



McMaster University, Department of Anthropology, ANTHROP 2U03

PLAGUES AND PEOPLES

Winter 2022

Instructor: Creighton Avery
Email: averylc@mcmaster.ca
Lecture: Monday 1:30-2:20pm,
Wednesday 1:30-2:20pm, Thursday
1:30-2:20pm

Office: CNH 515
Office Hours: Mondays, 12-1 or by
appointment

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Land Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that McMaster University is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” Wampum agreement. In this agreement, the dish represents the land, and the spoon represents the people, who are to take only what they need, and protect the land for future generations. Additionally, I am currently residing in traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishnawbe, and Neutral Peoples, in the land known as the Haldimand Tract. This land was given in compensation to the Six Nations of the Grand River and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation in 1784, but today only 5% of that land remains under their protection. I encourage you to learn more about the lands you inhabit. If you’re in Canada, you can start by visiting Native-Land (<https://native-land.ca/>) or Whose Land (<https://www.whose.land/en/>).

Course Description

Plagues, disease, and outbreaks are not new topics in the wake of COVID-19. Rather, they have marked human history and development for thousands of years, shaping both our bodies and our societies. In this course, we will take a biocultural approach to understand how biology, culture, societies, medicine, and the environment each play a role in disease outbreak, and how they are, in turn, shaped by disease occurrence. Rather than exploring each of these in isolation, we will focus on the interconnectedness of these variables, and how plagues are the “perfect storm” of social and biological conditions.

In this course, we will focus on a different disease each week, such as cholera or smallpox, and discuss the factors leading to the outbreak, as well as the resulting circumstances. As we all have experience living through a global pandemic, we will also incorporate our own experiences, and start to consider how COVID-19 will shape our world moving forward.

This course will help you consider multiple lines of inquiry to view a problem holistically. In doing so, it will also help develop your critical thinking skills, relevant in both academic and professional environments.

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Explain key concepts related to disease transmission and outbreaks.
2. Recognize patterns of social, political, and environmental conditions that give rise to disease outbreaks.
3. Critique representations of disease outbreaks in the past.
4. Design your own public health campaign for a past outbreak.
5. Relate your experiences with COVID-19 to past outbreaks.

Your Instructor

Hi! My name is Creighton (she/her). I'm a PhD Candidate in Biological Anthropology at McMaster University. In my research, I explore the social and biological experiences of adolescence in the Roman Empire. What I love most about my research, is that I get to use scientific methods to answer social questions about life in the past. Outside of academia, I love to quilt (which I learned how to do via YouTube) and go on canoe tripping adventures.



I'm looking forward to getting to know all of you, and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns at any point this semester.

Required Materials and Texts

McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In this short book, each chapter focuses on different diseases in the past. You can order the book or e-text through the [Campus Store](#). Beyond the required texts, additional readings may be assigned. These will be uploaded to our course shell on Avenue to Learn, or available through the McMaster Library system.

Class Format

This course will be held in-person, with Avenue to Learn serving as the remote base for all relevant course content and assignment submissions. Weekly lectures will be divided into three, one-hour blocks.

Each week will focus on a different disease outbreak. In the first lecture, we'll discuss the conditions that gave rise to the outbreak, taking a biocultural approach. In the second lecture, we'll focus in on a particular aspect or case study related to that disease. In the third lecture, we'll explore how the disease outbreak then influenced our world, resulting in changes in medicine, politics, environments, and more (some weeks may stray from this set up, as needed).

It is my hope to deliver a course that engages all learners, this includes designing assignments that can be completed in different formats and providing course content in different modalities. If there is any portion of the course that you feel you cannot engage in or complete to the best of your ability, please reach out to me via email or on MS Teams (@averylc) to learn how I can better support your learning.

Course Evaluation – Overview

Assignments are designed to cater to, and develop, a variety of skills. If you have any concerns about the following assignments (content, format, timeline etc.), please reach out to me in advanced, to see what can be done to help you succeed in this course. Assessments are to be submitted on Avenue to Learn. I employ a compassionate late policy, where late penalties are not deducted for two days after the due date. If I have not heard from you to discuss why your assignment is late, a late penalty of 5% per day, including weekend days, will be applied after that point.

1. Weekly Responses – 10%, due throughout the semester
2. Your COVID-19 Experiences – 10%, due 21 January 2022
3. Midterm Exam – 25%, takes place on 17 February 2022
4. Poster Redesign and Reflection – 20%, due 18 March 2022
5. Critical Essay – 30%, due 8 April 2022
6. Reassessment of Your COVID-19 Experience – 5%, 15 April 2022

Course Evaluation – Details

Weekly Responses (10%), due throughout the semester

Each week, you'll have the opportunity to gain marks by submitting work online for upwards of 1% each week. Your best 10 of 14 possible weeks will contribute to your final grade, but you can complete as many as you'd like. The format of the work will vary week-to-week, to help you connect with the material each week. This will help you achieve ILOs 1 and 2.

