In this course we will explore the meaning of epidemics over a long cultural history. The readings include representations of plagues of many kinds: mysterious ancient disasters, the Black Death, AIDS, and hypothetical diseases that operate as thought experiments. We will also analyze current issues around the spread and prevention of disease through the lens of cultural study. In discussion and writing we will consider four broad questions: How do disease and its control shape social and state structures? How have the meanings of disease, health, medicine, and the body changed over time? How does disease mediate the relationship between society, the individual, and the family? What kind of art does disease give rise to?

In this course students will:

- Gain a broad understanding of the history of disease and its representations
- Discuss the relationship between disease control and state authority
- Explore the social and cultural structures that are revealed and altered by epidemics
- Analyze the course topic with regard to various forms of media
- Place current concerns and beliefs in historical and cultural context
- Clearly communicate arguments, evidence, and conclusions in oral and written formats
- Practice academic writing and revision

This course is part of the UNH Discovery Program. It fulfills Humanities, Writing Intensive, and Inquiry requirements. As a Humanities course, it focuses on questions about meaning, aesthetics, and the foundations of knowledge, and is as concerned with form as with content. As a Writing Intensive course, it requires both high- and low-stakes writing, and offers practice in the planning and revision of academic prose. As an Inquiry course, it emphasizes the formation and investigation of complex, open-ended questions. In discussion and written assignments, students will be asked to find and follow their own questions, to inspire them to become curious about and take varied perspectives on the past and present world. They will also learn to clarify their standards of thinking, in order to evaluate varied accounts of the course topics; and to become effective communicators who can organize and persuasively present their ideas. By applying close reading skills to both literature and medical history, we will explore how these two usually separate disciplines can illuminate one another.

Required Texts:
Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Oxford)
Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Knopf)
José Saramago, *Blindness* (Harcourt)
Tony Kushner, *Angels in America* (Theatre Communication Group)
Readings and other media available via Blackboard or online
Assignments and Grading

Participation: 25%
This is a discussion-based class, which requires all students to attend and participate consistently; to be prepared for class; and to conduct themselves courteously. Absences, failure to contribute in an informed and useful way to the discussion, and discourteous conduct (e.g. participation in personal conversations, virtual or verbal) affect the class as a whole and will be reflected in the Participation grade. Attendance will be taken daily.

Homework, quizzes, in-class writing: 25%
This grade reflects the time and care you take completing reading and writing assignments. There will be occasional short quizzes, which give you the opportunity to show that you have completed and understood the reading. Throughout the semester you will write short (250-word) responses to the reading that will be handed in at the beginning of class, and will sometimes be asked to write during class.

Short Papers: 30% (10% each)
You will write 3 short (2–4 pp), polished essays during the semester. Assignment details are given at the end of this syllabus. One of these essays will be workshopped in class and returned to you for revision. The (presumably higher) revision grade will replace your lowest essay grade. In addition to this formal revision, it is expected that all essays are polished and revised by you before handing them in. If you wish to revise any essay (except the final essay) after it is graded, you may do so after a conference with the instructor.

Final Essay: 20%
The semester will conclude with a final research paper of 7–10 pp. You will select a topic in consultation with the instructor. Parts of the paper will be workshopped in class.

Assignment Details

Plague Film Club
This multipart assignment asks you to analyze a filmic representation of epidemic. In class, you will sign up for a film. Choices include:
- *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957)
- *The Andromeda Strain* (Robert Wise, 1971)
- *Outbreak* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1995)
- *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002)
- *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuaron, 2006)
- *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007)
- *How to Survive a Plague* (David France, 2012)
- *World War Z* (Marc Forster, 2013)
- *Dallas Buyers Club* (Jean-Marc Valee, 2013)–if available

Your group is responsible for acquiring the film and meeting to watch it together. You must also schedule a time for discussion with your group, either directly after watching the film or at another time. At that discussion, your group should generate a report on the film, your collective experience of watching it, and the
questions and observations generated by the experience. Everyone in the group will receive the same grade for this report (2–3 pp, due 2/13).

