

HISTORY SEMINAR

THE BLACK DEATH

Fall 2015

(510:489:70)

Wednesday 6:00-9:00 p.m.
CONKLIN HALL, 238

Dr. Nükhet Varlık
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Office Hour: By appointment only
Office: Conklin Hall, 310

Readings

- Paul Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) (ISBN: 9780199589548)
- Rosemary Horrox, trans., *The Black Death* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1994) (ISBN: 9780719034985)
- *Pandemic Disease in the Medieval World: Rethinking the Black Death*, edited by Monica Green, *The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014).
Open access: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval_globe/1
- All other readings, list of resources, and bibliography for further research will be available on Blackboard. Please make sure you check Blackboard for each week's reading material.

Description

This course is devoted to the study of the Black Death, one of the greatest pandemics in human history. We will keep the geographical and temporal scope of the course as broad as possible but the main focus will be Eurasia in the late medieval and early modern era. In this course, we will read and discuss the available historical scholarship on this pandemic and learn how to incorporate research findings produced in fields, such as bioarcheology, microbiology, and archeozoology into historical research. No previous background in sciences is required.

Overview

This course will prepare you to next semester's work. It is arranged in a way that will help you think about the topic while developing familiarity with major questions in the field of historical epidemiology. It involves reading, class discussions, research, and class presentations—all of which will contribute to honing your individual research projects. Through the first half of the semester, we will delve into in-depth discussions of the Black Death, historically and historiographically. This work will allow us to move toward more

individualized work, which will involve individual meeting with the instructor to discuss research projects, preparation, and sharing your project with your classmates in class presentations. At the end of the semester, you will submit your research prospectus electronically.

Structure and Requirements

This is a research seminar, which places heavy emphasis on reading, discussion, research, and writing. Students in this course are expected to be active participants by completing assigned readings before each meeting and contributing to class discussions. Each student will be expected to make short presentation(s) on assigned readings in class and build an annotated bibliography of readings and reference works during the course of the semester.

One of the goals of the class is to have each student carry out independent research and produce a research prospectus at the end of the semester. In addition to the research prospectus, there will be multiple writing assignments for this course including several short papers (1-2 pages), in-class and/or online quizzes, and a book review (3-4 pages). Assignments will be submitted electronically using the *Turn-it-in* function of Blackboard, except otherwise noted. **NO LATE AND/OR EMAILED PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.** Detailed instructions for assignments can be found on Blackboard.

Individual Meetings

October 21, 28, and November 4 are reserved for individual meetings. On those days, students will meet with the instructor to discuss their research projects. Early in the semester, time slots available for individual meetings will be announced so you can sign up. It is important that students come to their meetings with prior preparation, ideally with an outline, a list of possible research questions, as well as primary and secondary sources.

Class Presentations

As part of course requirements, students are expected to present their ongoing research projects, receive feedback from the instructor and their peers, and revise their work before submitting their final research prospectus. Each presentation will be 20 minutes, followed by an additional 10 minutes reserved for discussion. Power Point presentation is not required. Students are expected to submit the first draft of their research prospectus in the 72 hours following their presentation. The instructor will offer comments and revisions on drafts.

Grading

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|------------------------------------|-----|
| Participation to class discussions | 10% |
| Short papers and quizzes | 10% |
| Book review | 10% |
| Formal class presentation | 20% |
| Annotated bibliography | 10% |
| Research prospectus (first draft) | 10% |
| Research prospectus (revised) | 30% |

Grading Standards

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| 90-100 | % | A (a genuinely outstanding achievement) |
| 80-89 | % | B (above average achievement) |
| 70-79 | % | C (comprehension of the subject at an appropriate university level) |
| 60-69 | % | D (unsatisfactory performance, barely passing) |
| Below 60% | | F (failure) |

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- name and identify individuals, events, themes, and issues of major importance related to plague pandemics in world history,
- demonstrate a basic level of competence in differentiating the major periods of the history of pandemics and their significance in global context,
- recognize the importance of cause and effect in history, and discuss the significance of change and continuity over time,
- develop an understanding toward the use of historical evidence by historians and display some familiarity toward different types of evidence,
- critically analyze historical evidence and articulate a synthesis with a thesis.

