

POLI 3510
The Politics of Pandemics
Department of Political Science
Dalhousie University
Sir James Dunn Building 304
T/TH 4:05 – 5:25 Fall 2021

Instructor:

Dr. Larissa Atkison

Email: larissa.atkison@dal.ca

Office hours: T/TH 2-3 p.m Henry Hicks 355



Course Overview:

This course considers the relationship between plague and politics, both theoretically and in practice. We will consider some of the most pressing questions that contagion, and the threat of contagion, have posed to and revealed about the political communities they infect and more broadly affect. For example, what do contagions and the public crises they induce teach us about the function of fear and risk in political life? How have and should political communities balance individual rights and freedoms against collective security and well-being? How have pandemic responses fueled the emergence of new rights and social cohesion and how have they amplified social and political breakdown? What are the implications of epidemiological crises for vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as migrants and visible minorities?

This is seminar course divided into four units (including introduction) focussed on plague history, critical theories of contagion, and COVID-19 and contemporary politics. Each unit, after the introduction, will last approximately three to four weeks. Within the units we will read, listen, watch, discuss, and critically respond to thinkers and scholars, such Thucydides, Michel Foucault, Albert Camus, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Cornell West, Andrew T. Price-Smith, Samantha Power, and Naomi Klein. We will also read articles from a variety of reputed news venues such as the *New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker*.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes:

- 1) Identify and define salient ways plagues and pandemics have impacted local and global politics, as well as the ethical and moral questions they inspire;
- 2) Recognize, assess, and critically respond to scholarly positions on pandemics and their social, political and legal impacts, and relate these positions to ongoing debates around individual rights and freedoms, international and domestic law and governance;
- 3) Engage in sustained, safe, and respectful intellectual debate and exchange with peers;
- 4) Develop an ability to review, synthesize, and distill information from a variety of well-reputed news-sources;

Assignments and Class Participation Overview:

| | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| Participation | 10% |
| Critical Responses (4 x 10%) | 40% |
| Midterm | 20% |
| Final Exam | 30% |

Participation: Absences are to be expected during pandemic and I encourage you to stay home if you are symptomatic with flu or cold symptoms or are asymptomatic with a positive Covid test. You are still, however, required to make up for any missed content by requesting notes from the Accommodations Office. If sickness prevents you from attending more than TWO consecutive classes, you will need to provide me with a doctor’s note explaining your absence. Participation points will be deducted if you miss THREE or more classes throughout the term without explanation.

Note, even as participation requirements are somewhat relaxed due to the pandemic, you are expected to be an active participant in class when in attendance. Use of devices during class except for the purpose of notetaking, arriving late, distracting others, are all cause for participation deductions and may result in your removal from the classroom. Participation points of 8/10 or higher, will be assigned to students who attend class regularly (barring illness), are focussed and prepared to learn, and are willing to participate in class discussion (Note, engaged listening is a form of participation).

Critical Response (4 x 10%): You are expected to contribute **FOUR 500-word critical reading reflection** over the semester (*this means you may skip two of the possible six). Critical reflections should be thoughtful and thorough, written in clear prose, and engage closely with the assigned content. I expect to see references to assigned content to support your claims.

Note, that a critical reflection is not a summary or description of the reading. Rather, you should demonstrate your understanding of the material by reflecting on the author(s)' claims and applying them to your practical experience, or by bringing them into conversation with other reputable published opinions you have encountered.

Direct quotes must be marked as such and referenced, and you must link to any sources which have directly informed your thinking on a particular issue. The writing style may be first person but should be polished and clear. Assume your reader is informed and interested in your analytic perspective – do not, therefore, spend time, introducing basic concepts covered in the course in these assignments.

Please include the word count at the top of your assignment along with your name, the date, and a title.

The overall mark on the assignment will take into account your critical engagement with the assigned material, the originality of your questions and observations, and the clarity of your writing. A grading rubric will be provided.

*Note, a grade of A- or higher on these assignments is reserved for submissions that exceed expectations across the grading rubric.

