

The University of Texas at El Paso  
Syllabus  
Plagues, Pandemics, & Power  
WS 3373/17161  
Fall, 2017

Professor: Dr. Maissa Khatib  
Office: Liberal Arts 117  
Class Time & Place: Online

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Office Hours: Tuesdays &  
Thursdays 1:00-2:30 & by appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course we will examine the social, cultural and demographic impact of several major pandemic diseases and outbreaks including Plague, Cholera, Flu, Polio, Toxic Shock syndrome and HIV/AIDS. Our work will begin with a look at the Black Death. We will learn how an epidemic that occurred on another continent over 600 years still impacts our society socially and culturally. Our examination of the Black Death will also serve as a starting point for mastering the fundamentals of social epidemiology.

From there we will turn our attention to Cholera which will allow us to explore how epidemiologists trace the causes of disease and how social inequalities shape epidemics and their outcomes. Our exploration of avian and swine flus will give us further insight into the biology of viruses as well as the patterns of xenophobia that often accompany flu pandemics. We will look at the mid-twentieth century campaign to eradicate polio in the United States and the elements of social control and propaganda that were essential to its success.

A brief examination of Toxic Shock Syndrome will allow us to discover how sexism and sexist notions of the female body fueled this public health problem. Our work will end with an exploration of the "plague" of our time: HIV/AIDS.

We will examine how intersections of poverty, gender, sexual orientation, race and global inequalities contribute to the persistence of this pandemic. Our exploration of each disease will center on five areas: 1) biological factors, 2) social epidemiology, 3) the role of social power in shaping societal responses to the disease, 4) the construction of social meanings attached to the disease, and 5) the role of social power in shaping public health/public policy responses.

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

- Saracci, Rodolpho. 2010 *Epidemiology: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0199543335.
- Slack, Paul. 2012. *Plague: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0199589548.
- Sontag, Susan. 2001. *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador. ISBN-13: 978-0312420130ISP.
- Other readings and media are posted on Blackboard and are noted on this syllabus.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand how an individual experience of a disease can reflect larger societal experience of epidemics and pandemics;
2. Learn how to work with primary sources as a means of enriching our understanding of historical and current epidemics/pandemics;
3. Understand the basic biology and modes of transmission for each of the diseases we will be studying;
4. Master fundamental social epidemiological measures of incidence, prevalence, morbidity and mortality and understand how these are used in tracking epidemic disease;
5. Understand how race, class, gender and nationality impact epidemic diseases and their outcomes;
6. Learn about the public health measures used in epidemic disease control and the use of social power in their enforcement;
7. Analyze how the social meanings we attach to an epidemic disease can shape the production of knowledge about the disease itself, including scientific knowledge;
8. Examine public policy responses to epidemic disease and the role that social power plays in shaping them;
9. Develop cooperative learning and team learning skills through course discussion forums.

## CLASS FORMAT

This course is NOT self-paced. Instead, this course is based on weekly modules that open each Sunday morning at 12:00 am and close the following Saturday at midnight (Mountain Standard Time). If students fail to submit any required work before the module closes, they will receive a grade of zero (0) for that assignment. There are no exceptions. Because this is an online course, it is common to get behind and, if you do, it may be difficult if not impossible to catch back up. Again, once the modules close, there is no way to go back and submit work you failed to complete.

Students will be able to communicate with me to ask questions, share concerns, raise ideas, via email or phone, or face-to-face during my office hours and by appointment. I am also available for SKYPE meetings. I will check my email twice daily, Monday through Friday. Please use webmail email for all communication ([mkhatib@utep.edu](mailto:mkhatib@utep.edu)). **In the subject line of all emails please include the course title and your first and last name.** I will respond within 24 hours to emails sent from Monday morning through Friday afternoon. During university holidays and weekends, I am not available via email. Email is the best way to reach me!

## ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS

My assessment of your work in this course is based on three different areas:

- 1) **Discussion Forum** (3 points for each week's entries for a total of 45 points: 1 point for initial post and 2 points for responses to two peers' initial posts.

**You are expected to participate in the weekly discussion boards as follows:**

- a. You must have one initial post of 150-200 words that makes an original statement and follows all discussion prompt guidelines for that module.
- b. In addition, you must respond to at least two different classmates' initial Postings.
- c. Your initial post must be posted before Friday midnight (Mountain Standard Time)
- d. Your follow up posts to peers (75-100 words each) are due each Sunday by midnight (Mountain Standard Time).

Late initial posts and/or follow up posts will not be accepted & will not receive credit.

I will generally grade weekly discussion forums starting Monday mornings of the following week.

2) **Epidemiology Homework Sets** (Two Homework Sets for a total of 10 points altogether). During the semester you will complete two separate homework sets that will allow you to practice using basic epidemiological concepts including incidence, prevalence, morbidity rates, mortality rates and other measures. While this work will require some careful thinking and basic arithmetic, it will also empower you with quantitative tools for understanding and interpreting epidemic disease patterns.

3) **Journals** (Three journals for a total of 15 points). You will be given a prompt or a set of questions for each journal. You need to submit a 250 words, double spaced, 1-inch margins and is typed in 12 point Arial font. Journal will be due on selected Wednesdays.

4) **Exam I and Exam II** (15 points each, for a total of 30 points). There will be two timed, open book, open note exams for this course. Each exam will consist of multiple choice, fill in the blank and matching items.

### Grading Criteria

I will provide a specific and detailed description or a grading rubric for each assignment. Here are my broader criteria for grades. To pass this course you must earn a total of at least 60 points.

