

Livia Arndal Woods // This is my last post as a regular writer for *Synopsis*. It has been such pleasure to participate in this growing community over the past two years. That participation has allowed me to explore a broad range interests in the Medical Humanities, interests that reach through and beyond my Victorianist scholarship. Another area of my professional life that reaches through and beyond my Victorianist scholarship is the work I do in the classroom. So, it seems fitting to dedicate this final post to some big questions I have as I embark on designing new Medical Humanities courses for students at the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS). *Synopsis* has always been about building a “department without walls” and I hope these questions can spark meaningful conversation between colleagues. These are real questions – I would love real answers, either here in the comment section or over e-mail. You can reach me at livia.woods@uis.edu.

I’m working on developing a 200- and/or 300-level Medical Humanities course at UIS. I hope this course will serve the needs of nursing, pre-med, and allied health students here; I also hope that it will be of particular interest to some English, History, and Women’s and Gender Studies majors and minors. Though a significant number of students at UIS are seeking degrees in medical/care professions, and though these students need to fulfill upper-level humanities requirements, there are no medical humanities courses currently offered. I want to start offering these courses, and I want them to be meaningful for this population of students. One of the ways I’m pursuing that goal is by training a wide lens on caregiving – spending a lot of time on nursing humanities, for example – and by thinking through theories of the ethics of care that can help motivate us to draw connections between literary texts, say, and caregiving praxis. We’ll be reading a cluster of nineteenth-century women’s writing and using those texts as diving-boards into considering the particular affordances and limitations of literature as a way of thinking through bodies and care communities.

These are the broad outlines of what I know I want to do with this course. I’m hoping for some help with the details and with three categories, in particular:

- Firstly, I’m wondering about what reading I should be doing for my own pedagogical and field research and what reading assignments I should prioritize for my students.

What ideas do you have about textbooks and/or essential reading? I’m planning to look at sections of Rita Charon’s *Narrative Medicine*, for sure. And I have a few short pieces I know I need for my focus on nursing humanities and the ethics of care, but more generally I’ve got my eye on *Medical Humanities: An Introduction* (2014), *The Health Humanities Reader* (2014), *The Edinburgh Companion to*

the Critical Medical Humanities (2016), *Routledge Handbook of the Medical Humanities* (2019), and *Teaching Health Humanities* (2019).

Any experiences using these texts to design coursework in the Medical Humanities? Experience assigning them to your students? What else should be on my radar?

- Secondly, I'm hoping to establish contacts at a few programs where medical humanities coursework is working well to serve populations of students similar to my own. I'm especially interesting in talking to folks working in a program with strong nursing humanities curriculum and an R2 English department offering strong medical humanities coursework to undergrads. I have my eye on a few options, but would also love suggestions.
- Finally, I'm wondering about successful assignments and assignment sequences in courses something like this one. What has worked for you? What hasn't? I'm especially interested in assignments that ask students to reach outside of the classroom, but I worry about my ability to create a sense of relationship between that work and the navigation of the nineteenth-century women's writing (which is an important element in my conceptualization of this course).

Thank you in advance for any feedback you might have. I look forward to continuing to follow the wonderful work happening here at *Synopsis*!