

Fall 2024

## HSS 404-H01 Epidemic Health Justice, Fall 2024

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# EPIDEMIC, JUSTICE, & BIOCAPITALISM

HSS 404-H01 History Seminar

## FALL 2024 SYLLABUS

**Prof. Stephen Pemberton**

Federated Department of History  
New Jersey Institute of Technology

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### **Class Meetings**

8:30 – 9:50 AM Tuesdays and Fridays  
Central King Building (CKB 114)

### **Office Hours**

Fridays 10:00-11:30 AM and by individual appointment

### **Office & Contact**

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This senior seminar introduces students to problems at the intersection of disease, health justice, and biocapitalism in the United States -- particularly as they relate to how resources are deployed in 'epidemic' times. The course readings and assignments put all-too-common experiences with American medicine and healthcare into conversation with the ongoing challenges of recent epidemics – including the Covid-19 epidemic, the current Opioid Crisis, HIV-AIDS, and others. The course readings and assignments provide opportunities for students to think through some of the challenges associated with recent epidemics as well as efforts to manage health and disease in equitable ways. Students will learn, for example, how historians and other scholars of medicine, health, policy, and law have characterized American society's varied responses to epidemics and other disease problems since the mid-twentieth century. Another focus of the class is how resources for engaging these problems have been governed within global capitalism (i.e., our principal system for delivering resources) as well as how biotechnical innovations aimed at solving disease problems figure within those systems – for better or worse. The case studies explored in the class will give students opportunities to explore how the U.S. federal and state government, private enterprise, medicine and public health experts, and social activists have responded to ongoing epidemics and/or disease-based problems. Students will also be exposed to the roles that class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, disability, environment, culture, and biology have played in American responses to disease. Finally, the topics, the readings, and the assignments in this course will prepare each student to undertake and complete a research project on a significant health-related issue in the United States. That project will challenge the student to develop historical and critical perspective on matters of contemporary significance, and provide opportunities for them to communicate their understanding effectively to their peers.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Describe* and *interpret* how disease, justice, and/or biocapitalism have interacted in the history of United States of America, particularly during “epidemic” times.
- *Identify* and *describe* key historical events and actors as they relate to disease/health, justice and/or biocapitalism and *communicate* their significance.
- *Write* effective essays that *describe* and critically *evaluate* the merits of a certain argument in a specific place and time.
- *Research, write, and orally present* an argument of social and/or historical significance using primary and secondary sources.
- *Demonstrate* information literacy consistent with being an upper-level undergraduate: including (1) locating, retrieving and evaluating information relevant to the writing of a college-level argumentative essay; (2) organizing, synthesizing and communicating that information in clear, persuasive prose; and (3) producing a finished research paper that employs principles consistent with the ethical and legal uses of information.

### **Prerequisites and Honors Credit**

HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities General Education Requirement with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits of the 300-level may be taken concurrently with this class.

This class is designated as an honors class. Most student in the course are enrolled in Albert Dorman Honors College. However, this course is open to non-honors students with the instructor’s permission.

### **Course Webpage (Canvas)**

There is a Canvas webpage for this course that the professor and class will utilize throughout the semester. The course webpage contains the syllabus, assignments, readings, and other features that will enhance your learning experience this semester. Please consult this website regularly, preferably at least once before every class meeting. Canvas access [here](#) with your UCID.

### **Class Meetings & Office Hours**

Regular class meetings will take place in person for this course.

***My regular office hours are Fridays 10-1130 a.m. I also hold office hours by appointment during weekday business hours. Please email me at least 24 hours in advance for an appointment.***

Individual meetings on Tuesdays and Fridays normally occur in person. Virtual meetings are available by request and will take place via Zoom in the Professor’s Personal Meeting Room Zoom link (available within Canvas).

## Readings

The required readings discussed in class for this course include a variety of short readings. Students should follow the semester schedule in the syllabus or Canvas course page to determine what readings to complete for each class period.

Short Readings: Short readings are magazine or news media articles, scholarly essays, articles, or book chapters. These will be posted on the course webpage as pdfs or weblinks.

Books: To complete the individual research project in this course, students will typically have to acquire a handful of books on their research topic in consultation with the professor.

## Assignments and Grading

The primary goal of this course is to promote critical thinking about disease/health in relation to society, both past and present. All students will be evaluated on their written and oral communication over the course of the semester. This requires that the student does the reading and writing assignments dutifully. The assignments are detailed below.