Midterm – 20%: There will be one in-class midterm that will be designed to take 60 minutes to complete. If you require longer than 75 minutes, please contact the Accommodations Office.

Note, as the Midterm is 20% of your final grade, Student Declaration of Absence forms will not be accepted to excuse you from completing this assignment. **If you are unwell the day of the exam, it is your responsibility to schedule a make-up exam with me by the end of week seven (barring a medical or family emergency such as a death, or proof of positive Covid test). If you do not reschedule your missed exam within this window, you will receive zero on this assignment.**

Take-home Final - 30%: Students will write a final exam during the scheduled exam period. The exam should take you no more than 3 hours of focussed writing time. Further instructions on the final will be given in class.

Class Logistics and Policies:

This class will be held in person barring unforeseen developments in Nova Scotia's COVID-19 response. Barring illness or family emergencies, you are expected to attend class in person and ready to contribute to class discussion. You can expect to be tested on any material covered in class lectures or discussion. Relevant slides will be provided to students who miss class, however it is important to note that these slides will not be comprehensive and should not be treated as a substitute for class lectures and discussions. I will be happy to discuss missed

content with you in office hours. You will also be responsible for retrieving notes from any missed classes from the Accessibility Centre.

Under no circumstances is it permissible to audio or video record lectures without explicit permission from the instructor.

Policy on Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate and respectful learning environment. This includes ensuring you use your devices appropriately and only for course related content. **Cell phones should be turned off for the duration of lecture and computers should be used exclusively for notetaking. If you are distracted by your phone, chats, or online material, chances are you are also distracting those around you. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards will be subject to discipline and potentially removed from the class.**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, colour, ethnicity, culture, religion, creed, politics, military status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression, age, disability, and nationality.

Policy on Late Assignments: Due dates in an online class are brutally firm because they are pre-set into Brightspace down to the very second. Submit assignments on time! If you anticipate that you will have trouble meeting a deadline due to **significant extenuating circumstances**, please contact me ASAP to explain your situation. As noted above, if you do not provide adequate notice of an absence (at least 48 hours) you are required to provide medical documentation.

Late assignments will lose one half letter grade for every 24 hour period that they are late up to a maximum of two letter grades. **Late assignments will not be accepted more than two weeks from the submission deadline.**

Course Texts

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Penguin Classics: 2013).

Mitchell L. Hammond. *Epidemics and the Modern World* (University of Toronto Press: 2020).

Andrew T. Price-Smith, *Contagion and Chaos: Disease, Ecology, and National Security in the Era of Globalization* (MIT Press: 2009)

Andrew T. Price-Smith, *The Health of Nations: infectious Disease, environmental change, and their effects on national security and development* (MIT Press: 2002)

Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Duke University Press: 2008)

N.B. Course texts should all be available electronically through the library system, with the exception of Albert Camus' *The Plague*, which you are encouraged to buy on your own. However you are encouraged to download your texts early in the week to ensure you have plenty of time to complete your reading.

Course Schedule

Week 1. Introductions

T/Sept. 7: Course welcome and overview of syllabus.

Read: Course syllabus (carefully)!

TH/Sept. 9: Introductory lecture outlining key themes and questions

Read: "Theory and Exegesis: On Health and the Body Politic" Ch. 1 *Contagion and Chaos*, pp. 11-32.

Marijn Nieuwenhius. "The Significance of the Covid-19 Crisis" Open Democracy:
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/significance-covid-19-crisis/>

Week 2. A Tale of Two Plagues

T/Sept. 14: The Athenian Plague and Civic Responsibility

Read: Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Steven Lattimore (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), Book 2.31-65 (excerpt posted in Brightspace Module)

Listen "Lessons from the Plague of Athens" on CBC Ideas:

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1755042371652>

TH/Sept. 16: The Bubonic Plague

Read: "Bubonic Plague and the Modern State" Ch. 1 *Epidemics and the Modern World* (hereafter *EMW*), pp. 17-56

Week 3. Weaponizing Pox

T/Sept. 21: Pox as Misogyny

Read: "Sex, Gender, and the Pox of Many Names" *EMW* Ch. 2 pp. 57-104

TH/Sept. 23: Pox as Racism

Read: "Smallpox and American Catastrophe" *EMW* Ch. 3. pp. 105-145

First Reading Response due on Brightspace Thursday noon.

