This course examines the problem of disease in the history of medicine and society focusing on the 20th and 21st centuries, but also drawing examples from earlier periods. Through a case study approach, students will learn about people’s changing experiences of disease, transformations in biomedical understanding of disease, as well as shifts in clinical and public health practice over time. The historical case studies examine infectious diseases (from polio to AIDS) as well as non-infectious maladies (like cancer, diabetes, organ failure, and sickle cell anemia). Readings and discussions focus on the political and cultural dimensions of disease control efforts. We will examine how medical and public health professionals, private philanthropy, government funding, disease foundations, and patient advocacy have combated disease and promoted health. We will also analyze the ways that class, race, gender, and sexuality have impacted these efforts. The geographical focus of the course will be on the United States with some comparison to other countries.

Disease and society – through the intermediation of healthy and sick individuals – are intimately interrelated.

This course examines this proposition in detail, pursuing the following questions:

*Is individual health affected by society and culture?*

If so: **How does the outside get in?** How do social or cultural factors impact health? What are the mechanisms?

*Are societies and cultures influenced by the health or disease burden of individuals?*

If so: **How does the inside get out?** By what means are social structures altered when individuals have diseases? How are cultural values or tropes altered?

*Why do these processes matter?* Economically, politically, ethically, morally?

*How can we study these questions?* Using methods of history, epidemiology, sociology, economics, political science, cultural studies?
OUR COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Enhance your understanding of key concepts: Disease, illness, health, society, culture, association, cause, meaning, incidence, prevalence

2. Challenge your assumptions about these key concepts: Are diseases stable ‘facts’? Which is more important regarding disease: germs or poverty? What is medicine’s role regarding disease, illness, & health? Is technology a sign of progress? What is the proper balance of protecting public health & civil liberties?

3. Improve your argument, analysis, and writing skills. Thesis, claims, warrants, & evidence as used in arguments. The science and art of rigorous pertinent comparisons. Clarity, cohesion, emphasis, coherence, & concision in writing

Course Materials: The required reading for this course includes three books and shorter readings which will be posted to BlackBoard or distributed in class.

- Anne Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and The Collision of Two Cultures (Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1997)

Optional

Jeremy Greene, Prescribing by the Numbers: Drugs and the Definition of Disease, (Johns Hopkins, 2007)


Assignments and Grading

All students will be evaluated on their written and oral communication over the course of the semester. Please be mindful that it is a primary goal of this course to promote critical thinking about medicine and society, both past and present.

Participation. The class participation grade will reflect the student’s in-class performance in both their oral and written comments. The student should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading. The success of the seminar format actually depends on this. Attendance is also mandatory. Active participation in class will improve course grade. Moreover, students who choose not to participate in class risk being penalized. 20% of the final grade is devoted to participation. You may be penalized for absenteeism, tardiness, and/or early exits from the classroom. If you miss class due to illness, military service, or another unavoidable reason, please contact me as soon as possible to arrange to make up the work.
The student will write three papers in this course.

**First Essay.** The first written assignment of the semester will involve finding a primary document about a disease problem in the first half of the twentieth-century and writing a 3-4 page essay about it. The essay will place the document in historical context and discuss its significance. The essay will be due the 4th week of class. Guidelines for this writing assignment will be distributed at least a week in advance of the due date. The essay counts for 15% of the final grade.

**Second Essay.** The second written assignment in the course will discuss one of the books assigned in the course. The essays will be 5-7 pages long, and will reflect on a central theme or issue raised in one of these books. Guidelines for each essay will be distributed at least a week in advance of the due date. [Each student need only write on one of these books.] This essay counts for 25% of the final grade.

**Final Essay.** The final essay in this course will treat the history of a disease or a historical episode shaped by disease in 10-15 pages. Each student will determine their topic in consultation with the professor, and work on the paper over the course of the last month of the semester (April). The essay will be due the last day of class. Guidelines for this assignment will be distributed at the end of March. This essay counts for 40% of the final grade.

**Academic integrity:** I expect every student in this course to abide by the University Code of Academic Integrity. While it is appropriate for you to discuss assignments with each other, all work submitted by you must be your own work, done for this course (and not for previous or other courses) unless you have my permission to modify or extend other work. There are no collaborative projects in this course. If in your papers and presentations you quote from published materials or materials created by someone else, you must cite it appropriately and thoroughly. (If you have any questions about attribution, quoting, and citing, please speak to me.) If any of your work violates the Code of Academic Integrity, it will be referred for further action through the University’s policies and procedures.

**January 25th:** Introduction

**February 1: Haiti: Disaster, Health & History**


**February 8: Tuberculosis: Poverty, Neglect & Drug Resistance**


For further reading:


**February 15: Black Plague**

**In Class Showing of Excerpts from, The Plague (2005); Restoration**

Excerpts from:


**February 22 Malaria**

**In Class Showing of Excerpts from, Malaria: Fever Wars**

Excerpts from:


**March 1: Cholera and Urban Epidemics**


**March 8: AIDS**

**In Class Showing of Excerpts from, And the Band Played On; Age of AIDS**


**March 15: From Infectious Diseases to Chronic Diseases**


Optional:

Jeremy Greene, *Prescribing by the Numbers: Drugs and the Definition of Disease*, (Johns Hopkins, 2007)

**March 22: Chronic Diseases; Sickle Cell and Diabetes**


March 29: NO CLASS SPRING BREAK

April 5: Breast Cancer, Heart Disease & Technologies of Diagnosis


April 12: Mental Illness

In class showing of excerpts from: The Three Faces of Eve; Girl Interrupted

Joel Braslow, Mental Illness and Bodily Cures, Psychiatric Treatment in the First Half of the Twentieth Century, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; excerpts.


Additional Resources:


April 19: Epilepsy: Medicines, Culture & Control

Anne Fadiman, The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and The Collision of Two Cultures (Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1997), Preface (pp. ix-xi), and Chs. 1 – 9 (pp. 1-118)

Note on Hmong Orthography, Pronunciation, and Quotations (pp. 291-2),
April 26: Alzheimer’s Disease: Guest Lecturer, Stephen Post, PhD

Excerpts from:


May 3: Disease Causality, Diagnosis and Experience


Additional Readings:


