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 (available at Durham Book Exchange)
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: 15%
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: 15%
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 complete short writing assignments to be handed in in class. You will also sometimes be asked to write during class.

Blogging: 15%
During the semester you must contribute a minimum of 5 posts and 10 comments to our class blog. You can post thoughts about the readings and discussions, or relevant items that you come across in news, life, or culture. Each post should include at least 150 words of your own writing (i.e. a link unaccompanied by comment does not count as a post). Comments can vary in length but should take the form of at least one sentence.

Short Papers: 30% (10% each); see below for detailed assignments
You will write 3 short (2–4 pp), polished essays during the semester. Each of these papers must be thoroughly proofread and revised when you hand it in, preferably with the help of the Connors Writing Center or the Online Writing Lab. One of the papers must also be revised and resubmitted after you receive grades and comments. The new grade will replace your lowest essay grade.

Paper 1: Plague Film Club
This assignment asks you to analyze a filmic representation of epidemic. In class, you will sign up for a film from a short list of choices. 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. Submit via email. (2–3 pp, due 9/18)

Paper 2: Article Annotation
Each student will be assigned a longform article related to the course topic. Your assignment is to read the article and come to class with an annotation. This must include: a description of the article’s topic; a summary of its argument and main points; an evaluation of its effectiveness; and an analysis of the ideas it suggests and the questions it raises. In class, you may share your precis with other students, and will be responsible for giving a verbal version of it. Bring hard copy to class. (2 pp, due 10/2)
Paper 3: 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. Submit via email. (3–4 pp, due 10/14)

Research Presentation and Report: 15%
You will conduct independent research on a relevant topic of your choice, and present it to the class using digital presentation tools. A 2-page written report will be handed in with your presentation. Some steps of the research project will be completed as homework assignments. These will be graded as homework (see above); only the final presentation and written summary will count toward this grading category (12/2 and 12/4).

Portfolio and Reflection: 10%
At the end of the semester, you will submit an electronic portfolio that collects your work from the semester, as well as a short reflection (2 pp., due 12/9) about your achievements in the course: what have you learned? What have you gotten better at? Where do you see a need for improvement? Include the drafts of your revised paper in the portfolio and address the revision process in the reflection.

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 and the tutorial at 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

9/2 Introduction

9/4 Bocaccio, “The Author’s Introduction,” The Decameron (BB)

Exodus (BB)

Week 2

9/9 Stephen King, The Stand (excerpt); Edgar Allen Poe, “Masque of the Red Death” (BB)

9/11 Albert Camus, The Plague, Part I

Week 3

9/16 Camus, The Plague, Part II

9/18 Camus, The Plague, Part III

FILM CLUB PAPER DUE

Week 4

9/23 Camus, The Plague, Part IV

9/25 Camus, The Plague, Part V

Week 5

9/30 Michel Foucault, excerpt from Discipline and Punish (BB)

10/2 ARTICLE PRECIS DUE

Week 6

10/7 Malcolm Gladwell, excerpt from The Tipping Point (BB)

10/9 John Edgar Wideman, “Fever” (BB)

Week 7

10/14 PLAGUE OF METAPHORS PAPER DUE

10/16 Tony Kushner, Angels in America, Act I

Week 8

10/21 Kushner, Angels in America: Millennium Approaches, Acts II-III

10/23 Kushner, Angels in America: Perestroika, Acts I-III
Week 9

10/30 Radiolab, “Blood”

Week 10
11/4 RESEARCH TOPIC IDEAS DUE

Week 11
11/6 Jose Saramago, *Blindness*, pp. 1-76

11/11 NO CLASS: VETERANS DAY

Week 12
11/13 Saramago, *Blindness*, pp. 77-159


RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

11/20 Saramago, *Blindness*, pp. 240-326

Week 13
11/25 RESEARCH THESIS AND OUTLINE DUE

Week 14
11/27 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

Week 15
12/2 Research presentations

12/4 Presentations

12/9 Film: *Contagion*

PORTFOLIOS DUE

12/11 Film: *Contagion*