- "A" work: demonstrates complete mastery of the concepts and a synthesis and application of these that is innovative, unique and creates a new way of looking at the subject. It is creative and innovative yet follows the guidelines of the assignment. It includes clear, effective writing with no grammatical errors, misspelling or typos. It also includes correct incorporation of bibliography and citations.
- "B" work: demonstrates a solid understanding of the concepts with a synthesis and application of these that is good but not especially innovative. It follows the basic guidelines of the assignment. Writing is generally functional, but occasional glitches in grammar, spelling and typos may appear. It includes incorporation of a bibliography and citations that may not be consistent but is generally in the correct format.
- "C" work: demonstrates a working understanding of the concepts and some attempts at synthesis that do not go into enough detail or demonstrate flaws in

reasoning. One or two parts of the assignment may not be done correctly. Writing demonstrates some problems with grammar and organization and misspellings and typos are common. Bibliography and citations may or may not be included and are not in proper format.

- "D" work: demonstrates a very basic understanding of the concepts with no attempt at synthesis or application. There is a fair attempt at following the directions of the assignment, though they are not followed well. The assignment demonstrates significant problems with grammar, misspellings and organization, though an attempt was made to write carefully. Bibliography and citations are not included.

- "F" work: It is deficient and shows little or no knowledge of the concepts, disregard of directions, disorganized writing with grammatical and spelling problems and no evidence of proofreading, care or attention.

#### Grading Scale for Course as a Whole:

A = 90-100 points      B = 80-89 points      C = 70-79 points  
D = 60-69 points      F = 0-59 points

#### **Late Work**

I do not accept late work. Please remember that all deadlines are based on Mountain Time, always and without exception.

Exception to the above-stated policy is only made under these circumstances: (1) a medical emergency requiring hospitalization, (2) jury duty or (3) official UTEP business such as athletics, debating team, or band. Documented proof of official UTEP business or jury duty must be provided ten calendar days before the fact; documented proof of hospitalization must be provided one day after discharge. **Your instructor can drop you for lack of effort. Your instructor can drop you with a "W" only before the dropping deadline.**

## TENTATIVE COURSE CALENDAR

#	ITEM	DUE DATE	TOTAL POINTS	TOTAL %
1	Discussion Forum Posts	Weekly (initial post by Thursday midnight; response to two different peers' initial posts by Saturday midnight)	3 points each* 15 weeks	45 %
2	Epidemiology Homework Set One	September 30	5 points	5 %
2	Epidemiology Homework Set Two	October 28	5 points	5 %
3	Journals	Journal one: September 16 Journal two: October 14 Journal three: November 4	3 points each	15 %
4	Exam I	October 21	15 points	15 %
4	Exam II	December 2	15 points	15 %
	Total			100 %

### My Commitments to You as a Professor

#### **I am committed to each of the following:**

- I will respond promptly to email as outlined at the beginning of this syllabus;
- I will give you clear, written guidelines and expectations for each assignment well in advance of its due date;
- I will give you prompt feedback on all graded work;
- I will make available to you feedback on your current grade on request;
- I will work to ensure a safe e-learning environment for all students;
- If I have to make changes to the syllabus or assignments, I will communicate these to you as soon as possible.
- I will work to make learning in this course both fun and challenging by making frequent use of real life examples to simplify and clarify abstract concepts. before emailing or texting me with a question.

**Note:** If you have a question about technical problems (i.e., your computer, problems submitting an assignment, browser issues, internet connection issues) please contact Tech Support or the UTEP Help Desk as outlined on the first page of this syllabus. Please note that I am neither qualified nor able to help you with these issues. For all other questions, please contact me and I will respond within 24 hours on weekdays. For emails sent on the weekends or

holidays, I will respond first thing on Monday or the next business day.

## CLASS AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Academic Dishonesty Statement:

(From the Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Affairs)

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person's as ones' own. And, collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions.

- Notice of Safe Assign: This course will utilize third party software that has the ability to automatically detect plagiarism on documents submitted for grading.
- Copyright Notice: Many of the materials that are posted within this course are protected by copyright law. These materials are only for the use of students enrolled in this course and only for the purpose of this course. They may not be further retained or disseminated.

## Students with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access and opportunity. In support of this endeavor, **Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at UTEP** provides needed accommodation to those who believe or suspect a disability and need assistance in their pursuit of higher education including the opportunity to participate and benefit from all University sponsored programs, social activities and events. CASS ensures that reasonable accommodations and services are afforded to students with disabilities such that they have equal opportunities to achieve their academic and professional goals. CASS staff serves as liaisons between students and faculty, administrators, and outside agencies.

CASS at UTEP

Phone:(915) 747-5148

Union Building East Room 106

[cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu)

## TECHNOLOGY ISSUES:

I **will not** provide any technical assistance. Rather, you should familiarize yourself with the assistance available to you whenever you have problems. You should also ensure that you have the appropriate hardware and software.

- Technical Assistance: Please see the "Tech Support" link in the left side menu of Blackboard.
- Hardware Requirements: Please see the "Getting Started" link in the left side menu of Blackboard.
- Software Requirements: Please see the "Getting Started" link in the left side menu of Blackboard. For UTEP Technical Support:

Phone: 915-747-5257

Email: [Helpdesk@Utep.Edu](mailto:Helpdesk@Utep.Edu)

Distance Learners: 1-866-747-5256

Location: Library Room 300

## IMPORANT DATES:

August 28.....Classes Begin  
August 28-31.....Late registration  
September 4.....Labor Day-no classes  
September 13.....Census Day  
November 3.....Drop/Withdrawal deadline  
November 23-24.....Thanksgiving Holiday – no classes  
December 8.....Dead Day  
December 11-15.....Final Exams