Course Policies

- Attendance at all regularly scheduled meetings of this class is mandatory. Rutgers catalog states that “the recognized grounds for absence are illness requiring medical attention, curricular or extracurricular activities approved by the faculty, personal obligations claimed by the student and recognized as valid, recognized religious holidays, and severe inclement weather causing dangerous traveling conditions.” Two UNEXCUSED absences will lower your final grade by one letter grade. Three (or more) UNEXCUSED absences will automatically result in your failure. It is your responsibility to come to class and see that you are marked present for the classes you attend. In the event that you have a medical, legal, or family-related problem that might lead to an extended absence, you need to meet me in person and bring necessary documentation as evidence for your problem. Only then, we can discuss whether or not your absence(s) can be excused. An email message explaining your problem will NOT be considered as an excuse of your absence. Ultimately, it will be the instructor’s judgment to decide whether an absence can be excused or not. If you miss a class due to a reason that you cannot document, please do not contact me to explain your case. Instead, consider it as one of your unexcused absences. Please remember that any student who misses five (or more) sessions through any combination of EXCUSED and UNEXCUSED absences will not earn credit in this class. Such students should withdraw to avoid getting an F.
- You are expected to come to class having done the assigned readings and participate in class discussions. It is your responsibility to follow the syllabus to keep track of what readings are assigned for each class, bearing in mind that you may be given a pop quiz on the readings. Please make sure to bring a copy of assigned readings for class discussions.

- The use of portable electronic devices, such as laptops or cell phones during class in a manner not compliant with classroom conduct (texting, surfing the web, playing games, and others) will not be tolerated. Students may be warned for such behavior initially. If repeated, they may be asked to leave the classroom and marked absent for the day.
- Punctuality and courtesy at all times are expected.
- Academic dishonesty of *any sort* will not be tolerated. It is your responsibility to comply with the university's policy on academic integrity. To review the policies go to http://history.newark.rutgers.edu/index.php?content=rn_integrity. All students are required to include the Rutgers honor pledge on all major course assignments submitted for grading: "On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."
- If you have questions or concerns about this class, come and talk to me *in person*. Please do not send email inquiries instead of asking questions in class. Any question that can be asked in class should be asked in class. Before you send an email, you need to verify that you have checked the syllabus, Blackboard, and/or asked your fellow classmates but have not found an answer to your question. Finally, remember that emails to the instructor should be considered as "professional correspondence," so it is recommended that you conform to standards of professional etiquette.
- Rutgers abides by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments (ADAA) of 2008, and Sections 504 and 508 which mandate reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities and the accessibility of online information. If you have a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please contact me early in the semester so that I can provide or facilitate in providing accommodations you may need. If you have not already done so, you will need to register with the Office of Disability Services, the designated office on campus to provide services and administer exams with accommodations for students with disabilities. The Office of Disability Services is located in the Robeson Student Center. I look forward to talking with you soon to learn how I may be helpful in supporting your academic success in this course. For more information on disability services at Rutgers, go to <http://disabilityservices-uw.rutgers.edu/>

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to amendment or change at the discretion of the instructor.

September 2

- Introduction to the course; review of the syllabus, course material, and policies; scheduling of individual meeting and presentations
- Viewing of film *Contagion* (2010, Steven Soderbergh, 106 minutes); discussion questions assigned

- September 9
- Why study the Black Death? Overview of terminology, scope, historiography, research methods, and approaches in the study of plague epidemics
 - First assignment due in class (see Blackboard for detailed information)
- September 16
- Introduction to Plague Paradigms
 - Short presentation on plague news in popular media (Second assignment due at the end of class)
- September 23
- Black Death Historiography: Why is it contentious? What are the points of tension? How to reconcile different perspectives?
 - Terminology quiz (in class)
- September 30
- Geographical survey: pros and cons
 - Third assignment due in class
- October 7
- Chronological survey: pros and cons
 - Class debate about different plague ecologies in different geographical settings
- October 14
- Contemporary & global “plagues”—How does studying the Black Death help?
 - Book reviews due (electronic submission only--*Turn-it-in*)
- October 21
- Individual meetings with instructor to discuss research project

- October 28 - Individual meetings with instructor to discuss research project
- November 4 - Individual meetings with instructor to discuss research project
- November 11 - Class presentations
- November 18 - Class presentations
- November 25 No class (Thanksgiving break)
- December 2 - Class presentations
- December 9 - Post-mortem discussion of class presentations; tips for further research and writing of projects; concluding remarks for the semester
- December 16 - Deadline for submitting revised paper prospectuses using *Turn-it-in* (by 9:19 p.m.)