Week 4. Misinformation and Blame: The "Spanish" Flu

T/ Sept. 28: Scapegoating, misinformation, the 1918-19 Flu

Read: "Pandemic Influenza: On Sclerosis in Governance" *Contagion and Chaos*" *Contagion and Chaos*, pp. 57-88.

“Influenza 1918-One Pandemic Many Experiences” *EMW* Ch. 8, 327-37.
Alisha Haridasana Gupta, “How the Spanish Flu Almost Upended Women’s Suffrage” April 28, 2020, *The New York Times*:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/us/spanish-flu-womens-suffrage-coronavirus.html>

TH/Sept. 30: NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Week 5. Agent Zero: Individual and Collective Responsibility

T/Oct. 5: Typhoid Mary

Read: “The Healthy Carrier: ‘Typhoid Mary’ and Social Being” *Contagious*, Ch. 2, pp. 68-113.

TH/Oct. 7: AIDS: Patient Zero and Global Responsibility

“The Columbus of AIDS: the Invention of Patient Zero” *Contagious* Ch. 5. 213-263.
The Faces of HIV/AIDS” *EMW* Ch. 11. 426-462.

***Second Short Reading Response due, Thursday noon**

Week 6. Midterm and Pandemic Surveillance

T/Oct. 12: Midterm

TH/Oct. 14: Panopticism

Read: Foucault, M. “Panopticon” in *Discipline and Punish*, pp 195-228.

Recommended:

Yossi Melman, Marwa Fatafta, Yael Berda et al. “Pandemic Panopticon: Israeli Surveillance during Covid-19” Al Jazeera:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2020/04/pandemic-panopticon-israeli-surveillance-covid-19-200418090128636.html>

Bio-surveillance, invisible borders and the dangerous after-effects of COVID-19 measures, Ayelet Shacher, *Open Democracy* June 22:

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/pandemic-border/bio-surveillance-invisible-borders-and-dangerous-after-effects-covid-19-measures/>

Max S. Kim, Seoul’s Radical Experiment in Digital Contact Tracing, *The New Yorker*: <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/seouls-radical-experiment-in-digital-contact-tracing>

Week 7. The State of Exception or Sacrificial Politics?

T/Oct. 19 Lockdown and the State of Exception

“Philosophers on Contagion and Coronavirus” G. Agamben, in conversation with L. Nancy, R. Esposito, S. Benvenuto and others, hosted by *European Journal of Psychoanalysis* in collaboration with the journal *Antinomie* (read G. Agamben, L.

Nancy, R. Esposito, S. Benvenuto, D. Dwivedi, and S. Mohan)
<http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>
Carlo Salzani, "COVID-19 and State of Exception: Medicine, Politics, and the Epidemic State": <https://parisinstitute.org/depictions-article-covid-19-and-state-of-exception-medicine-politics-and-the-epidemic-state/>

TH. Oct. 21: Sacrificial Politics

Read: Michael Barnett, "Covid-19 and the Sacrificial International Order" International Organization, Oct. 27, 2020:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/covid19-and-the-sacrificial-international-order/7D64519B3541BD20C77D4DE82702243F>

Watch: Institute for the Arts and Humanities at UNC, Dialogue with Judith Butler on COVID, sacrificial politics, the university and grief:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GODpxwxPPfI>

***Third Reading Response due Thursday noon.**

Week 8. Camus's Pandemic Humanism

T/Oct. 28. Individualism and Denial

Read: Camus, Albert. *The Plague* (Parts I and II, pp. 1-137 in the Penguin Classics edition)

TH/Oct. 30: Plague and Solidarity

Read: *The Plague* (Parts III-V, pp. 138-252)

***Fourth Reading Response due Thursday noon.**

Week 9. COVID-19 and International Law and Order

T/Nov. 2: The International Health Regime

Read: David P. Filer, "Public Health and International Law: the Impact of Infectious Disease on the Formation of International Legal Regimes, 1800-2000", in *Plagues and Politics: Infectious Disease and International Policy*
Armin von Bogdandy, Pedro A. Villarreal. "International Law on Pandemic Response: Stocktaking in Light of the Coronavirus Crisis." MPIL Research Paper Series, No. 2020-07:1-29.

