Health has been defined ("A Feminist Dictionary", 1985) as the ‘condition of body and mind traditionally assigned to (women’s) care’. “As mothers and wives we have been held responsible for the health (or illness) of children, men and parents. As ‘caring’ nurses and auxiliaries in hospitals we have worked long hours for low pay. On the other hand our own health, in body and mind, has often been seen as flowing from, or blocked, by our female biology, and as something to be controlled by doctors”.

In this course, we will look at Western medicine and our health care system — how it happened, how it shapes our views of physical, mental and social health/disease; and how it determines who controls the definition and provision of medical treatment. A feminist historical perspective documents the decline of women healers and the rise of ‘professional’ men as health care authorities, paralleled by the industrialization of medicine into a big and profitable business. At a time when universal health care is in danger of dying before being developed, we need to re-examine the whole approach to such care; and to develop ways for increased control by women of their own health.

This course is divided into three sections:

PART 1: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF HEALTH

1. Lost in time: holistic being and women as healers
2. Medical ideology: if man is to medicine as woman is to nature...the medical need for norms
3. Drugs: profits, politics and victims
4. Research: priorities, problems and lobbying
5. Dis-ease: alternatives to the germ theory

PART II: WOMEN’S HEALTH ISSUES

6. Life stages: the male norm and female deviance (menstruation, pregnancy and menopause as illness or process?)
7. Reproductive technologies
8. Volunteers and home health care
10. Poverty and health care
PART III: ALTERNATIVES

11. Self-help and collective power: women’s health collectives
12. Other health resources
13. Future directions

REQUIRED READINGS:


COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance, participation  15%
Journal 15%
Research Paper (10-12 pages)  30%
Midterm Examination 20%
Final Examination (take home) 20%

DESIGNATED CREDIT:

This course may be applied to the Certificate in Liberal Arts.