English 205: Genre - Plague Literature
CRN 33622 | Professor Mattie Burkert (she/her/hers)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION
Class meetings: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00-1:20pm, Lokey 117
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 11:00am-2:00pm on Zoom
Professor’s Contact Info: mburkert@uoregon.edu | 541.346.0272

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course will ground our ongoing experience of the COVID-19 crisis in the literature of plague and pandemic stretching back four centuries. We will begin with contemporary works of poetry and nonfiction about COVID and Ebola, as well as fictional works about imaginary pandemics of apocalyptic proportions: Ling Ma’s Severance and Emily St. John Mandel’s Station Eleven. We will then move backward through the AIDS and influenza epidemics of the twentieth century with an essay by journalist Susan Sontag and a novella by Katherine Anne Porter. We’ll end with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction by Edgar Allen Poe and Daniel Defoe about epidemics real (the 1665 Bubonic plague in London) and fantastical (a “red death” that kills within half an hour of infection, based loosely on cholera). Along the way, we will draw connections between past and present outbreaks—examining, for example, the ways that outbreaks of disease then and now highlight and deepen existing social inequalities. We will also ask what we can learn from fiction about dealing with the social and cultural effects of real-life pandemics, and we will consider the role of literature in healing collective trauma and preserving hope for the future.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
In this course, you will…

• become familiar with a variety of literary and cultural texts about epidemics;
• learn to recognize common metanarratives about disease and contagion;
• identify formal features in literature and interpret the effects and meanings they produce;
• situate literary texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
• employ literary texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
• defend your claims using textual evidence and analysis;
• engage in a revision practice that empowers you to improve your written work using feedback from your instructor and peers;
• and hone your speaking, writing, and collaboration skills.

REQUIRED MATERIALS
In addition to the materials below, you will need day-to-day access to a laptop or desktop computer, Internet with web browser, Canvas, Zoom, and your UO email account.

Texts available through the Duck Store:
• Emily St. John Mandell, Station Eleven (ISBN: 9780804172448)
• Ling Ma, Severance (ISBN: 9781250214997)
• Katherine Anne Porter, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (ISBN: 9780151707553)

*Texts available online:*

• Seema Yasmin, *If God Is a Virus* (excerpts)
• Priscilla Wald, “Contagion”
• Carmen Maria Machado, “Inventory”
• Susan Sontag, “AIDS and its Metaphors”
• Edgar Allen Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death”
• Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (abridged)

**WORK EXPECTATIONS**

**Major Assignments**

• Short close reading paper (2-3 pages) due Week 3
• Comparative essay (4-5 pages) | draft due Week 6 | revision due Week 7
• Op-ed (2 pages) | due Week 10
• Final reflection (2 pages) and portfolio | due Week 11

In addition to these formal graded assignments, you will also be expected to complete surveys, participate in discussion boards, produce reading annotations, complete in-class check-ins/exit surveys, engage in peer review of classmates’ drafts, contribute to shared class notes, and partake in other informal forms of engagement and assessment, all of which will be graded complete/incomplete.

**Grading Distribution and Scale**

This class is graded using a points-based contract that rewards your labor, effort, and engagement, in addition to your mastery of course content and skills. This system gives you the flexibility to focus on earning points in the areas of the course that are best suited to your schedule, accessibility needs, and priorities, provided you meet the following minimum expectations to pass the class:

• Attend at least 14 of our 19 live classes
• Submit the three major papers (close reading, a comparative essay, and op-ed) and meet minimum requirements for each

Beyond that, fulfill the contract by earning points based on the rubric below.

• A: earn 7 points
• B: earn 6 points
• C: earn 5 points
• D: earn 4 points
• F: earn 0-3 points

The logic is that a “B” indicates meeting expectations in all areas, while an “A” indicates meeting expectations in all areas and exceeding them in at least one. However, you can mix and match points however you wish, provided you meet the minimum expectations to pass the course listed above.
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<td>Submit a complete draft and revision on time, and earn a “meets expectations” score on the assignment rubric</td>
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<td>• Exit memo</td>
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<td>Submit both memos on time and with all required components</td>
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*Grading Criteria*

Specific grading criteria for each assignment are located on the assignment prompt.
COURSE POLICIES

Late Work

- **Short assignments, drafts, and reflection memos:** these are designed to be low-stakes and build on one another; therefore, they must be completed on time in order to contribute meaningfully to your learning and others’ learning. For grading contract purposes, “on time” is defined as meeting the Canvas deadline. These assignments can be completed and marked as late in the one-week window following the due date before the assignment automatically closes.

- **Close reading, revised comparative essay, and op-ed:** You may choose to use ONE free 48-hour extension without explanation or penalty (meaning, the assignment is still considered “on time” and is eligible for “exceeds expectations” points). Simply comment in the Canvas assignment submission indicating that you are using your one free extension. There is no need to email me or to make a formal request.

