Introduction to Methods in the History of Medicine
Online Program in the History of Medicine
3 credits

This course is composed of three strands: 1. The historiography of the history of medicine 2. An introduction to a range of themes in the history of medicine and 3. An introduction to historical research and writing methods for the history of medicine. Class time will be focused on discussion of assigned articles and of research strategies based on group research projects through the course. Written assignments are designed to strengthen analytic skills and to complement your own ongoing research.

Required Books:

Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, students will be able to:
1. Understand the ways that general history and the history of medicine are related.
2. Recognize the main trends within the history of the history of medicine as a discipline.
3. Find primary sources in digital resources related to the history of medicine.
4. Articulate the differences in the main journals publishing in the history of medicine.
5. Apply specific research methods for carrying out primary research in the discipline.

Class Sessions

Session 1: The History of the History of Medicine: An Introduction to Historiography
Although historians cover a vast range of meanings, practices, and approaches, as members of an academic discipline they share a commitment to studying the past on its own terms. Just as medical concepts, practitioners, healers, and practices have changed over time and so have different histories, approaches to the history of medicine also has a historiography. Medical history is fundamentally about asking questions and working out the best way to answer them, finding evidence and seeking the best to interpret them related to all that falls under the broad umbrella of medicine. This week we’ll read what the historian of medicine and science Ludmilla Jordanova has written about “History in General” and the opening section in The Craft of Research on what it means to do research and be a researcher. We will then relate these two overviews on historical research to three essays that take different approaches to understanding how the history of medicine as a discipline has changed over time from its institutional move from Germany to Johns Hopkins (Nutton), the switch in focus from great physicians to social history (Reverby and Rosner), and how a particularly prolific and influential historian of early modern medicine has practiced medical history (Siraisi).

Readings:
History in Practice, ch 1 “History in General,” 13-34.

Other autobiographical essays on “A Life of Learning” of well-known cultural, intellectual, social, and economic historians can be found on the website of the American Council of Learning: (www.acls.org/pubs/haskins/). The essay by the sociologist of science, Robert K. Merton, (1994), or by other cultural and intellectual historians may also interest you, such as Paul Oskar Kristeller, Carl E. Schorske, Lawrence Stone, Peter Brown, Natalie Zemon Davis.

Assignment: Read the assigned readings and be prepared to discuss what you learned from them about the history of the history of medicine from the institutional move from Germany to the US, intellectual shift from great doctors to social history, and one medical historian’s “life of learning.”

Live Talk: Introductions. Be prepared to introduce to everyone what brought you to the history of medicine, what kind of experience you have already in the discipline, and the general contours of your research interests within it.

Learning Objectives
1. Examine the place of the history of medicine within the broader discipline of history
2. Understand some key shifts in the history of the history medicine as a discipline
3. Articulate how some of these shifts influenced the “Life of Learning” of a medical historian

Session 2 Introduction to Major Historians of Medicine: Changing Trends in Medical History
Continuing on the theme of the history of the history of medicine, we will contrast the historical methods of four different historians of medicine—Karl Sudhoff, Erwin Ackerknecht, Charles Rosenberg, and Roy Porter—whose scholarship spanned most of the twentieth century and discuss their different approaches to and calls for change in the history of medicine


Voice Thread:

**Assignment on readings:** Post your assessment of one of the articles on the VT for the course and respond to at least one of your peer’s assessments.

**Assignment on your research:** Discuss where you might situate your own research interests and start to formulate a research question that interests you. Ask yourself do any of this week’s readings align with how you would like to approach your research question?

**Learning Objectives**
1. Differentiate the historical methods of Karl Sudhoff, Erwin Ackerknecht, Charles Rosenberg, and Roy Porter.
2. Relate these differences in method to changes in the history of medicine discipline
3. Be able to articulate what is Ranke’s historical method, the behaviorist approach, the cultural anthropological approach, and medical history from below

**Session 3 Introduction to History of Medicine Journals: Changing Trends in Medical History**
Continuing on the theme of the historiography of the history of medicine, we will delve into the journals that have contributed most to developing the history of medicine as a discipline. In addition to discussing Jordanova on “Mapping the Discipline” of history, we will therefore work on “Mapping the history of medicine” through comparing and contrasting the changes in temporal, regional, and topical coverage over time in the most important journals in the field: *ISIS, Medical History, the Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, and the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*.

