MA Core Module

Medical History and Humanities

Convenors: Professor Sanjoy Bhattacharya and Dr Alice Hall

Module Description:

This module identifies and examines key theoretical concepts and debates in medical history and humanities, including shifting definitions of the field itself, and the co-existence of multiple conceptions and approaches. It begins with a session which explores the term ‘medical humanities’ and traces its history. The opening session will introduce an understanding of medical humanities as a field which crosses disciplinary, cultural and temporal boundaries. This interdisciplinary, cross-cultural approach is reflected in the wide geographical and historical scope of the material covered in the rest of the module.

In the sessions which follow, students will engage with theories of the body, conceptions of health, medicine and well-being, representations of illness, and different types of engagement with health policy through the study materials from early modern, eighteenth century, modern and contemporary periods. Students will explore a range of methodologies; they will examine primary and secondary historical sources, critically analyse images, and engage in close readings of literary texts. The final seminar will invite students to reflect on how their understanding of medical humanities has shifted and bring together key concerns of the module through a discussion of visual culture.
Learning Outcomes:

Students who have completed this module should be able to:

A. Select, evaluate and critically analyse primary and secondary historical sources and materials
B. Engage in close readings of literary texts, literary criticism and theory
C. Locate images, texts, and works of art relating to the cultural history of medicine in their wider historical contexts
D. Make connections between medical history and humanities, and global health policy
E. Participate in discussions and debates that cross disciplinary boundaries
F. Effectively present an argument or a set of ideas in an oral presentation
G. To plan, structure and effectively form arguments in written work

Teaching Programme:

Students will attend eight two-hour seminars in weeks 2-9.

Seminars may include:

- What is Medical Humanities?
- The Early Modern Body
- Pollution, Perception and Public Health
- Literature and Medicine in the 18th Century
- Culture and Medicine in the 19th Century
- Framing Disease: The many histories of medicine of the 19th and 20th Centuries
- Visual Culture in Medical History and the Medical Humanities

Preliminary Reading: