

*HIS 383W/483: Disease and Society from Antiquity to the Present*

Thursdays, 2:00-4:40 p.m., Rush Rhees 362  
Professor Laura A. Smoller  
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*Illustration: Tuberculosis hospital at Fort Stanton, NM*  
(<https://www.ruidosonews.com/story/news/local/community/2018/07/06/public-can-tour-tuberculosis-hospital-first-time-during-fort-stanton-live/764554002/>)

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Week 1. January 17. Introduction: Ways of thinking about disease and society.

*Research: Finding a topic; beginning research.*

Week 2. January 24. The perils of retrospective diagnosis and the Hippocratic understanding of disease.

Reading:

William Bynum, *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-18;

Hippocrates, *Epidemics*, 1.1-10;  
 Testimony of Oliverius Herbelt, Petrus Le Chanteur, Johanna du Clerigo, and Yvoan Dagaut, from “The Canonization Process for St. Vincent Ferrer,” translated by Laura A. Smoller, in Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 797-800;  
 Andrew Cunningham, “Identifying Disease in the Past: Cutting the Gordian Knot,” *Asclepio: Revista de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia* 54 (2002), 13-34.

*Research: Field trip to Miner Library, Rare Books and Serials (3:00-4:40 p.m.).*

Week 3. January 31. Cultural approaches/framing disease: AIDS and AIDS posters.

**N.B.: Class will meet in the Plutzik Room in Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation, Rush Rhees 225**

Reading:

Christian W. McMillen, *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*, pp. 1-6, 103-18;  
 Sander Gilman, “The Beautiful Body and AIDS,” in Sander Gilman, *Picturing Health and Illness: Images of Identity and Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 115-72;  
 Charles Rosenberg, “Framing Disease: Illness, Society, and History,” in Charles Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 305-18.

Optional: John Aberth, *Plagues in World History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), “AIDS,” pp. 135-78;  
 “Radiolab: Los Frikis” (podcast from March 24, 2015),  
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/los-frikis> (how a group of 80’s Cuban misfits found rock-and-roll and created a revolution within a revolution, going into exile without ever leaving home, by injecting themselves with HIV).

*Research: Resources in Rush Rhees, Rare Books and Special Collections*

Week 4. February 7. Disease as an agent of historical change: the Black Death.

Reading:

William McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976), pp. 1-13, 132-75;  
 McMillen, *Pandemics*, pp. 7-30.

Optional: Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, “Introduction,” pp. 1-17.

*Research:*

*Scholarly encyclopedia article; primary sources. Locate an article from a scholarly encyclopedia (or the equivalent) pertaining to your topic as well as a primary source to be used for your research, and make a brief (5 minute) presentation introducing your chosen source to the group. **Hand in a properly formatted bibliography entry for that article and for your primary***

*source, along with a brief explanation of how that source addresses some question related to the topic covered in the encyclopedia article.*

*Students should schedule an individual conference with the instructor some time before February 28.*

Week 5. February 14. Leprosy in the medieval world.

Reading:

Bynum, *History of Medicine*, pp. 19-42;

Susan Zimmerman, "Leprosy in the Medieval Imaginary," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38, no. 3 (2008): 559-87;

"Ritual of Separation of a Leper," from the Old Sarum Rite;

Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), pp. 13-29, 39-43, 302-14, 343.

Research:

*Diagrams. You will make a brief (5 minute) presentation in which you will diagram your research topic for the class.*

Week 6. February 21. New approaches to the Black Death.

Reading:

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, "Introduction," in Rosemary Horrox, ed., *The Black Death* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 26-34;

Sharon N. Dewitte and Maryanne Kowaleski, "Black Death Bodies," *Fragments: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Ancient and Medieval Pasts* 6 (2017): 1-37;

Will Hunt, "Letter from Leiden: Of Cesspits and Sewers: Exploring the Unlikely History of Sanitation Management in Medieval Holland," *Archaeology* 72, no. 1 (January/February 2019), <https://www.archaeology.org/issues/327-1901/letter-from/7205-letter-from-leiden>.

Optional: Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Plague," pp. 19-72.

Research:

*Diagrams, continued.*

Week 7. February 28. Understandings of cancer in early modern Europe.

Reading:

Alanna Skuse, *Constructions of Cancer in Early Modern England: Ravenous Natures* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ch. 2, "Cancer and the Gendered Body," pp. 40-60; ch. 5 "Wolves' Tongues and Mercury: Pharmaceutical Cures for Cancer," pp. 94-120;

Anonymous, *An Account of the Causes of Some Particular Rebellious Distempers Viz: the Scurvey, Cancers in Women's Breasts, &c. Vapours, . . . Together with the Vertues and Uses of a Select Number of Chymical Medicines Studiously Prepar'd for their Cure . . .* (London?: s.n.,

1670), section on “A Liniment for Sore, Swell'd or Cancerated Breasts in Women,” pp. 19-32 (Images of the original are available on EEBO: [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation:11968041](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:11968041), images 14-21).