TH/Nov. 4: Covid and International Cooperation

Read: Colum Lynch, "Can the United Nations Survive the Coronavirus?" *Foreign Policy*:

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/08/colum-lynch-china-us-can-the-united-nations-survive-coronavirus/>

"What if the Coronavirus is just a test run?" by Matt Chase, NYT, Sept. 1:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/opinion/covid-pandemic-global-economy->

[politics.html?campaign_id=39&emc=edit_ty_20210902&instance_id=39435&nl=opinion-today®i_id=89200884&segment_id=67900&te=1&user_id=efffc6dafaec746fe2fa7faa26b3f85b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics.html?campaign_id=39&emc=edit_ty_20210902&instance_id=39435&nl=opinion-today®i_id=89200884&segment_id=67900&te=1&user_id=efffc6dafaec746fe2fa7faa26b3f85b)

Listen: Samantha Power, Munk Debates – the Fate of International Institutions After COVID: <https://munkdebates.com/dialogues/samantha-power>

Week 10. READING WEEK

***Optional Bonus Assignment** (3% on your final grade if you complete in full)

Watch A plague movie such as *The Seventh Seal*, *Contagion*, *Death in Venice*, *Outbreak*, *Jezebel*

Read: “Imagined Immunities: The Imagined Epidemiology of Belonging” Wald, *Contagion* Ch. 1.

Due Sunday 11:55 pm:

A 500-word reflection on the function of plague narratives in popular culture (submit to “Bonus” folder in Assignments).

Week 10. Covid and the Climate Crisis

T/Nov. 16 Understanding Zoonosis

“Climate, Ecology and Human Health,” Paul R. Epstein, Ch. 3. *Plagues and Politics*.

“Environmental Change and Disease Proliferation,” *The Health of Nations*, Ch. 5

TH/Nov. 18: Covid and the Current Climate Crisis

Read: IPBES Workshop On Biodiversity And Pandemics Executive Summary:

https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf

“The COVID-19 lockdowns: a window into the Earth System,” Noah S. Diffenbaugh, Christopher B. Field, Gabrielle Wong-Parodi et al; *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* vol. 1: https://www.nature.com/articles/s43017-020-0079-1#auth-Gabrielle-Wong_Parodi

***Fifth Reading Response due Thursday noon.**

Week 12. Pandemic Racism

T/Nov. 23 Pandemic fuelled racism

Read: “In a Pandemic, All Some People See is Your Colour: What COVID-19 Reveals About our Fraught Relationships” by Calvin Baker, *The Atlantic* June 2020

“The Coronavirus has Intensified Systemic Racism Against Black Americans” by Steven Greenhouse, *The New Yorker* July 2020

TH/ Nov. 25 Racism fuelled pandemic

Read: "Taking a Closer Look at COVID-19, Health Inequities, Racism" by Jennifer Abbasi, *Medical News and Perspectives* June 29, 2020
"Sharpening the Global focus on ethnicity and race in the time of COVID-19" *The Lancet* (May 30 2020)
"ENOUGH: COVID-19, Structural Racism, Police Brutality, Plutocracy, Climate Change—and Time for Health Justice, Democratic Governance, and an Equitable, Sustainable Future" by Nancy Krieger, *American Journal of Public Health*, Nov. 2020: <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=edfa3185-2e01-414f-8ae0-8418498200f5%40sessionmgr4006&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=146319261&db=bth>

Recommended:

- "Spaces of Solidarity and Spaces of Exception at the times of COVID-19" by Anna Trianafyllidou. *International Migration*. May 2020

