New Course on the History of Global Health

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When the Department of History awarded Professor Adam Warren a course development grant, he used it to craft a new undergraduate course that would not only be of interest to students of the past, but would be of value to those training to shape the future of global health. Part of the University of Washington's new Minor in Global Health, this course considers how a historical approach may help experts address complex political and ethical concerns within the global health movement.

Professor Warren has long been interested in the history of medicine and the role of medicine in colonial politics in late colonial Latin America and more recently has conducted research on the interactions between American and Peruvian medical and scientific experts in the twentieth century. The course development grant allowed him to attend meetings of the American Association for the History of Medicine, where he was able to exchange ideas with specialists on a wide array of topics and regions. The resulting course offers students a way to move beyond traditional area studies frameworks in order to engage with history in ways that are comparative and transnational.

From ancient Roman, Aztec and Inca notions of disease to the twenty-first century rise of the Gates Foundation, the course provides students with an understanding of the complex historical origins of the modern global health movement, which has its roots in practices of colonialism and empire-building, the rise of international commerce and industrial capitalism, the development of international philanthropy, and efforts to secure and protect national borders during epidemics and other public health and humanitarian crises. By comparing the ideologies, institutions, ethics, and practices of international health during much of the twentieth century with those of earlier centuries, this course asks students to consider to what extent the more recent global health movement represents a new and distinct approach.

The course has proven so popular that Professor Warren plans to teach it again in Autumn 2014.

Click here to see the course featured in UW Perspectives.