**Readings:**

**Assignment for class:** Journal exercise, in groups — *Isis; Med Hist; JHMAS, BHM*. Choose 3 tables of contents over the decades, post to Voice Thread and comment: how have these journals changed over time thematically, temporally, spatially? what are the themes? time periods? Regions covered? Languages used?

**Assignment on your research:** Make note as well of any articles that you may come across that relate to your own research interests and start a bibliography for yourself.

**Live Talk:**
Be prepared to present your findings to the class related to how these journals changed over time. Discuss as well what journal or journals published articles on subjects related to your own research interests.

**Learning Objectives**
1. Learn about the most important journals in the history of medicine in English language
2. Evaluate changes in the history of the history of medicine through a “biography” of journals
Session 4 Primary Sources and Digital Resources in the History of Medicine

We’ve seen that the history of medicine has its own complex history, connects with general history and other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, and has specific journals through which one can “map” it as a discipline in its own right. Medical history is fundamentally about generating questions and framing answers to them, finding evidence and analyzing it in relationship to an argument. In this week, we’re going to read Jordanova’s overview of “History and Other Disciplines,” study how one medical historian marshaled evidence to revise previous arguments (Bylebyl), and apply both Jacalyn Duffin’s essay on “how to research a question in medical history” and The Craft of Research’s “From Questions to Problems” to a group project on how to choose a topic and find a primary source related to the history of medicine in the ECCO digital database.

Readings
History in Practice, ch 3 on “History and Other Disciplines,” 59-86.

Voice Thread:
Focus on Bylebyl’s analysis of the frontispiece. What primary sources did he use to explain it? What other historians was he speaking to? How did he revise what they had argued? Discuss as well Duffin’s methods for researching a question in medical history in relationship to the research question you began to conceptualize in the previous three weeks.

Generate key words to search with. Each group selects one source, posts TP to Voice Thread and explains why they chose it.

Assignment on your research: If anyone finds a source that relates to their own research interest, please feel free to post individually and discuss its relevance to your research questions.

Learning Objectives
1. Learn how to ask a research question, find sources, and formulate answers in medical history.
2. Analyse how one medical historian used primary sources, visual evidence, and argument to revise previous historian’s arguments.
3. Apply these methods to a group research project using the eighteenth-century collections online database and share results with the rest of the class.

Session 5 Putting Primary Sources in Context: Engaging with Secondary Literature
Primary sources and secondary scholarship in history have a mutually constitutive relationship to each other. Primary sources do not necessarily precede secondary ones nor vice versa. Sometimes we as historians are inspired by secondary scholarship to find a primary source that will challenge, modify, or build upon what other scholars have written. Conversely, sometimes we find a primary source that captures our attention to such an extent we search for secondary scholarship that would help us better interpret its meaning and situate it within its historical milieu. You have together found primary sources of interest to you in the ECCO database and discussed why you chose to for the history of eighteenth-century medicine. Your challenge this week is to work within your group to link your group’s primary source to the relevant secondary literature that you think would help you better understand this source and place it within its historical context.

Readings
History in Practice, ch 4 “Status of Historical Knowledge,” 87-104.
Craft of Research, Part II “Asking Questions, Finding Answers,” ch. 5-6 “From Questions to Problems” and “Using Sources,” pp. 64-84.

Assignment: What secondary sources would help us understand the primary sources your groups chose last week? Use Historical Abstracts, American History & Life, and JSTOR, to search for secondary sources. Each group should submit a bibliography of no more than ten sources, with brief annotations drawn from their abstracts. Each person should select one article to read and write one paragraph that relates their article to the primary source chosen in their group. Does the secondary source support or contradict the primary source?

Possible assignment on your research: Anyone from the previous week who found a primary source related to their research interests, should use this week’s exercise to find secondary sources that help interpret and contextualize their primary source or sources.

Live Talk:
We’ll have a discussion on search strategies and what you discovered in the process of looking for secondary sources both for the group primary source and your own research project.

Learning Objectives
1. Articulate the standards of how to evaluate the quality of historical knowledge.
2. Learn how to find secondary sources in library online databases.
3. Explain your understanding of how a secondary source relates to a primary source.