Your COVID-19 Experience (10%), due 21 January 2022

Having lived through a global pandemic, we are in a unique situation to reflect on our own experiences and better connect with outbreaks in the past. To help me understand your experiences, tell me about how COVID-19 has affected your life over the past two years. Papers should be one page, using 1.5 line spacing. See assignment sheet for more details and guiding questions, if needed. No references are needed, and you are encouraged to use the personal perspective (i.e., using the word "I"). This will help you achieve ILO 5.

Midterm Exam (25%), takes place on 17 February 2022

Just before reading week, you'll complete a midterm exam through Avenue to Learn, consisting of T/F, multiple choice, fill in the blank, and short answer questions. This will be a timed exam, but a practice exam will be made available prior to the exam, to help familiarize yourself with the process and types of questions that will be asked. The exam will be available in-class during our scheduled time, or online between 9am and 9pm on February 17th, and you'll have two hours to complete it once you begin (+ any applicable SAS accommodations). This will help you achieve ILOs 1 and 2.

Poster Redesign and Reflection (20%), due 18 March 2022

Public health campaigns in the past occasionally used blame or “othering” in their posters or media, to influence public perception and limit the spread of disease. In class, we’ll learn how this can be problematic. For this assignment, you’ll take one of those posters (provided on Avenue to Learn), provide a brief reflection as to why it is problematic. Then, you’ll re-design the campaign using the medium of your choice (video, TV or radio ad, comic strip, poster, etc.), and explain why this new communication is better. Rubrics are available on Avenue to Learn. If you’d like to use a medium not listed above, please reach out to the instructor at least two weeks prior to the due date, to discuss. This activity will help you learn to distill information to the key points and engage with the public in dynamic and interesting ways. This will help you achieve ILO 3 and 4.

Critical Essay (30%), due 8 April 2022

Using what you’ve learned over the semester, your major assignment asks you to respond to one of the two questions below.

Option 1: What biocultural factors led to the widespread distribution of COVID-19? Which of these, in your opinion, is the most important, and why?

Option 2: Based on what we’ve learned, what are the potential long-term biocultural outcomes of COVID-19? Which of these, in your opinion, is the most important, why?

Written assignments are to be double-spaced, with a 12-point font and 1-inch margins, between three and five pages (not including references). The rubric is available on Avenue to Learn. In this assignment, you’ll have the opportunity to apply what you’ve learned in this course, and discover how it all comes together, rather than working as independent pieces. This will help you achieve ILO 2, 3 and 5.

Reassessment of Your COVID-19 Experience (5%), due 15 April 2022

Now that we’ve examined the ways social, political, and environmental conditions influence epidemics and pandemics in the past, reflect on your own COVID-19 experiences once again. Papers should be one page, using 1.5 line spacing. See assignment sheet for more details and guiding questions, if needed. No references are needed, and you are encouraged to use the personal perspective (i.e., using the word “I”). This will help you achieve ILO 5.

Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings

Assigned readings and/or videos should be completed each week, to stay on top of the materials, facilitate your learning, and prepare you for assessments. Lectures will be delivered in class, with opportunities for students to ask questions and seek clarification. To further support your learning slides will also be available on Avenue to Learn.

Week 1. Introduction to the Course (January 10, 12 & 13)

For our first week, we'll take a tour of the course shell and go through some introductions as we get started in this course. We'll also discuss the biological and social fundamentals of disease outbreaks, setting the foundation for the rest of the course. You'll also set your own private goals of what you'd like to accomplish in this class this term, and how you will measure your own personal success.

Readings: None

Week 2. The Plague: *Yersinia Pestis* (January 17, 19 & 20)

A natural place to start to study plagues is to look at *The Plague*. We'll look at the causes of the spread the plague by focusing on the Black Death. We'll also look at the various ways researchers are trying to learn more about this disease that claimed up to 30% of Europe's population between the 14 and 18th centuries CE.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 1: Plague (pg7-30).

Notes: Your COVID Experience due at midnight on January 21st.

Week 3. The Hot Plague: Cholera (January 24, 26 & 27)

Today, we know that cholera is a water-borne disease that has high recovery rates as long as individuals can get fluids back in their bodies. But before 1854, people thought this condition was caused by "bad air". In this class, we'll look at early transmission ideas and the foundations of germ theory.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 4: Cholera (p60-72).

Week 4. The Speckled Monster: Smallpox (January 31, February 2 & 3)

By exploring smallpox, we'll learn about the early attempts to inoculate people, including variolation and vaccinations. Smallpox is also one of the only diseases that has been globally eradicated, so we'll also discuss the public health campaigns and international efforts involved to accomplish this.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 2: Smallpox (pg31-44).

Week 5. The White Plague: Tuberculosis (February 7, 9 & 10)

Diseases rarely have one story or one perspective. This week, we'll learn about Tuberculosis (also called Consumption) and how perceptions of the disease depended on the social status positions of those infected. We'll also touch on multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, a growing problem in the modern world.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 5: Tuberculosis (pg73-88).