Attendance

Attending 14 of our 19 live class sessions is a requirement to pass the course; attendance also impacts your score on the course grading contract, as outlined above. If you need to miss class, you must complete a Canvas survey logging the absence and indicating how you are catching up on what you missed. Although you are welcome to email me to give a head’s up about anticipated absences or to ask questions that arise as you review the material, an email exchange is NOT a substitute for this REQUIRED absence logging. In addition, it is your responsibility to review the shared notes for that day and catch up with your base group on the material you missed.

Participation

Your active engagement in this class matters for your own learning as well as for the contributions you can make to the learning of others. You are expected to:

- check the course Canvas site and your UO email account regularly for announcements and updates;
- prepare any assigned reading or homework before class on the date indicated;
- read actively, taking notes about any questions, comments, or thoughts you might raise in class;
- remain alert, engaged, and thoughtful throughout class;
- and participate fully in group discussions and activities.

Speaking up during class is easier for some than others. I will offer a variety of opportunities to participate in different modalities, but please do check in with me if you are unsure how to enter the conversation.

Content and Class Culture

The materials and subjects we study in this course will be challenging and will address controversial subjects, including racism, misogyny, heterosexism, and ableism. These issues will resonate differently for each of us depending on our own identities and experiences. In order to learn alongside and from one another, I ask that we all practice active listening and empathy. With that said, I have zero tolerance for hate speech, stereotypes, slurs, or harassment, and I will make a point to recognize and “call in” more subtle forms of harm. If our class culture impedes your learning in any way, I hope you will feel safe speaking with me about it.

Privacy

It is your ethical responsibility to respect the privacy of your classmates and what they share in class and online. It is prohibited to screenshot or record and repost material from this course on social media, even if names/identities are anonymized, without written permission from the instructor. No personally identifiable information, such as street addresses, phone numbers, or email addresses should be posted on our course Canvas site, nor should any discussion of grades.
Accessibility
I work hard to create accessible and inclusive learning environments, and I strive continually to improve. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 360 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

DEPARTMENTAL AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Honoring Native Peoples and Lands
The University of Oregon is located on Kalapuya Ilihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people. Following treaties between 1851 and 1855, Kalapuya people were dispossessed of their indigenous homeland by the United States government and forcibly removed to the Coast Reservation in Western Oregon. Today, Kalapuya descendants are primarily citizens of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and they continue to make important contributions to their communities, at UO, and across the land we now refer to as Oregon.

In following the Indigenous protocol of acknowledging the original people of the land we occupy, we also extend our respect to the nine federally recognized Indigenous nations of Oregon: the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Coquille Indian Tribe, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and the Klamath Tribes. We express our respect to the many more tribes who have ancestral connections to this territory, as well as to all other displaced Indigenous peoples who call Oregon home.

Basic Needs
Your safety and wellbeing impacts learning. Please contact resources that can help you to thrive and let me know if you need any help connecting. Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, is urged to contact the Dean of Students Office (346-3216, 164 Oregon Hall) for support. The UO Basic Needs Resource Guide also includes resources for food, housing, healthcare, childcare, transportation, technology, finances, and legal support.

Mental Wellbeing
Life in college can be very complicated. Students often feel overwhelmed or stressed, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationships, or just need help navigating challenges in their life. If you're facing such challenges, you don’t need to handle them on your own--there's help and support on campus. As your instructor if I believe you may need additional support, I will express my concerns, the reasons for them, and refer you to resources that might be helpful. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I care and that help is available. Getting help is a courageous thing to do—for yourself and those you care about.

University Health Services help students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. If you need general resources on coping with stress or want to talk with another student who has been in the same place as you, visit the Duck Nest (located in the EMU on the ground floor) and get help from one of the specially trained Peer Wellness Advocates. University Counseling Services (UCS) has a team of dedicated staff members to support you with your concerns, many of whom can provide identity-based support. All clinical services are free and confidential. Find out more by calling 541-346-3227 (anytime UCS is closed, the After-Hours Support and Crisis Line is available by calling this same number).

Academic Integrity
The University Student Conduct Code defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic
misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the instructor before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available here. Cases of clearly established plagiarism or cheating will result in an assignment grade of “0” as a minimum penalty; all incidents will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, as required by the English Department and University.

Reporting of Discrimination, Harassment, and Abuse
Any student who has experienced sexual assault, relationship violence, sex or gender-based bullying, stalking, and/or sexual harassment may seek resources and help at safe.uoregon.edu. To get help by phone, a student can also call either the UO’s 24-hour hotline at 541-346-SAFE [7244]. Students experiencing any other form of prohibited discrimination or harassment can find information and resources at investigations.uoregon.edu or contact the non-confidential Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance at 541-346-3123 or the Dean of Students Office at 541-346-3216 for help. As UO policy has different reporting requirements based on the nature of the reported harassment or discrimination, additional information about reporting requirements for discrimination or harassment unrelated to sexual assault, relationship violence, sex or gender based bullying, stalking, and/or sexual harassment is available in the Employee Responsibilities section of the Office of Investigations and Civil Rights Compliance website.