Session 6 Periodization: Temporal Limits from Long Durée to Short Term
At the heart of all historical research is the study of change over time. Yet patterns of change are unpredictable and the pace of change uneven. Change depends on circumstances, is contingent, and varied depending on different aspects of a subject. Political formations may change quickly, for example, while cultural practices transform much more slowly. Part of the historians’ craft has been to name periods that give a clear temporal shape to history. For instance, Antiquity, Medieval, Renaissance, Early Modern, Modern, and Contemporary periods structure European, even world history, and the imperial dynasties dominate much of East Asian history. One of the most important decisions historians make then is to limit their narrative to a clear periodization.
The following three articles illustrate how medical historians have periodized their research, thereby strengthening their arguments, yet in very different ways: by studying a practice that spanned a long-durée of several centuries and occurred in several countries of late medieval Europe (Park), by focusing on the cultural significance of one unique late-18th-century Japanese medical text (Kuriyama), and by looking at how medical case histories varied for different doctors and changed over just a few decades in the Southern US of the 1840s-50s (Stowe).

Readings:

Assignment on your research: This is a research week for all of you. Some of the other faculty as well as myself will meet individually with you via email/Skype about the question you have been considering for research. This is a good point in the course to limit the periodization of your own research interests: an event, month, year, decade, century?

Voice Thread:
Choose one of the above articles and post on voice thread what how you think the author’s periodization and sources support his or her argument. What changed, when, where, and why did it matter? Could the period have been lengthened or shortened? Did the authors’ respective choices of Late Medieval Europe, Eighteenth Century, and the Mid-Nineteenth Century match well what they argued?

Learning Objectives
1. Be able to discuss the main ways historians divide up time in history
2. Evaluate some pros and cons of the short-term and the long-durée approach to periodization
3. Clarify what period of medical history you are most interested in further researching

Session 7 Sampling a Range of Primary Sources in the History of Medicine
Medical case histories, legal documents, letters, diaries, memoirs, notebooks, public health reports, newspapers, journals, and oral histories are just some of the range of primary sources of value in the history of medicine. This week we will examine both how to evaluate a primary source – in terms of its reliability, typicality, and historical value – as well as how a type of primary source is used as evidence to support a specific historical claim or argument. We will do this by focusing on some exceptional primary sources for the history of medicine such as a 17th-century English woman’s memoir on the pain of childbirth (Howard), turn-of-the twentieth century dying declarations used for criminal abortion cases in the US (Reagan), medical case records on a Chinese woman’s madness in 1930s Beijing (Shapiro), and the case for using oral history for recovering the dramatic medical transformations of the past half a century (Tomes).
Readings:
History in Practice, ch 7 on “Historian’s Skills,” 150-72.

Assignment on your research: Decide on your main primary sources during this week for your own research project. You need not have all the primary sources gathered, just a couple exemplary ones that relate to your interests. Formulate a few questions about them; write one paragraph on the primary sources; and draft one paragraph on their significance.

Live Talk:

Learning Objectives:
1. Learn the historian’s skills of how to make a claim and support it through model examples
2. Summarize the range of primary sources used so far in the assigned articles for methods
3. Learn how to evaluate unique primary sources in terms of reliability, typicality, and historical significance

Session 8 Honing the Skill Sets of the Medical Historian
One of the most important distinctions for historians generally is that between the analytical concepts they used to interpret primary sources and the historical actors’ categories within those same sources. Analysis of actors’ categories is not only an effective means to understand peoples’ perspectives on their own terms but also one of the most productive historical methods for revising historical misconceptions, for example, of histories of medieval plague (Getz). For an influential analytical concept we will discuss postcolonial as it has used to write global health histories (Anderson). Another dimension in the history of medicine has been to use historical analysis to intervene in contemporary debates on the bioethics of human experimentation, informed consent, and patient rights (Reverby).

Readings
On making an argument based on historical actors’ categories

On making an argument based on an analytical concept:

On making an argument in the history of medicine that matters for public policy:

Assignment on your research: Considering the three examples related to honing the skills of a historian combine the work you’ve done so far related to your own research project into one document with three parts: summary of primary sources, assessment of their significance, a preliminary of secondary sources related to your research, and statement clarifying a historical method you think you can use: for example, whether you are applying an analytical concept, analysing an actor’s category, intervening in public history or policy, or some other angle related to the significance of your research.

Voice Thread:

**Learning Objectives**
1. Learn the difference between actors’ categories and analytical concepts
2. Be able to articulate what is public history and medical history’s role in it.
3. Understand how medical historians have used warrants and qualifications to make historically informed interventions related to contemporary bioethics