Week 8. March 7. No class: Work on research project.

Reading:

Bynum, *History of Medicine*, pp. 43-67 (no written response necessary)

***Prospectus for the research paper due March 7 on Blackboard (see instructions).***

Week 9. March 14. Spring break.

Week 10. March 20. Cholera, contagion, and society (session with Professor Emeritus Ted Brown).

Reading:

Bynum, *History of Medicine*, pp. 68-90;

McMillen, *Pandemics*, pp. 60-72;

Reinhard S. Speck, “Cholera,” in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 642-49;

Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), Introduction, ch. 1, and ch. 4, pp. 1-39, 65-81;

Amanda Erickson, “1 Million People Have Contracted Cholera in Yemen. You Should Be Outraged,” *The Washington Post*, December 22, 2017.

Optional: Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, “Cholera,” pp. 101-10.

*Research:*

*Close readings. You will make a brief (5 minute) presentation offering a close reading of a key passage or passages from a primary source. Make copies of the passage for the class or get an original to me on Monday by noon.*

Week 11. March 28. Changing attitudes towards consumption.

Reading:

Bynum, *History of Medicine*, pp. 91-117;

McMillen, *Pandemics*, pp. 73-88;

Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York, 1977, 1978), pp. 3-42;

Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), “Playing the Lone Game of Illness,” pp. 135-55; 219-26;

Betty MacDonald, *The Plague and I* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1948), pp. 37-59.

Optional: Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Tuberculosis," pp. 89-100;  
Ann Shaw and Carole Reeves, *The Children of Craig-y-nos: Life in a Welsh Tuberculosis Sanatorium, 1922-1959* (London: Wellcome Trust, 2009), pp. 10-35.

*Research:*

*Historiography. Make a brief (5 minute) presentation in which you outline the historiography on your topic and demonstrate the ways in which your research contributes to or overturns some existing interpretation. (This is the "hook" that will draw readers into your paper. Look at a couple of good articles as model compositions to see how other historians have hooked their readers, and look over the handout How to Get a Handle on Historiography.)*

***Historiography paper due, via Blackboard, on Monday, April 1 by 5 p.m.***

Week 12. April 4. Influenza.

*Reading:*

McMillen, *Pandemics*, pp. 89-102;

Nancy K. Bristow, *American Pandemic: The Lost Worlds of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 40-81, 191-98;

Newspaper articles from Rochester, NY, from 1918.

Optional: Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Influenza," pp. 111-34.

*Research:*

*Thesis and evidence. You will make a brief (no more than 5 minute) presentation outlining the argument you will make in your paper and showing some of the ways in which you will prove your thesis. This is a trial run for the paper draft, so don't make a presentation "in search of a thesis," i.e., laying out all the neat things you found without making a clear argument. Think about logical structures and ways of presenting evidence. Notice that you will need to have a working outline of the paper and a good sense of the thesis for which you wish to argue in order to make a successful presentation.*

Week 13. April 11. No class.

*Research:*

*Work on draft of paper.*

***Drafts to be submitted to Blackboard by Sunday, April 14, at 5 p.m.***

Week 14. April 18. Workshop on drafts.

***Schedule an appointment with the instructor this week or next week to discuss your draft.***

Week 15. April 25. Final presentations.

***Undergraduate final papers due by 5 p.m. on May 9, via Blackboard; as per department policy, graduate student papers are due on May 5, by noon, also via Blackboard.***

**Books to purchase:**

William Bynum, *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). ISBN: 978-0-19-921543-0.

Christian W. McMillen, *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). ISBN: 978-0-19-934007-1

Optional: John Aberth, *Plagues in World History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), ISBN: 978-0742557062

**Course requirements:**

- Attendance at all weekly discussions.
- Completion of all reading assignments. *All readings except for the Aberth, Bynum, and McMillen books are available on Blackboard.*
- A 300-600 word (1 to 2-page, double-spaced) reading response, to be handed in on the day each reading assignment is discussed. (Graduate student responses should run 3-4 pages, around 600-1200 words.) I will grade these responses on a 10-point scale. I am looking for: 1) a brief summary of all the assigned reading(s) (0-7 points); 2) some critique of the reading, comparison with another reading or a current situation, and/or some question for discussion that arises from the reading (e.g., “I think McNeill overstates the case for disease’s role in history because . . .” or “The experiences of leprosy and plague seem very similar in that . . .,” or “Do you think leprosia would work for Ebola patients?”) (1-2 points); and 3) brief quotations and specific examples from the readings to back up your points (1 point). The response should demonstrate that you have done all the reading (so if there are multiple texts to be discussed, be sure to mention all of them), that you have thought about the reading (so you will want to raise some questions or ideas for discussion), and that you can use evidence from the readings to back up a point (so you will want to offer brief quotations in support of arguments that you advance). One paper is due per week of discussion, even when there are multiple readings; the point is to put the readings into dialogue, not to write a separate response to each reading. **Late papers will be penalized one point (out of ten) for every calendar day late. I do not accept emailed papers except by prior arrangement and only in the most exigent of circumstances.**
- A paper (4-6 pages for undergraduates, 5-7 pages for graduate students) discussing the historiography on your chosen topic.
- Students will also research a topic in the history of disease (ranging from antiquity to 2000) chosen in consultation with the instructor, culminating in a paper that asks a