The instructor of this class, as a Student Directed-Employee, will direct students who disclose sexual harassment or sexual violence to resources that can help and will only report the information shared to the university administration when the student requests that the information be reported (unless someone is in imminent risk of serious harm or a minor). The instructor of this class is required to report all other forms of prohibited discrimination or harassment to the university administration.

UO employees, including faculty, staff, and GEs, are mandatory reporters of child abuse. This statement is to advise you that your disclosure of information about child abuse to a UO employee may trigger the UO employee’s duty to report that information to the designated authorities. Please refer to the following link for detailed information about mandatory reporting: Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect.

COVID-RELATED POLICIES

Academic Disruption
In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in this course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should immediately log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. Students are also expected to continue coursework as outlined in this syllabus or other instructions on Canvas. In the event that the instructor of this course has to quarantine, this course may be taught online during that time.

Staying Safe in Classes
As the University of Oregon continues in-person instruction, instructors and students play a key role in keeping our community healthy and safe. To prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19 in classrooms and on campus, all students and employees must:

- Comply with vaccination policy
- Wash hands frequently
- Complete daily self-checks and stay home/do not come to campus if feeling symptomatic
- Individuals with no symptoms or mild symptoms can get tested at McArthur Court through UO’s Monitoring and Assessment Program. Masks are required at COVID-19 testing sites including in line outside.
- Visit the Exposure Scenario page page for information on reporting cases.
Support
The following resources are available to you as a student.

- University Health Services or call (541) 346-2770
- University Counseling Center or call (541) 346-3277 or (541) 346-3227 (after hrs.)
- MAP Covid-19 Testing
- Corona Corps or call (541) 346-2292
- Academic Advising or call (541) 346-3211
- Dean of Students or call (541)-346-3216

Flexibility
We are in the midst of a national crisis of historic proportions that affects us each. Individually and collectively, the members of this class are facing challenges related to health and wellness, caregiving, travel and immigration restrictions, supply shortages, shipping slowdowns, employment instability, food insecurity, Internet connectivity, and other variables. I am committed to empathy, flexibility, and equity as we work together to help everyone in the class meet its core learning goals.

SCHEDULE
Readings and annotation assignments are to be completed in advance of the corresponding class.

Week 1
- Tuesday, 3/29 [Class live in person and on Zoom]: Selections from Seema Yasmin, If God Is A Virus
- Thursday, 3/31 [No live class]: Watch Priscilla Wald, “Contagion” (first 42 minutes) and complete discussion board

Week 2
- Tuesday, 4/5 [Class on Zoom]: Read and annotate Machado, “Inventory”
- Thursday, 4/7: Ma, Severance, Prologue & Chapters 1-5 (pages 1-77)

Week 3
- Tuesday, 4/12: Ma, Severance, Ch 6-12 (pages 78-147)
- Thursday, 4/14: Ma, Severance, Ch 13-18 (pages 148-219)
- Sunday, 4/17: Short close reading due at 11:59 p.m.

Week 4
- Tuesday, 4/19: Ma, Severance, Ch 19-26 (pages 220-291)
- Thursday, 4/21: Mandel, Station Eleven, Ch 1-12 (pages 1-67)

Week 5
- Tuesday, 4/26: Mandel, Station Eleven, Ch 13-26 (pages 71-164)
- Thursday, 4/28: Mandel, Station Eleven, Ch 27-41 (pages 167-228)

Week 6
- Tuesday, 5/3: Mandel, Station Eleven, Ch. 42-55 (pages 231-333)
- Thursday, 5/5: Read and annotate Susan Sontag, “AIDS and its Metaphors”
- Sunday, 5/5: Comparative essay draft due at 11:59 p.m.
Week 7

- Tuesday, 5/10: Comparative essay workshop
- Thursday, 5/12: Watch “The Story of the 1918 Flu Pandemic” and “Spanish Flu: A Warning from History”; explore Influenza Encyclopedia
- Sunday, 5/15: Comparative essay due at 11:59 p.m.

Week 8

- Tuesday, 5/17: Katherine Anne Porter, *Pale Horse Pale Rider*, 179-228
- Thursday, 5/19: Katherine Anne Porter, *Pale Horse Pale Rider*, 228-264

Week 9

- Thursday, 5/26: Read and annotate Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (abridged)

Week 10

- Tuesday, 5/31: Read selection of opinion pieces on Canvas
- Thursday, 6/2: Op ed workshop
- Sunday, 6/5: Op ed due at 11:59 p.m.

Finals Week

- **Tuesday, 6/7**: Final portfolio due at 8:00 a.m. (note that this is our scheduled exam period; there will be no live exam)