<u>Assignments</u>		<u>Grading Scale for Assignments</u>
Participation	20%	A = 89.5 to 100
In-Class Assignments	10%	B+ = 86.5 to 89.4
Proposal/Bibliography*	10%	B = 79.5 to 86.4
Essay 1	10%	C+ = 76.5 to 79.4
Essay 2*	10%	C = 69.5 to 76.4
Research Presentations*	20%	D = 59.5 to 69.4
Final Research Paper*	20%	F = 59.4 to 0
<hr/> Course Grade		100%
 <b>* This assignment is part of the student's individual research project. 60% of the course grade relates to this project.</b>		
 <b>Consistent effort and improvement are weighted heavily in grading.</b>		
 <b>Passing this class with a B or higher is unlikely without completing each assignment in a timely fashion.</b>		

## Participation (20% of Course Grade)

The class participation grade will reflect both the student's presence in the classroom and their consistency and improvement in engaging the subject matter across the course. Students should promptly communicate any concerns about their ability to meet the following requirements with the professor. Consistent effort and improvement are weighted heavily in grading participation.

Attendance Policy. **This course is taught in person, in a twice a week 70 minute class format. Missing even a single class is not recommended.** However, each student is allowed to miss two full class periods without penalty to their participation grade. It is highly recommended

that you consult with the professor about any missed class time beyond one or two absences. Class time missed beyond the two “excused” classes can result in substantial reductions in the student's participation grade (as calculated as a percentage of formal contact hours for the semester). The professor will consider excusing repeat absences under extraordinary circumstances that can be verified by the Dean of Students Office. See policy on “Student Accommodations” below for further details. Overall, attendance will constitute half of the student’s participation grade.

Student Engagement. The student's verbal and non-verbal engagements with class activities account for the half of the participation grade. Each student should come to class promptly and regularly, actively listen to the online presentations, and be prepared to ask questions and discuss the readings assigned for the day. Students should respect the learning environment by arriving on time and staying the full term of the session. Students who participate regularly and constructively in discussion will be rewarded with higher grades in their final participation grade. The student must contribute to the learning environment to receive full credit in this area. Meeting the professor in office hours also counts positively toward participation. The professor will also consider improvement and other factors in his assessment of each student’s participation grade, and he reserves the right to award extra credit to students who make substantial contributions to the learning environment.

### **In-Class Assignments (10% of Course Grade)**

The professor will evaluate the quality of each student’s engagement with the weekly readings and class lectures using written response assignments during class time. The prompts (usually a question or two) will be given in class, and the student will hand write their response on paper. The assignments are completed during class time (unless accommodations for the absence have been verified through the Dean of Students office). These in-person assignments are typically not announced in advance of the class period. There will be at least four in-class assignments over the course of the class. The student’s grade on these assignments is composed of their three best grades in this category. Collectively, the in-class assignments amount to **10%** of the course grade.

### **Essay 1 (10% of Course Grade)**

This essay will address a major course theme in the first half of the course using a required course reading. The topic and guidelines for the writing assignment will be distributed on Canvas at least two weeks before the assignment is due. The essay will be short (approximately 5 pages) and will be used to help the student and professor assess progress in understanding the subject matter and communicating effectively in college-level writing.

### **Research Project (60% of Course Grade, split into four separately graded assignments)**

Each student will conduct an individual research project in consultation with the professor.

- (1) The student will identify a topic and source material early in the semester and write a paragraph-length proposal statement and annotated bibliography.
- (2) The student will write a short essay using at least one primary document source for the purposes of feedback on the project. This assignment is referred to above as essay 2.
- (3) The student will develop and present the research project in a short presentation to the class and receive feedback from their peers as well as the professor.
- (4) The student will write a final paper based on the research done and feedback received across the course.

### **Respect for Persons and the Learning Environment**

In the interest of an open exchange of ideas and collegiality, everyone participating in the class should strive to respect their classmates as persons. The professor will make every effort to facilitate a respectful environment for learning, but students should keep in mind their own responsibilities in the classroom.

The professor reserves the right to ask you to leave the classroom for any behaviors that do not meet the expectations of a proper, professional learning environment.

Computer and phone use, web-surfing, texting and social media usage that is unrelated to class is disruptive of a respectful learning environment. Students are therefore expected to limit cell phone, tablet, and lap top use to class-related activities only during our designated class times.