significant historical question, situates it within a body of scholarship, answers it with a clear thesis and a logical argument, supports it with both primary and secondary sources documented according to the standards of the Chicago Manual of Style, and articulates its points in clear and artful prose with the grammar and spelling associated with formal composition. Undergraduate papers should be at least 20 pages in length; graduate student papers should be of publishable length (25-40 pages) and quality. Papers should be submitted in Times, Times New Roman, or Garamond font, 12 point, double-spaced, with standard margins. You may use footnotes or endnotes, but whichever you choose you MUST follow University of Chicago style (Turabian/humanities style) for text and references.

- We will have weekly progress reports on the research projects. You may work on any topic you choose within the chronological limits, provided it somehow deals with the relationship between disease and society. In addition to the resources at Miner Library's and Rush Rhees's Rare Books and Special Collections rooms, there are fine collections of primary sources relating to the history of disease available online through Harvard University Libraries (<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/>), the National Library of Medicine (<https://collections2.nlm.nih.gov> and <https://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/index.html>), the Medical Heritage Library (<http://archive.org/details/medicalheritagelibrary>), the Wellcome Library (<https://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/digital-collections/>) and the University of Michigan (<http://www.influenzaarchive.org/>), to name a few.
- This is a discussion-based seminar course. Your attendance and participation in discussions is a crucial aspect of the course. Three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by 5%. Five unexcused absences will result in a failing grade for the course. (Three tardies constitutes one absence.)

*N.B.: The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 383W are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, working alone or in groups, and to researching in depth their topics for the final seminar paper.*

### **Grading:**

- Reading responses----15%
- Participation in discussions----10%
- Research prospectus----10%
- Meeting intermediate deadlines as listed on syllabus----10%
- Historiography paper----15%
- Final research paper----40%

### Grading scale:

<u>A</u>	<u>100-93%</u>
<u>A-</u>	<u>92.9-90%</u>
<u>B+</u>	<u>89.9-87%</u>
<u>B</u>	<u>86.9-83%</u>
<u>B-</u>	<u>82.9-80%</u>
<u>C+</u>	<u>79.9-77%</u>

<u>C</u>	76.9-73%
<u>C-</u>	72.9-70%
<u>D+</u>	69.9-67%
<u>D</u>	66.9-63%
<u>D-</u>	62.9-60%
<u>F</u>	Below 60%

In case of some mix-up, it is a good idea to save all returned work until you receive your grade at the end of the semester.

**Learning objectives:** At the end of this course, students will be able to

- Read and understand primary sources as products of specific historical contexts
- Discuss ways in which disease can be said to have affected historical events
- Discuss ideas about disease and its treatment as products of specific historical and cultural contexts
- Identify the thesis and analyze the argument of secondary sources relating to the history of disease
- Present historical analysis and arguments in a clear written form, demonstrating the ability to construct an argument by marshaling evidence in an appropriate and logical fashion.
- Write a research paper that asks a significant historical question, situates it within a body of relevant scholarship, answers it with a clear thesis and a logical argument, supports it with both primary and secondary sources documented according to the standards of the Chicago Manual of Style, and articulates its points in clear and artful prose with the grammar and spelling associated with formal composition.

**A note regarding the use of computers in the classroom:** While I do not (yet) ban laptops and tablets from the classroom, there is a significant body of research that shows that people retain material more effectively when they take notes by hand rather than on a computer. (See, e.g., <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>.) Needless to say, the opportunities for distraction are much greater if the Internet and the world of social media beckon. Similarly, while there are numerous readings posted on Blackboard for the class, researchers have demonstrated that reading a physical, hard copy of a text results in more focused and critical reading. (E.g., <https://newrepublic.com/article/135326/digital-reading-no-substitute-print>.) Ideally, you will print out readings that have been posted on Blackboard to read them. At the very least, you should plan to bring *some* version of the text to class (hard copy or digital).

**Students with disabilities:** The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL, 1-154 Dewey Hall, 585-275-9049) offers a variety of disability services for undergraduates and graduate students in Arts, Sciences & Engineering. These services aim to provide an inclusive experience and equal access to academic content and program requirements. They can help you to request accommodations for your success in this class. You can learn more at: [www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/disability](http://www.rochester.edu/college/cetl/undergraduate/disability). If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me as well.



**Classroom etiquette:** Please turn off cell phones or set them to a silent alert. In the rare event you must enter late or leave class early, please let me know in advance.

**Academic honesty:** All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "Defining Plagiarism," <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>.

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**Disclaimer:** The instructor reserves the right to change topics and assignments on the syllabus at any point in the semester.