Individually, you will each write a review of the film’s treatment of epidemic. This review should include a short summary of the plot, but it should focus on what the film is saying about disease. How does it use visual, auditory, and narrative elements to convey the nature of epidemic? What claims does it seem to be making about disease? How does it answer our course questions? (2–3 pp., due 2/27)

**Plague of Metaphors Paper**
What’s an epidemic? Choose a phenomenon that is frequently referred to as an “epidemic” but that is not a contagious disease, e.g. the obesity epidemic, the teen pregnancy epidemic, the drug abuse epidemic. Provide some examples of how concepts of disease are applied to the phenomenon. Discuss how conceptualizing the phenomenon as an epidemic is helpful or unhelpful to advancing understanding and awareness of it. This paper will be workshopped in class and revised (3–4 pp, due 4/1; revision due 4/22).

**Final Research Paper**
Choose a controversial issue that relates to the issues we have discussed in this class. First, generate a research proposal. Explain what the conflict is and why it is important. Outline a plan for learning more about it, naming the sources (or kinds of sources) you will consult (2 pp, due 4/24).

Write the first page of your paper. This should include: A short summary of the issue and the conflicts around it; your own claim about the topic; and an outline of the evidence you will use to support your claim. This page will be workshopped in class (due 4/29).

Beginning with your revised first page, write a paper that makes a contestable, supported claim about the controversy. Cite all sources in MLA format (7–10 pp, due during final exam period).

**Policies**

**Late work:**
Homework is due at the beginning of class unless otherwise specified. Missed homework, quizzes, and in-class writing cannot be made up, unless an exception is granted by the instructor. Essays will be marked down by 1/3 letter grade for each day they are late.

**Academic Honesty:**
Work that you submit for a grade must be yours alone, and must be written expressly for the given assignment. Writing that takes text and/or ideas from other sources (including your own previous work) without appropriate attribution constitutes plagiarism and is in violation of the Academic Honesty policy and subject to disciplinary action. You are responsible for understanding the University’s definition of plagiarism and adhering to its standards for originality. For more detail please consult [http://www.unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/academic-honesty](http://www.unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/academic-honesty) and the tutorial at [http://www.unh.edu/liberal-arts/plagiarism/plagiarismHome.cfm](http://www.unh.edu/liberal-arts/plagiarism/plagiarismHome.cfm).

**Access:**
The University is committed to providing students with documented disabilities equal access to all university programs and facilities. If you think you have a disability requiring accommodations, you must register with Disability Services for Students (DSS). Contact DSS at (603) 862-2607 or disability.office@unh.edu. If you have received Accommodation Letters for this course from DSS, please provide me with that information privately in my office so that we can review those accommodations.
Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week 1
1/21 Introduction
   In class: Exodus
   Medieval iconography

1/23 Bocaccio, “The Author’s Introduction,” *The Decameron* (BB)
Edgar Allen Poe, “Masque of the Red Death” (BB)

Week 2
1/28 Stephen King, *The Stand* (excerpt); Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (excerpt) (BB)

1/30 Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*

Week 3
2/4 Michel Foucault, excerpt from *Discipline and Punish* (BB)

2/6 Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*

Week 4
2/11 Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*

2/13 Albert Camus, *The Plague*
FILM CLUB REPORTS DUE

Week 5
2/18 Camus, *The Plague*

2/20 Camus, *The Plague*

Week 6
2/25 Camus, *The Plague*

2/27 FILM PAPER DUE
   In class: scenes from plague films

Week 7
3/4 Malcolm Gladwell, excerpt from *The Tipping Point* (BB)

3/6 John Edgar Wideman, “Fever” (BB)

3/10–3/14: Spring Break
3/18 Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*  
3/20 Kushner, *Angels in America*  
3/25 Kushner, *Angels in America*  
3/27 Kushner, *Angels in America*  

Week 9

4/1 PLAGUE OF METAPHORS PAPER DUE  
Radiolab, “Blood”  
4/3 Jose Saramago, *Blindness*  
4/8 Saramago, *Blindness*  
4/10 In-class writing workshop  
4/15 Saramago, *Blindness*  
4/17 Saramago, *Blindness*  

Week 10

Week 11

Week 12

Week 13

4/22 PLAGUE OF METAPHORS REVISION DUE  
Film: *Contagion*  
4/24 RESEARCH PROPOSALS DUE  
Film: *Contagion*  

Week 14

4/29 FIRST PAGE DUE  
In-class writing workshop  
5/1 Presentations