Preliminary Syllabus, Spring 2012
GRS HI 877

HEALTH IN AFRICAN HISTORY
ASC 505
Friday 10 – 1 pm

Professor Diana Wylie, African Studies Center, 232 Bay State Rd., 353-6645
dwylie@bu.edu, office hours: MTR 2-3

This graduate seminar will use the case study method to survey health problems that have plagued the African continent, with special but not exclusive reference to southern Africa. Our approach will be two-pronged: to learn as much as we can about the causes and treatments of particular diseases, to situate them in time and place so that we are in effect studying the social history of disease and medicine. Thus, we’ll find ourselves consistently discussing how ideas about the causes and treatments of diseases have changed over time and differed from culture to culture.

Prepare to cast your net wide geographically and to use tools from a variety of disciplines. You are encouraged to search for material pertaining to all regions of Africa, though the richness of historical studies of health in southern Africa has biased our assigned readings in that geographical direction. You will necessarily be using many different disciplines and sources to investigate the history of African health: for example, the primary documents at your disposal include medical journal articles, memoirs of medical practitioners, official commissions of enquiry, and anthropologists’ records.

Prepare, too, to approach health and disease pluralistically, that is, by looking at the ideas and practices of traditional healers and diviners, and not just of biomedical doctors. I hope that we will frequently be joined by professionals working medical fields.

The work for this course consists of active participation in our weekly seminar, leadership of one discussion, and a long (circa 20 page) research paper.

1. 20 January: Introduction

2. 27 January: A Comparative Perspective/The Big Picture: excerpts from William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (introduction, chapter 6); Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind* (chapters 1, 2, 15)

3. 3 February: Environmental health: James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land*


6. 24 February: Doctors and Nurses: excerpts from Shula Marks, *Divided Sisterhood* and Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills*

7. 2 March: Tuberculosis: Randall Packard, *White Plague, Black Labor*

8. 9 March: Malaria: Randall Packard, *The Making of a Tropical Disease, a short history of Malaria*

9. 23 March: Leprosy: Eric Silla, *People are Not the Same*

10. 30 March: Nutrition: Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach*

11. 6 April: Mental Illness: Jonathan Sadowsky, *Imperial Bedlam, institutions of madness in colonial southwest Nigeria*

12. 13 April: AIDS: John Iliffe, *The African AIDS Epidemic, a history*


13. 20 April: Paper presentations

14. 27 April: Summing Up