Week 6. Mid-term Exam (February 14, 16 & 17)

This week we won't have an in-person class. Instead, you'll complete an online exam. The exam will be made available through Avenue to Learn all day, and you'll have one hour once you begin (+ any SAS accommodations). You can come to class to take the exam, if you're more comfortable having me with you to answer any questions, or you can complete it at home at a time of the day that makes more sense to you.

Readings: None

Notes: Midterm Exam on February 17th, in-person or online

Week 7. Reading Week (February 21-27)

Take the opportunity to relax this week, and possibly complete a mid-term evaluation for me (pretty please?). If 60% of the class completes it, everyone will receive "Weekly Response" marks for this week.

Readings: None

Week 8. The Forgotten Plague: Spanish Flu (February 28, March 2 & 3)

Until recently, the Spanish Flu was largely forgotten, but direct comparisons to COVID-19 makes it all the more relevant. This week, we'll look at how an increasingly connected world led to this global pandemic, and how the lessons of yesterday could have been utilized to better prepare us today.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 6: Influenza (pg89-102).

Week 9. The Moral Plague: Syphilis (March 7, 9 & 10)

This week, we'll look at syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease largely blamed on "loose women" during World War II. We'll also make comparisons to current outbreaks within Canada.

Readings: Tampa M, Sarbu I, Matei C, Benea V, Gerorgescu SR. 2014. [Brief History of Syphilis](#). *Journal of Medicine and Life* 7(1): 4-10.

Week 10. The Children's Plague: Polio (March 14, 16 & 17)

In each disease, a particular population is often more affected than another. Today, we'll talk about polio, a widespread disease in the mid-1900s that largely affected children. We'll look at how this helped frame the disease, motivated change, and instilled fear in both children and adults in North America.

Readings: Williams G. 2020. [How a virus brought New York to a standstill in the summer of 1916](#). *The Conversation*.

Foss KA. 2020. [Remote learning isn't new: Radio instruction in the 1937 polio epidemic](#). *The Conversation*.

Notes: Poster Redesign due at midnight on March 18th.

Week 11. The Secret Plague: HIV/AIDS (March 21, 23 & 24)

In this class, we'll look at the rise of HIV/AIDS, particularly in North America, and how it was framed as "punishment" for "deviant" individuals. We'll discuss how these biases and prejudices influenced disease knowledge and treatments, and how people are working to change those perceptions today.

Readings: McMillen CW. 2016. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. Chapter 7: HIV/AIDS (pg103-118).

Week 12. The Unknown Plague: Cocoliztli (March 28, 30 & 31)

One of the deadliest outbreaks in history affected the Aztecs in the 16th century, yet until recently, the pathogenic cause was unknown. Originally suspected to be an outbreak of Ebola, recent discoveries point to salmonella as the main culprit, brought by Spanish colonizers.

Readings: Acuna-Soto R, Stahle DW, Cleaveland MK, Therrell MD. 2002. [Megadrought and Megadeath in 16th century Mexico](#). *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 8(4): 360-362.

Pennock CD. 2018. [Have scientists really found the germ responsible for killing 15m Aztecs?](#) *The Conversation*.

Week 13. The Future of Diseases (April 4, 6 & 7)

This week, we'll turn our focus to the future, considering what new pathogens or re-emerging pathogens might lead to future outbreaks. We'll also consider the possibility of bioterrorism, including smallpox and anthrax.

Readings: Peyre M. 2021. [The Keys to Preventing Future Pandemics](#). *The Conversation*.

Notes: Critical Essay due at midnight on April 8th.

Week 14. Wrap-Up (April 11)

Our last class, on Monday, is up to you (there is no lecture on Wednesday/Thursday this week). We could invite researchers to have a panel discussion about "the worst plague". We could watch part of a Hollywood portrayal of an outbreak (e.g., Contagion) and critique their portrayal. We could play boardgames based on plagues (e.g., Pandemic) to see how

it relates to what we've learned. It's up to you! (We'll discuss what we want this class to look after reading week so I can start planning).

Readings: None

Notes: Reassessment of your COVID experience due at midnight on April 15th.

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

All assignments will be submitted through Avenue to Learn, including written work (weekly responses, essays, etc.) and exams. Deadlines are set for midnight on Friday nights.

Grades

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

MARK	GRADE
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

Late Assignments

I employ a compassionate late policy, where late penalties are not deducted for two days after the due date. If I have not heard from you to discuss why your assignment is late, a late penalty of 5% per day, including weekend days, will be applied after that point.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "[Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work](#)" (MSAF). If you have used your MSAF, and still need relief from academic work, please visit the Faculty of Social Sciences (or your home faculty) to discuss what alternatives might be possible.

Avenue to Learn

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

Turnitin.com

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. By submitting to the Avenue to Learn submission folder, it will be scanned by Turnitin.com so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must inform the instructor at the beginning of the semester. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please to go www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

University Policies

Academic Integrity Statement

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)

The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student's religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code. Please review the [RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences](#) about how to request accommodation.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Privacy Protection

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.



The Paris Catacombs. Photo Credit: Creighton Avery (same as header image).