Students must comply with NJIT policy while in the classroom – including formal and informal codes of conduct for university students.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is *enforced* in this course. Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found [here](#).

It is the instructor's professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu).

Students are also responsible for upholding the integrity of NJIT by reporting any violation of academic to the [Dean of Students Office](#). The identity of the student filing any academic integrity violation will always remain anonymous.

Students will also be required to submit their original written work to [Turnitin.com](#), an online service used by NJIT instructors to detect plagiarism and irregularities in sourcing and citation of the written word and claims. When uploading your written assignment to Canvas, it will automatically be reviewed by [Turnitin.com](#).

### **AI Policy in this Course**

To ensure that your written work is original and yours alone, the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is prohibited in this course. Any questions about what does or doesn't constitute generative AI use should be directed to the professor in advance of turning in an assignment (not after the assignment is due). Unauthorized use of AI will be considered an academic integrity violation in this particular course.

### **Ethical Research and Writing**

NJIT's Van Houghton Library has numerous tutorials to help you succeed in your research and writing in this class. They are designed to ensure you are meeting acceptable standards of ethics as well as scholarship.

The tutorial appropriate to doing acceptable research and writing in a history-based humanities class can be found [here](#).

Tutorials that explain acceptable academic writing for this humanities-based course are available at NJIT's Van Houghton library website devoted to ENGL 101/102, [here](#).

Tutorials on how to evaluate appropriate online source material can be found [here](#).

Finally, and arguably most critical, tutorials on how to cite sources ethically in your academic writing can be found [here](#).

Citing your sources properly will help you avoid plagiarism. I prefer that students use the author-date citation format from the [Chicago Manual of Style \(CMS\)](#) in their writing for this course.

**NJIT's Librarians** can field your questions about how the library resources can help you succeed in this history class. They are experts who are happy to help you. **You can reach them via the [Ask A Librarian](#)** link on the library website.

Again, all students are expected to abide by the norms outlined in these websites, this syllabus as well as the Canvas webpage for this class; students can be penalized for failure to do so. Please consult the professor if you have any concerns about academic integrity, academic reading, writing and citation, plagiarism or their meanings in actual practice.

### **Student Accommodations and Privacy**

**Instructors can only accommodate a student at the direction of the Dean of Students (DoS) Office.** This NJIT policy helps ensure your privacy and accords with U.S. federal law.

If you need accommodation for illness, disability, death in family, religious reasons, etc., University Policy dictates that students must inform the [Dean of Students Office](#).

You can request absence verification [here](#).

If you wish to have accommodations made for a disability, please contact the [Office of Accessibility Resources & Services \(OARS\)](#) to address your specific needs. A Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the OARS authorizing your accommodations will be required. Information about accessibility resources and services and forms to initiate accommodation are available [here](#). NJIT policy on accommodations is governed here by the Regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

If you have any further questions regarding accommodation, please consult the DoS webpage devoted to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) to see how you should proceed with your concern.

## Semester Schedule

### **Tues, Sept 3. Introduction to “Epidemic, Justice, & Biocapitalism”**

In-Class Activities: Introductions, review syllabus, discuss course.

### **Fri, Sept 6. Introduction (continued)**

Reading: Please read from recent news selections I have posted on Canvas alongside the selections from Beatrix Hoffman, *Health Care for Some: Rights and Rationing in the United States Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

There will be a brief in-class writing assignment on this reading at the beginning of class!

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

### **Tues, Sept 10. Fact and Interpretation: How to Have Theory in an Epidemic I**

Reading: Selections from Beatrix Hoffman, *Health Care for Some: Rights and Rationing in the United States Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

There will be a brief in-class writing assignment on the reading!

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

### **Fri, Sept 13. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part I**

Reading: Specter, Michael. 2021. “How Act Up Changed America.” *The New Yorker*. June 7, 2021

Selections from David France, *How to Survive A Plague: The Inside Story of How Citizens and Science Tamed AIDS* (New York: Vintage, 2017)

Selections from Sarah Schulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of Act UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2021)

In-Class Movie: Selections from *United in Anger: A History of Act UP* (2014 Documentary)

### **Tues, Sept 17. Consumerism and Modern Medicine I**

Reading: Selection from Nancy Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient: How Madison Avenue and Modern Medicine Turned Patients into Consumers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

