CSPH 5000 (2 Credits)

HEALING STORIES:
NARRATIVE AND WELLBEING

Online  |  Instructors: Asa Olson, PhD and Kevin Obsatz, MFA

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course seeks to answer the question: “How can the stories that we tell ourselves and others contribute to our wellbeing?” To answer this question, students will consider how narrative can help us understand our emotions, create a sense of belonging, motivate us to address injustice, and re-author our stories. Students will survey cultural and historical perspectives on narrative and wellbeing as they relate to individuals and their communities, such as marginalized individuals who re-author narratives about their community or write counter-narratives as a form of healing. Students will also learn about the role of narrative in modern health practices, including narrative therapy and the clinical contributions of narrative medicine.

Throughout the course, students will engage with a variety of content, including research, examples of therapeutic writing (e.g. diaries and personal health journals, such as CaringBridge), popular literature (e.g. graphic novels and memoir), film, video, and social media (e.g. video blogging, documentaries, and filmmaking as a medium of personal expression). Students will not only read/view these stories, they will examine their wellbeing and apply what they learn by composing their own stories in written/video journals and narratives.

This course will invite practitioners, researchers, and organizers on campus to speak with students broadly about the importance of narrative in their work. Examples may include social workers, therapists, or psychologists who use narrative therapy or coordinators for initiatives related to narrative medicine, story slams, or the use of art to process trauma.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the historical and cultural roles of narrative in wellbeing
- Discuss the cognitive neuroscience of understanding narrative
- Apply close-reading, slow-looking, and formalist practices as a way to understand the relationship between what content a narrative conveys, the medium it takes and how the narrative conveys this content, and why it’s conveyed this way.
- Establish a fluency in multimedia tools and a practice for creating their own narratives in a way that empowers them as the storyteller and protagonist
- Analyze how the commercialization and commodification of narrative can reflect and shape attitudes that affect wellbeing for an individual and a community
- Examine the role of narrative in racial and cultural healing
- Author your own narratives or story-lines as a way to address predicaments related to wellbeing in your life

Contact us at csh-academics@umn.edu for more information.