



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF MEDICINE

Supported by the Dalhousie Medical Humanities Program

Clinical Humanities Continuing Professional Development 2026

Off the Charts: Narrative and Book Arts for Clinical Communication

Online, 6:00-7:30pm, Oct 13, 20, 27, Nov 3, 10, 17

Land Acknowledgement

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples. These sovereign nations hold inherent rights as the original peoples of these lands, and we each carry collective obligations under the Peace and Friendship Treaties. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada.

Instructors:

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Dr. Paula Holmes-Rodman, **Contact:** p.holmes.rodman@gmail.com

Email Policy

All email communication to the instructors must be professional, courteous, and concise, with the course indicated in the subject line. Responses can usually be expected within 24 hours during weekdays. We will not generally check our email at night or on the weekends.

Introduction

Off the Charts: Narrative and Book Arts for Clinical Communication is a six-week online interactive clinical humanities continuing professional development series for healthcare practitioners and medical humanities faculty. Through poetic/theatric prompts and material arts, we explore narrative medicine and embodied bookmaking practices to enhance reflective capacity and deepen patient-provider communication beyond the medical chart. *Off the Charts* will challenge participants to imagine and respond to patient experiences that may not always be shared or contained within the typical provider-patient encounter, though may profoundly impact patient outcomes, adherence to treatment, and well-being. The material aspects of the course will further prompt participants to flex their creative capacities for sensory expression and otherwise communicate what is not being said. The combination of text and sculptural book-object promotes alternative, creative, and inter-subjective modes of communication that may more holistically express patient experiences than standard clinical “history-taking” alone. The goal of this course is to encourage participants to engage in creative dialogue, create meaning from the senses, and promote critical thinking within and beyond the provider-patient encounter.

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop a repertoire of critical questioning skills aimed at uncovering social, structural and individual determinants of health outside of strictly physical ailments.
2. Conceptualize and translate personal medical histories, complex illness narratives and the clinical encounter itself through artistic materials and the senses to enhance non-linguistic modes of learning and expression.
3. Critically engage with existing patient-made subjective materials to promote meaning-making and clinical learning.

Course Overview

This will be both an online seminar with at-home studio components between classes. Class typically goes as follows:

- **Attendance:** Taken at the beginning and end of class.
- **Technical demonstrations:** Slides and real-time demonstrations during class time will prepare participants to write, populate and create their handmade books. Participants are expected to bring their materials to each class and be prepared to create.
- **Creative Prompting:** Participants are expected to respond to creative, poetic, and narrative prompts in their sketchbooks. These will form much of the source material for further artistic translations.
- **Documentation & Sharing:** Participants are expected to share their answers to narrative and poetic prompts, images of their creations, and talk about their work. These sharing rounds may be class-wide or in smaller breakout rooms.

All discussions and sharing rounds are intended to be free and safe for all participants. Anything other than open, respectful, and productive discussions will not be tolerated. All discussions and critiques will be geared towards positively moving ideas and creations forward.

This course calls for 1.5 hours of in-class work per week with an estimated **1 additional hour of homework per week**. Outside homework time is intended to give participants more freedom to accomplish their creative expressions than may be possible in class.

Participants are required to keep a **sketchbook** to write answers to creative prompts, develop creative ideas between classes, test colour interactions, create layering schematics, test compositional arrangements, take demonstration notes, and record discussion questions. The sketchbook is an essential source material for in-class sharing rounds.

It is essential that you come to class with all of the arts materials you will need for the day.

Evaluation Criteria

Off the Charts is a **pass/fail** course. Participants must achieve a **“pass” in each portion of the rubric** in order to pass the course as a whole. Evaluation is not necessarily based on the artistic merit of project outcomes, but rather on effort, participation, and sincere conceptual engagement with course materials.

The course recognizes that different kinds of writing, imagery, techniques, and volumes of book media can all take significantly varied amounts of time. Therefore, it is important for each participant to develop personal goals to achieve the desired artistic outcome without going over the estimated 1 additional hour per week of homework time.

Course Rubric:

Description:	Pass:	Fail:
Attends each class fully		
Completes both projects to the best of their ability and within the allotted time frame		
Fully participates and engages in creative prompts (answers all prompts in the sketchbook, makes clear connections between prompts and artistic outcomes)		
Fully participates in sharing rounds (speaks, shares images and prompt answers, asks questions, provides feedback to peers)		
Submits final materials: course evaluation, images of final books, 250-word explanation of final projects		

Course Schedule Summary

(Week 0)		Read syllabus before week 1, gather arts materials
Week 1	Oct 13	Introductions, create zines
Week 2	Oct 20	Bind zines, create altered book
Week 3	Oct 27	Reflections and Sharing Rounds + Bind second book
(Before Nov 3: Choose Embodied Book from website)		
Week 4	Nov 3	Respond to prompts + populate second book
Week 5	Nov 10	In-progress share + video about patient-made artists' books
Week 6	Nov 17	Reflective writing exercise + sharing Rounds + large group discussion
(Week 7)		Submit course eval, book photos, and writeup

Academic Integrity

The academic enterprise is founded on honesty, civility, and integrity. As members of this enterprise, all participants are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required, **including Artificial Intelligence programs**. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Violations of academic integrity (i.e., misconduct) lead to the breakdown of the academic enterprise, and therefore serious consequences arise and harsh sanctions are imposed. For example, incidences of plagiarism or artificially altering documentation photos may result in a “Fail” and more serious consequences may apply if the matter is referred to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Discipline. Careful records are kept in order to monitor and prevent recurrences.

