



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

Pandemics: A Global History - 27020

Last update 15-09-2024

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: School of History - Honors Program

Academic year: 0

Semester: 2nd Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Lee Mordechai

Coordinator Email: lee.mordechai@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours:

Teaching Staff:

Dr. Lee Mordechai

Course/Module description:

The Covid pandemic has changed our lives. For many of us, the pandemic was one of the most significant events in our lives. And yet, historically - how unusual was the pandemic? Was Covid the most lethal or destructive pandemic in history? How can we know?

To answer these questions in the present, we will tackle other questions regarding the past. How did pandemics change the ways in which people lived, temporarily or permanently? How did governments, scientists and societies try to deal with past epidemics, and were they successful? When did disease outbreaks become crises, and what (and who) influenced this process?

More broadly, epidemics allow us to examine human societies in different times and places through their political, economic and socio-cultural responses. Disease epidemics are "tests" that highlight the faults and problems in human systems - such as the inaccessibility of health care services, social inequalities, ambiguity of scientific research and so on. As Covid has demonstrated, infectious diseases do not threaten all groups in the population in an even manner, and marginalized or vulnerable groups might experience a pandemic as a catastrophe while stronger groups might see the same disease event as negligible. At the same time, epidemics serve as the background to a series of human behaviors - anxiety, blaming and stigmas regarding the sick and carriers of disease. These occur in parallel to heroic stories and the mobilization of communities for the common good.

This course will survey different disease outbreaks in history, focusing on the ways in which epidemics change human ways of life. The course will create connections, identify common themes, and raise issues related to epidemics and pandemics (diseases that spread quickly over wide areas and globally, respectively) in history. During the course we will read and analyze primary sources, modern studies and popular culture. On the basis on them all we will propose a narrative of past disease events, compare between different diseases, and attempt to examine disease events from different angles and resolutions. In parallel, the course will engage with questions related to history itself - such as tackling differences in historians' interpretation of the past, the methodologies and theories that historians use to collect information and learn about the past, and the ways in which we create and tell the stories about the past.

No background is required to take this class, which is open to all interested students.

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be

able to:

1. Demonstrate basic knowledge regarding important diseases in human history
2. Recognize the tools and methodologies that scholars use to learn about diseases in the past and present
3. Trace the development of human thinking regarding diseases over time
4. Identify recurring themes in epidemics as well as connections between epidemics
5. Identify some of the most famous primary sources on diseases and their effects
6. Analyze the scholarly and public discourse regarding disease at a basic level

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction: Lecture

Course/Module Content:

1. Introduction
2. Narratives of past diseases
3. Ancient diseases: the Plague of Athens
4. The First Pandemic
5. The Black Death
6. Diseases in the New World
7. Colonialism and Imperialism
8. The Third Plague Pandemic
9. "The Spanish Flu"
10. Can humanity triumph over disease?
11. AIDS
12. Emerging infectious diseases in the 90s: Ebola
13. Covid and its aftermath

Required Reading:

A detailed reading list will be provided at the beginning of the semester.

Additional Reading Material:

Grading Scheme:

Written / Oral / Practical Exam 80 %
Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports / Forum / Simulation / others 15 %

Other 5 %

Additional information: