

History 3840F
Microscopes and Amputation Saws:
A History of Medicine in 10 Objects
Fall 2025

Instructor: **Professor Shelley McKellar**

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Office Hours: **Tuesdays 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.**

This is a **draft** outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

Using 10 objects as entry points into the history of medicine, this course explores the changes and continuities in Western medical knowledge and practice since the 18th century. New and old medical treatments, different medical theories, professional authority, socio-cultural expectations, and issues of power, class, race, gender will be explored.

Prerequisite(s):

None. This is a 2-hour weekly in-person class meeting.

Course Syllabus

Content & Expectations

This is a course in the history of modern Western medicine that focuses on medical **KNOWLEDGE and PRACTICE**. This course aims to highlight the changes and continuities in Western medicine, identifying key individuals, ideas, treatments, structures, and contexts that reinforced or shifted the knowledge and practice of medicine, predominantly from the 18th century to present day. In this course, we will ask (and trace): What medical practices changed, and why? How did certain medical practices reinforce or disrupt medical knowledge at various periods of time? Who and what (individuals, technology, structures) were involved in these changes?

Each week's topic will start with a medical object, which will serve as an entry point to explore a broader theme or aspect in the history of medicine. In this course, we will spotlight 10 medical objects and tackle 10 distinct areas of medical history, covering such topics as the germ theory revolution, the history of surgery, and more. Our weekly lectures and discussion will delve into various topics by providing relevant content and object information, considering different historical interpretations and contrasting points of view, and examining numerous methods and theories used by historians to gather and evaluate historical evidence. Issues of class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality will be discussed alongside themes of individual agency, professional authority, consumerism, and more. Students will engage with a variety of primary sources throughout this course and be exposed to material culture study.

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This is a mixed lecture and breakout sessions course. Each week, there will be a lecture and break-out discussions in small groups. There will be a hands-on component in the form of a Medical Artifact Collection workshop for which students will work in small groups. This workshop session is scheduled during class time, so please note the change of venue (the workshop location differs from our regular classroom).

Who can take this course?

This course is open to all students. Students in history, science, social sciences, health sciences, or arts and humanities are welcome. Students do not need a background in science, medicine, or history to take this course.

Course-Level Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students shall be able:

- To differentiate the changes and continuities (historical shifts and patterns) in medical knowledge and practice over time, and how individual agency, professional authority, socio-cultural expectations, and issues of power, class, race, and gender may influence this;
- To explain key medical developments, such as the establishment of the germ theory and the introduction of new medical technologies and treatments;
- To recognize that medical knowledge and practice are shaped by time and place;
- To analyze critically various source materials – primary and secondary sources – from which to understand the history of medicine;
- To formulate and communicate an effective argument, which demonstrates strong writing and analytical skills.

Refer to history outcomes and expectations for 3rd year students at:

https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/expectations_outcomes.html

Methods of Evaluation

- Quiz #1 (online; open book) 20 %
Due date: 6:00 p.m. on Oct 7; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Oct 9
- Workshop Assignment: Medical Object Reflection (video) 15 %
Due date: 6:00 p.m. on Oct 14; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Oct 16
- Essay Assignment (approx. 2000-2500 words) 30 %
Due date: 6:00 p.m. on Nov 11; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Nov 13
- Quiz #2 (online; open book) 20 %
Due date: 6:00 p.m. on Nov 18; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Nov 20
- Group Break-out Session Reports (10 sessions in total; weekly activity) 15 %
Due date: In-class activity*; Flexible that 2 of the lowest grades dropped (students may ‘miss’ 2 (out of 10) session activities without assessment penalty)

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Please note that assessment flexibility is offered for all work required in the calculation of the final grade for this course. As such, with this intentional flexibility, requests for academic consideration for submission (including late penalty exemptions) of these assignments/quizzes may be denied (as per [Western's Senate's Policy on Academic Consideration](#)).

* For weekly Break-out Session Reports, students earn grades for demonstrating aspects of “**thinking and practicing as an historian**”. In this course, there will be 10 ‘formal’ in-class break-out sessions, in 10 different class meetings, during which students will participate in group peer-to-peer learning activities. The group will interrogate a set of primary documents, with specific CONTENT and ANALYSIS questions assigned. A group break-out session grade is awarded (not individual grades). Each student will accumulate a total of 10 break-out session report grades, of which the lowest 2 grades (such as a zero of a missed class) will be dropped from consideration when calculating your final overall grade for participation. As such, with this intentional flexibility, requests for academic consideration for these participation breakout sessions may be denied (as per [Western's Senate's Policy on Academic Consideration](#)).