***Sixth Reading Response due Thursday noon.**

Week 13. Vaccine Politics

T/Nov. 30: Vaccine politics and global inequity

Read: "Global COVID-19 vaccine inequity" by Tahla Burki, *The Lancet*, July 2021: <https://www.who.int/news/item/22-07-2021-vaccine-inequity-undermining-global-economic-recovery>
"Vaccine inequality will cost money as well as lives"
<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/08/30/vaccine-inequality-will-cost-money-as-well-as-lives>

The Rising Politization of Covid-19 Vaccines, by Giovanni Russonello, *The New Yorker*, April 6, 2021: "The Rising Politicization of Covid-19 Vaccines: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/06/us/politics/covid-vaccine-skepticism.html>"

TH/Dec. 2: Course conclusions

Note: While I have tried to the best of my ability to finalize the reading klist for this syllabus, adjustments may be required as the course unfolds.

ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES

SECTION B: UNIVERSITY POLICIES, STATEMENTS, GUIDELINES and RESOURCES for SUPPORT

"This course is governed by the academic rules and regulations set forth in the University Calendar and the Senate.

University Statements

Academic Integrity http://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/academic-integrity.html

At Dalhousie University, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect (The Center for Academic Integrity, Duke University, 1999). As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. The University provides policies and procedures that every member of the university community is required to follow to ensure academic integrity.

Accessibility https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/accessibility.html

The Advising and Access Services Centre is Dalhousie's centre of expertise for student accessibility and accommodation. The advising team works with students who request accommodation as a result of: a disability, religious obligation, or any barrier related to any other characteristic protected under Human Rights legislation (NS, NB, PEI, NFLD).

Student Code of Conduct

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/student-life-policies/code-of-student-conduct.html

Everyone at Dalhousie is expected to treat others with dignity and respect. The Code of Student Conduct allows Dalhousie to take disciplinary action if students don't follow this community expectation. When appropriate, violations of the code can be resolved in a reasonable and informal manner—perhaps through a restorative justice process. If an informal resolution can't be reached, or would be inappropriate, procedures exist for formal dispute resolution.

Diversity and Inclusion – Culture of Respect

Every person at Dalhousie has a right to be respected and safe. We believe inclusiveness is fundamental to education. We stand for equality. Dalhousie is strengthened in our diversity. We are a respectful and inclusive community. We are committed to being a place where everyone feels welcome and supported, which is why our Strategic Direction prioritizes fostering a culture of diversity and inclusiveness (Strategic Priority 5.2).

(read more: <http://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect.html>)

Recognition of Mi'kmaq Territory

Dalhousie University would like to acknowledge that the University is on Traditional Mi'kmaq Territory. The Elders in Residence program provides students with access to First Nations elders for guidance, counsel and support. Contact the program at elders@dal.ca.

University Policies and Programs

Important Dates in the Academic Year (including add/drop dates)

http://www.dal.ca/academics/important_dates.html

University Grading Practices: Statement of Principles and Procedures

https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/academic/grading-practices-policy.html

Scent-Free Program

<http://www.dal.ca/dept/safety/programs-services/occupational-safety/scent-free.html>

Learning and Support Resources

General Academic Support – Advising

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/advising.html

(Halifax)

<https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/agricultural-campus/student-success-centre/academic-support.html>

(Truro)

Fair Dealing Guidelines

<https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office/guidelines/fair-dealing-guidelines.html>

Dalhousie University Library <http://libraries.dal.ca>

Indigenous Students

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/indigenous.html

Black Students

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/communities/black-student-advising.html

International Students

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/international-centre.html

Student Health Services

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness.html

Counselling

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/health-and-wellness/frequently-asked-questions-august-2017.html

Copyright Office

<https://libraries.dal.ca/services/copyright-office.html>

E-Learning website

<http://www.dal.ca/dept/elearning.html>

Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services

<http://dsu.ca/dsas>

Dalhousie Ombudsperson https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html

Writing Centre https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/writing-and-study-skills.html

Faculty or Departmental Advising Support: Studying for Success

Program: http://www.dal.ca/campus_life/academic-support/study-skills-and-tutoring.html