essential, and therefore you are expected to come to all class meetings. It is also expected that you will be responsible for any material presented in class, even if you are not there. If you miss class, make arrangements with a classmate to borrow notes. Attendance will be taken, and your presence and participation, especially in discussion, will be reflected in your participation grade. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class, and tardy students who are not available for attendance will be marked as absent. Frequent tardiness (regardless of the excuse) may also result in a deduction in your grade. Additionally; you are required to be present for your performances. There will be no make-up time for any missed performances. *If you miss four or more classes (for any reason) you will automatically fail the course, or receive an incomplete if there is acceptable excuse.*

Definition of Excused Absences

The only “excused absences” are: Religious holidays, university-sponsored events (athletic teams, debate and forensics, etc.), and a documented extreme illness or emergency (i.e., car accidents, death in the family, etc.). In all three cases, for an absence to be excused you will need to provide me with appropriate documentation. If you are going to miss class for religious holidays or university sponsored events, please notify me in writing at the start of the semester or, at minimum, two weeks in advance.

Participation:

You must be present in class to participate, and absences will count against participation credit, but attendance does NOT generate participation credit by itself. Participation means not only being physically present in class, but also being active in engaging in course interactions. To participate in class, you need to have read and thought about that day’s reading assignment. Be prepared to ask questions, offer examples, and apply concepts to class exercises/performances. Participation also means asking thoughtful questions and offering insightful comments and feedback. *Any behaviors that detract from that kind of climate (e.g., cell phones ringing in class, reading other material, distracting mannerisms, poor audience engagement) will reduce your class participation grade.*

Disability Services:

Students registered with the Disability Resources Center (DRC) should notify me as soon as possible. I will gladly work with you to accommodate your needs. Contact The DRC in the Matthew’s Center at 480-965-1234(voice) / 480-965-9000 (TDD) or <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc>

Disruptive Student Conduct Policy:

I want us to build a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. In a communication class, it is *especially* important that we: (1) Display respect for all in the class—including the instructor and students; (2) Pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities; (3) Avoid

Disruptive Student Conduct Policy (cont.):

unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g. having private conversations, reading the newspaper, surfing the internet, posting on Facebook, making and receiving cell phone calls or text messages, etc.); and (4) Avoid racist, sexist, homophobic or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our classroom or campus. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; rather, it represents examples of the types of things that can have a dramatic impact on the class environment. Your final grade may be reduced by 1% *each time* I determine that you engage in these sorts of behaviors. Further, students who are verbally or physically aggressive towards the instructor, the TA’s (if there are TA’s in your class), or another student before, during, or after class will have their grade lowered by 25% *each time* they engage in this sort of behavior (and, students engaging in such behaviors will be permanently removed from the class and the proper authorities notified). Students are required to adhere to the behavior standards listed at:

<http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/ssm/ssm201-10.html>

A Scholarship Opportunity in Performance Studies!!

The Kristin Bervig Valentine Endowed Scholarship in Performance Studies is awarded annually to an undergraduate student who has successfully completed at least one performance studies class and has shown significant interest in additional performance research, creative activity, or community service.

Apply for this scholarship at

<http://humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/undergraduate/scholarships>

**Information in this syllabus and course schedule is subject to change depending on course needs*