Assignments -- Assignment handouts are posted on the OWL Brightspace course site.

Submitting Your Course Work -- Students will complete quizzes online and submit digital copies of assignments via the OWL Brightspace course site. A **digital copy** of all assignments is required for grading. As per [Western Senate Academic Policy](#), “the last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course”.

Late Penalties -- Penalty for late assignments is 2% each day (including Saturday and Sunday) after the due date. As per [Western Senate Academic Policy](#), course work cannot be submitted after the last day of scheduled classes in the term. As per [Western Senate Academic Policy](#), academic consideration for late or make-up submissions may be denied since there is already flexibility built into the submission framework. To be fair to all students in this class, anyone seeking course work extensions and/or a late penalty exemption must request this through Academic Advising/Advising.

Course Materials

- Jacalyn Duffin, *History of Medicine: A Scandalously Short Introduction*, 3rd edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. (\$43.00 Ebook; \$56.05 Paperback at [campus bookstore](#)) Online copy available via Western Libraries
- Weingarten, Karen. *Pregnancy Test*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. (\$22.40 Paperback at [campus bookstore](#)) Online copy available via Western Libraries
- Break-out Session primary documents – digitized and uploaded to OWL course site

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Course Schedule and Readings

Week	Date	Topic	Duffin Textbook Chapters
1	9 Sep	Introduction - Why Objects as an Entry Point into the History of Medicine?	Chapter 1
2	16 Sep	Artificial Leg (Object #1) - History of the Body Group Break-out Session #1 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE class</u>)	Chapter 2, Chapter 3
3	23 Sep	Microscope (Object #2) - History of Pathology & Disease Theories Group Break-out Session #2 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE class</u>)	Chapter 4
	30 Sep	National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (non-instructional day)	
4	7 Oct	Penicillin (Object #3) - History of Pharmacology Group Break-out Session #3 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE class</u>) Online Quiz #1 opens -- Students responsible for material covered & assigned during classes of Sep 9, Sep 16, Sep 23, and Oct 7 inclusively; Due date for quiz completion: 6:00 p.m. on Oct 7 ; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Oct 9	Chapter 5
5	14 Oct	WORKSHOP in the Medical Artifact Collection (LwH 2262) *** workshop session held in LwH 2262 – the Teaching Classroom connected to the Collection Storage Space <i>A workshop sheet guiding you through your artifact examination will be provided. No pens, no food, and no drink are allowed in the collection teaching space.</i>	None
6	21 Oct	Scarificator (Object #4) – History of Bloodletting Group Break-out Session #4 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE class</u>) Workshop Assignment due date: 6:00 p.m. on Oct 14 ; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Oct 16	

7	28 Oct	Thermometer (Object #5) - History of Measurement & Diagnosis Group Break-out Session #5 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class)	7
	4 Nov	Fall Reading Week – NO CLASS MEETING	None
8	11 Nov	X-ray (Object #6) - History of Hospitals Group Break-out Session #6 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class) Essay Assignment due date: 6:00 p.m. on Nov 11 ; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Nov 13	Chapter 9 (over 2 weeks)
9	18 Nov	Amputation Saw (Object #7) - History of Surgery Group Break-out Session #7 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class) Online Quiz #2 opens -- Students responsible for material covered & assigned during classes of Oct 21, Oct 28, Nov 11, and Nov 18 inclusively; Due date for quiz completion: 6:00 p.m. on Nov 18 ; Flexible until 6:00 p.m. on Nov 20	Chapter 10
10	25 Nov	Obstetric Forceps (Object #8) - History of Childbirth & Pediatrics Group Break-out Session #8 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class)	Chapter 11, Chapter 13
11	2 Dec	The DSM or Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (Object #9) - History of Psychiatry Group Break-out Session #9 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class)	Chapter 12
12	9 Dec	Acupuncture Needle (Object #10) – Numerous Healing Practices in History Group Break-out Session #10 (read digitized material <u>BEFORE</u> class)	None

Additional Statements

You may not make any use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course. Any use of such tools for assignments in this course may be considered a form of academic misconduct.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.