Syllabus for HCOM509 HEALTH LITERACY
Tufts University School of Medicine

Term/Year: Session 2, Summer 2015
July 7th through July 23rd

Meeting Day/Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Location: M&V 102

Course Director: Sabrina Kurtz-Rossi, M.Ed., Assistant Professor, Office: 617-636-6388; Cell: 781-835-6488; Email: sabrina.kurtz_rossi@tufts.edu

Office Hours: By appointment, Tuesdays and Thursday

Course Description: Understanding the relationship between health and literacy is essential to development of effective health communication. National assessments of adult literacy have raised serious concerns about the ability of nearly half the adult population in the U.S. to access and use health information and services (NALS 1992, NAAL 2003, PIAAC 2012). Low health literacy is a barrier to effective health communication, affects health care quality and contributes to health disparities. To address these issues the Institute of Medicine calls for increasing “knowledge, awareness, and responsiveness to health literacy among health service providers” (IOM 2005). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that health service providers be trained in health literacy, plain language, and culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS) and use those skills to create patient-centered best practices (DHHS, 2010).

To raise awareness among health professionals regarding health literacy as a public health priority, the Health Communication Program at the Tufts University School of Medicine offers a skills oriented seminar in health literacy. This course explores the links between health literacy, language and culture and how systems barriers impact access to health information and quality health care services. Students practice writing and speaking in plain language, and consider how to apply health literacy research to practice. The course provides an overview of health literacy interventions being tried in a variety of sectors and explores opportunities for collaboration across fields.

Credits: .5

Prerequisites: None

Required Texts (must be obtained by the student)


Required Articles (available on TRUNK)


Competency-based Objectives

- Craft theory-based messages to achieve health communication objectives including but not limited to: raising awareness, advocacy, behavior change, and risk communication.

- Understand the strengths and weaknesses of a broad range of communication channels and technologies and be able to choose those that are most appropriate for the audience and message.

Learning Objectives: The course will provide students with the opportunity to develop and practice plain language, culturally competent health communication skills to meet the health information needs of health care consumers with a broad range of health information and literacy needs. At the conclusion of the course students will be able to:

- Articulate how poor health literacy impacts patient and consumer access to health information and quality health care services

- Assess written, verbal, and online health information for readability and usability

- Use plain language in both verbal and written health communication

- Identify supports that aid health communication across cultures

- Compare and contrast health literacy initiatives

- Apply health literacy research to health communication efforts in practice

Expectations: The course will meet in July 2015 during Summer Session 2 on Tuesdays (7/7, 7/14, 7/21) and Thursdays (7/16, 7/23) from 5:00 pm to 8:30 pm in the Public Health and Community Medicine Department, MV 102 (Tufts University School of Medicine, 145 Harrison Avenue, Boston, 02111). The seminar is limited to 15 participants to meet the learning needs
of individual students and to allow for in-depth feedback from the instructor. All students must have access to the course on TRUNK, the Tufts course management system, prior to the first class session.

Students will read two required texts. *Health Literacy A-Z* by Osborn, a practical guide, and *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Fadiman. Please obtain and begin reading the Fadiman text as soon as possible. It reads like a novel but still takes time to complete. We will have extensive discussion in class related to this particular readings during session four (Thursday, July 16, 2015) so the earlier you get started the better. A single copy of each required text will be on hold at the Tufts University Hirsch Health Sciences Library. Copies of all other readings will be available on TRUNK.

**Course Outline**

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<td>6/23/15</td>
<td>Research to Practice</td>
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**Evaluation and evaluative framework:** Attendance and focused attention during course hours (5:00 pm – 8:30 pm) is required and absences and level of participation will affect your grade. Please see the course instructor if you have any conflicts with the schedule. Students are expected to read all the assigned texts, actively participate in class discussions, and complete all assignments. Late assignments will not be accepted without prior approval from the instructor. Missing assignments will affect your grade.

- **Class Participation 10%:** This course is designed to be highly interactive. Class participation is expected from all students. Your final grade will reflect an assessment by the course instructor of your attendance, participation in class discussions, including the Communicating Across Cultures in-class discussion and completion of daily online evaluations following each session.
- **In-class Assignments 30%:** Each in-class assignment is worth 15% x 2 assignments = 30%. In-class assignments include: Plain Language Practice: a role-play activity and Health Literacy Study Circles, a group project and presentation. See detailed description of assignments below.
- **Portfolio Assignments 60%:** Each portfolio assignment is worth 20% x 3 assignments = 60%. Portfolio assignments include: 1) Approaches to Health Literacy, a 2-4 page paper, 2) Write it Easy-to-Read, an audience-specific plain language health education material, 3) Creating a Word List, using plain language to define technical terms. See detailed description of assignments below.
Assignments

Approaches to Health Literacy: Students will view two videos describing health literacy. One from a clinical perspective, the other from an adult literacy / public health perspective. Students will consider interventions to improve health literacy in a 2-4 page paper. Papers will include the following: a brief introduction to health literacy; description of health literacy interventions from a systems perspective; description of health literacy interventions from a skills perspective; and from which perspective you see yourself working to address the health literacy challenge. Students will:

- Demonstrate familiarity with health literacy interventions in practice
- Describe health literacy as both a systems and skills challenge
- Conceptualize applied approaches to addressing the problem

Plain Language Practice: Students will create a health communication role-play. In the role-play students will communicate key health information and concepts and highlight at least five technical terms or jargon and how to translate them into plain language. Students will:

- Identify five technical terms or jargon commonly used in health care settings
- Demonstrate the ability to translate technical terms or jargon into plain language
- Communicate health information and concepts in plain language

Write It Easy-to-Read: In this exercise students will apply plain language writing and design principles to develop an easy-to-read health education material. Students will develop an audience specific health education material on a topic of their choice. Students will:

- Practice writing in plain language
- Apply graphic design principles to improve reading ease
- Select cultural appropriate visuals and content examples

Communicating Across Cultures: Students will read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman. Through facilitated discussion in-class, students will identify barriers and supports to clear health communication across languages and cultures. Students will:

- Recognize culture, language and literacy barriers to communication
- Describe the relationship between health literacy and cultural competency
- Consider the role of interpreters, cultural brokers and community health workers in communicating health information
Creating a Word List: Students will choose 10 technical words related to a specific health topic, such as diabetes, asthma, cancer, etc. With these 10 words students will create a mini-dictionary, with easy-to-read definitions and phonetic spellings to clarify pronunciation. Students will:

- Define 10 health related words in easy-to-read terms
- Practice plain language writing and design principles
- Apply phonetic spellings to aid pronunciation

Health Literacy Study Circles: Students will work in small groups to focus on a specific area of research. Each group will be assigned a reading and given a sample study circle guide. Students will meet with their group at least once outside of class to discuss the reading. In the final class, each small group will facilitate a study circle to engage the class in a discussion and activity to explore the research topic and issues raised. All students will be expected to read all assigned readings and have an in-depth understanding of the research assigned to their group.

- Demonstrate familiarity with the health literacy research
- Identify gaps in knowledge / areas for future study
- Consider the application of health literacy research to practice

Public Health Programs Grading Guidelines

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Level of Performance</th>
<th>Numerical Equivalent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A plus</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>97 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>93-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minus</td>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B plus</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B minus</td>
<td>Flawed but acceptable</td>
<td>80-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C plus or below</td>
<td>Poor: Failing grade</td>
<td>79 and below</td>
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Session 1: What is Health Literacy?
This session is an introduction to course content and expectations. We will review the course syllabus and begin to explore the link between literacy and health and how poor health literacy impacts access to health information and quality health care services. We will consider the role of adult literacy and public health in a discussion of emerging approaches to improving health literacy. By the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of course objectives, mechanics, and expectations
- Define health literacy and populations at risk
- Identify health literacy barriers to effective communication and quality care
- Describe emerging health literacy interventions in practice

Session 2: In Plain Language
In this session students will consider written, verbal, and on-line health information. We will evaluate the reading grade level at which materials are written and discuss the utility of these tools in practice. We will consider an audience-centered approach to materials development and the application of plain language writing and design principles. By the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Describe approaches to audience-centered plain language materials development
- Recognize the strengths and weaknesses of readability formulas
- List criteria for evaluating readability and usability of print and web-based information
- Apply plain language writing and design principles

Session 3: Patient-Provider Communication
In this session students will apply adult learning theory to health communication in practice. Students will also engage in a project-based learning activity and practice communicating health information in plain language. Students will practice teach-back and other methods for promoting understanding between patients and providers and consider systems changes that promote health literacy. By the end of this session students will be able to:

- Demonstrate verbal plain language health communication skills
- Practice two health literacy interventions used to promote patient-provide communication
- Identify 10 technical terms commonly used by health care provider and their plain language alternatives
- Consider system changes that promote health literacy
Session 4: Working Across Cultures

This session will focus on the relationship between health literacy, language, and culture. Students will consider culture as a factor in health communication through a discussion of the novel *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman. We will discuss issues related to translation and interpreting and identify supports that aid health communication across cultures. By the end of this session students will be able to:

- Link health, literacy and language
- Describe how to work effectively with an interpreter
- Name methods for ensuring the quality of translated material
- Compare the roles of interpreters and cultural brokers

Session 5: Research to Practice

In this session students will work in small group to present an overview of assigned reading. Students will facilitate a discussion and activity that will engage the class in an exploration of the research and its application to health literacy efforts in practice. By the end of this session students will be able to:

- Articulate familiarity with health literacy research
- Consider the application of health literacy research to practice
- Identify gaps in knowledge and areas for future research

About the Instructor: Sabrina Kurtz-Rossi, M.Ed., is Assistant Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine and Principal of Kurtz-Rossi & Associates, a woman-owned consulting group offering health, literacy, education and evaluation services. As a health literacy practitioner, Ms. Kurtz-Rossi works on a variety of health literacy projects and draws upon this experience to inform her teaching and course work. Ms. Kurtz-Rossi received her Master's Degree from Boston University's School of Education and began her career in the Boston area working with community-based organizations implementing health information outreach programs.

Contacting the Instructor: Students are encouraged to contact the instructor with any and all questions. Please email sabrina.kurtz_rossi@tufts.edu or call 617-636-3833.