Project Descriptions

Project 1: “Unraveling Communication” Books

Brief: Each participant will create their own zine with the aid of guiding writing prompts and provocations. The theme of these zines will focus on crafting clinical encounters from the first person, caregiver, or medical provider perspective including all characters, voices, influences, backstories and scaffolding. After populating these zines, participants will scan the pages and email them to Darian, who will then send the collection to each participant. After printing off the collection in their homes or offices, each participant will be guided through the process of binding this collection. Finally, the collective book will become an “altered book,” as each participant will then spend time materializing the conceptual links between pages through additive and deletion processes, and exploring what it means to “off chart” a medical narrative. The final altered book may be more sculptural than functional, but nevertheless holds the collective consciousness of each participant.

Project 2: “Talking Back/ Talking With/ Talking Through” Books

Brief: Participants will begin by constructing a French Door book, which is a form of book that consists of a right- and left-hand side and opens from the center. This inherently dualistic construction sets the premise for thinking through textual and sensory communication styles, multiple- and counternarratives. The theme of the book will be a response to a patient-made artist’s book from a selection of works on the Embodied Books website, and participants will be assigned writing prompts based on their choice of artist’s book, again focusing on the expansion and contraction of the story through the examination of all characters, voices, influences, backstories and scaffolding. Participants will attempt to mobilize their book as a gesture of care, attention, and empathy to the issue(s) witnessed in the patient-made books. The left-hand side will be mainly textual, while the right-hand side will be entirely sensory: visual, photographic, textural, haptic, folded, cut out, additive, ripped apart, set on fire, etc.

The final product will ask readers to make meaning between the textual and sensory halves of this book and to reflect on spoken and unspoken clinical communication.

Your choices for Project Two: <https://www.embodiedbooks.com/off-the-charts>

Weekly Sessions

Week 0: Preparing for Uncharted Course

- Receive and familiarize yourself with the syllabus
- Confirm participants received their bookmaking kits.
- Gather arts supplies

Week 1: Introductions: Narrative and Zinemaking

- Agenda: Round of introductions. Presentation on medical narratives, clinical communication, and bookmaking. Walk through the syllabus. Introduce “Project 1: Unraveling Communication Books.” Deliver narrative medicine prompts, fold zine template, and populate it with writing, drawings, and found objects together in class.
- Homework: Scan and email zine template to Darian. Print off distributed PDF from Darian. Fold up the class set of zines in preparation for class time.

Week 2: “Unraveling/Retelling”

- Agenda: Sew set of class zines together into a single book. Create an “altered book” using destructive/creative writing prompts from Paula. Use break out rooms to reflect on making the zine templates.
- Homework: Complete your altered book.

Week 3: Altered Book Reflection

- Agenda: Use break out rooms to present final altered books to one another. Come back as a large group to reflect on Project 1.
- Introduce Project 2: “Talking Back/Talking With/Talking Through.” Bind book form for Project 2.
- Homework: Participants will select and read through a selection of artists’ books from the Embodied Books website, <https://www.embodiedbooks.com/off-the-charts>. Bring art supplies, photographs, medical documents, collage materials, and anything else you think you might want to incorporate into your final book project.

Week 4: Preparing for Parallel Charts

- Agenda: Populate your French Door book with writing and sensory prompts. Use break out rooms to share initial ideas with peers.
- Homework: Continue working on Project 2

Week 5: Crafting Impact

- Agenda: Watch selection from “I Make Books” documentary by artist Martha Hall. Use break out rooms to share work-in-progress and creative solutions for each other’s books.

Collectively work on Project 2 books.

- Homework: Finish Project 2

Week 6: Bound together

- Agenda: Engage with reflective prompts on Project 2. Use break out rooms to share and give feedback on each other's books. Come together for a large-group evaluation of Project 2.
- Homework: Complete exit survey, email Paula and Darian documentation photos of your books and 150-250 word explanation of the final projects.

Materials List

Provided:

- Book board
- Page sheets
- Jig
- Needles
- Book binding thread
- Awl
- Clips
- Glues

To be gathered:

- Sketchbook (or notebook)
- Scissors
- Writing utensils
- Drawing materials (your choice, coloured pencils, pens, markers, crayons, watercolors, etc.)
- Collage materials (your choice, magazines, photos, medical documents/accessories, stickers, tissue papers, old textbooks, Post it notes; 'sign here' flags; string, yarn, anything that sticks to or can be stuck to paper) Be VERY creative!

Access to:

- Printer (colour)
- Copier