“The aim of a liberal education is to unsettle presumptions, to defamiliarize the familiar, to reveal what is going on beneath and behind appearances, to disorient young people and to help them to find ways to reorient themselves” (Harvard Faculty Committee Report).

Course Description:
“Madness and Melancholy” rests on the assumption that definitions of madness and melancholy are, in Roy Porter’s words, “not fixed points but culture-relative.” While we will read some contemporary discussions of how depression and other mental disorders are treated and defined, the bulk of our reading will consist of literary, medical, and philosophical accounts of madness and melancholy written from the classical period to the early seventeenth-century. Our reading will be comparative and we will seek to understand each account of madness and/or melancholy in the context in which it was written. Instead of agreement, we will find, in every period, debate and disagreement about how madness and melancholy should be defined and treated.

While depression and madness are now typically medicalized and pathologized, in other periods, writers, scientists included, took an approach to melancholy and madness that was as much, or more, religious, ethical, or philosophical as it was medical. We will see madness and melancholy sometimes judged positively rather than negatively. We will read writers defining madness and melancholy in relation to the bodily humors, to gender, genius, the gods or God, love, parents, power, the planets, reason, and sin. More often than not, these same writers are more concerned with what it means to be good than they are concerned with what it means to be well. Frequently, the writers we read are critical of the societies in which they live and of most of the people in those societies, including those who are wealthy and have power. The class, then, has less to say about contemporary views of psychology or medicine than it does about religion, moral philosophy, and the social and political implications of madness and melancholy in eras earlier than our own.

Reading:
• Euripides, Medea <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/euripides/medea.htm>.
• Plato, Phaedrus (Hackett).
• Shakespeare, King Lear (Arden).

Excerpts or essays at Oncourse or on the web from work by the following writers: [Pseudo] Aristotle, Erasmus, Marsilio Ficino, Galen, Hildergard of Bingen, Hippocrates, Ruth Padel, the Pew Research Center, [Pseudo] Hippocrates, Seneca, and Ethan Watters. Entries from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5), “The bright side of being blue: Depression as an adaptation for analyzing complex problems” by Paul W. Andrews and J. Anderson Thomson, Jr., comments on that essay by Ed Coyne and Jerry Hagen, essays by Jonah Lehrer and Louis Menand, and essays that illustrate the debate about the content of DSM V.

Informal Writing & Information Literacy:
On a number of occasions during the semester, you will be asked to prepare notes that focus on particular words or images or characters; write summaries or summaries and evaluations of an argument made by another; write comments or ask questions about claims made by an author you have read; perform library research that enables you to find and use reliable academic sources of information; write a complete draft of an essay that you will later revise and submit. The more command you have over each task, the better the reader, researcher, and writer you are likely to be.

Writing Requirements and Grades:
• Three 6 to 8 page essays. The essays should be double-spaced and typed in font size 12. 65% of final grade. You may revise the first essay you write if it receives a grade below B+.
• 25% of your grade will depend on summaries you submit to me, your responses to questions posted at Oncourse, and on your participation in class discussion.
• A graded exercise designed to display your ability to find and use information in IUCAT, WorldCat, Online Full-Text Journals, and a variety of subject specific online databases. 10% of the final grade.