### **Fri, Sept 20. Consumerism and Modern Medicine II / Project Topic Discussion**

Reading: Selection from Nancy Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient: How Madison Avenue and Modern Medicine Turned Patients into Consumers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

In-Class: Finding Your Research Topic



**Tues, Sept 24. Biocapitalism and AIDS: What World is This?**

**Assignment: Sign Up for Individual Meeting Time in October (no exceptions)**

Reading:

Pemberton, Stephen. 2019. "Bad Blood and Unsettled Law: Are Healing and Justice Even Possible When Biocapitalism Prevails," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 63, no. 3 (Summer): 576-589.

and

Selection from Eric Weinberg and Donna Shaw, *Blood on Their Hands: How Greedy Companies, Inept Bureaucracy, and Bad Science Killed Thousands of Hemophiliacs* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

and

Examine the Blood Products Litigation Documents [Electronic database] via Canvas and the primary source, "Advertisements in various gay magazines for plasma donors exposed to hepatitis"

In-Class Movie: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary)

**Fri, Sept 27. Are Healing and Justice Even Possible When Biocapitalism Prevails?**

Reading: Selected Primary Sources speaking to lived experience of contaminated blood

In-Class Movie: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary Movie)

**Tues, Oct 1. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part II**

Reading: Primary Sources reading from PEN Parent Empowerment Newsletter (November 2010) including Laurie Kelly and Paul Clement, "Bad Blood, Good Movie?"

In-Class: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary Movie)

**Fri, Oct 4. Fact and Interpretation: How to Have Theory in an Epidemic II**

Reading: Selections from Judith Butler, *What World Is This? - A Pandemic Phenomenology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022) and Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2022).

**Mon, Oct 7. Assignment Due: Project Topic Choice Due**

**Tues, Oct 8 – Fri, Oct 11. Individual Meeting with Professor**

No class meetings, but you must complete Essay 1 by the due date

and

Meet me to discuss your individual project idea at your scheduled time during this week!

**Mon, Oct. 14. Assignment Due: Essay 1 Due**

**Tues, Oct 15. Chronic Pain in America**

Reading: Selections from Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015)

**Fri, Oct 18. The American Health Dilemma: Undertreated and Overmedicated**

Reading: Selections from Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015)

**Tues, Oct 22. Workshop Projects / Preparing Your Proposal & Annotated Bibliography**

**Fri, Oct 25. Interpreting “Big Pharma” I**

Reading: Selection from Marcia Angell, *The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What To Do About It* (New York: Random House, 2004).

**Tues, Oct 28. Interpreting “Big Pharma” II**

Reading: Selection from Joseph Dumit, *Drugs For Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012)

**Fri, Nov 1. Interpreting America’s Opioid Epidemic I**

Reading: Selections from David Herzberg, *White Market Drugs: Big Pharma and the Hidden History of Addiction in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

**Mon, Nov 4. Proposal & Annotated Bibliography Assignment Due**

**Tues, Nov 5. Interpreting America’s Opioid Epidemic II**

Reading: Reviews and Commentary on David Herzberg, *White Market Drugs: Big Pharma and the Hidden History of Addiction in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

**Fri, Nov 8. Interpreting Health, Disease, & Quality-of-Life in America (continued)**

Reading: Selection from Anne Case & Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) and Commentary

**Mon. Nov 11. Assignment Due**

Sign Up for Presentation time (no exceptions)

**Tues, Nov 12. Interpreting Racial Capitalism and Health Disparities**

Reading: Selections from Jonathan Metzl, *Dying of Whiteness: How the Politics of Racial Resentment is Killing America's Heartland* (New York: Basic Books, 2019)

**Fri, Nov 15. Workshop Projects in Class**

**Assignment Due:** Essay 2 Due Before Class

**Tues, Nov 19. Workshop Projects in Class**

**Fri, Nov 22.** Student Presentations\*

**Wed, Nov 27.** Student Presentations\*

**Tues, Dec 3.** Student Presentations\*

**Fri, Dec 6.** Student Presentations\*

**Tues, Dec 10. Final Group Discussion\***

**Mon, Dec 16. FINAL PAPER DUE**

\* **Mandatory Attendance.** Students will be doing individual presentations, presenting their research to their peers in class, in advance of completing their final papers by the end of the semester. Each student is required to attend student presentations and participate in the discussions. Part of each student's presentation grade will consist of peer reviewing at least two other student presentations.