

**HISTORY 387 007 / P01 (FALL 2023)**  
**A GLOBAL HISTORY OF DISEASE:**  
**FROM THE BLACK DEATH TO *THE WALKING DEAD* AND COVID-19**

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Office Hours: By appointment on Zoom or in-person  
Office Location: Global Center, room 1202

Class Location: Horizon Hall, room 3008

Class Periods: Thursdays, 4:30 – 7:10 p.m. every OTHER week (August 24; September 7, 21; October 5, 19; November 2, 16, 30—see course schedule on Blackboard for the specific calendar plus see below for an explanation of how the timing of this course works out)

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

In this hybrid course, we will explore the sweeping historical changes that created today's world through one particular lens: disease and humans' responses to them. One major theme of this course will be the changing nature of diseases throughout the last seven centuries or so starting with the Black Death in Eurasia leading up to “our” recently ended (or did it?) COVID-19 pandemic. Another major theme of the course will be the various ways human civilizations respond to diseases—both pandemic ones like the Black Death and COVID-19, and more endemic disease environments like malaria in West Africa—and how those responses have changed (and, sometimes frustratingly, stayed the same) over time. A final major theme of the course will be scientific and medical advances over the last three-quarters of a millennium and how they have succeeded and failed to combat various diseases. We will end the course by discussing current-day depictions of disease outbreaks in popular culture, including metaphorical versions like the zombie movie and TV craze of the last decade or so (of which I am a big fan!). Suffice it to say, taking this course while living through a pandemic of our own is going to be VERY surreal. I'd like for us to deal with that surreality head-on through a variety of reflective and other activities.

ALL parts of the world will be discussed in this course. Each geographic region became enmeshed in a global system that has had dramatic (and sometimes traumatic) consequences for the world. We will study that process as it relates to disease—their cause, their spread, their cures, and their (occasional) eradication. By the end of the semester, students should have a grasp of the major disease trends underlying early modern and modern global history. To accomplish all of this, we will explore primary documents, secondary source scholarship in the form of academic journal articles and a textbook created specifically for this course, along with various videos, films, and TV. This class will consist of some lecturing but will mostly consist of interactive activities such as group work and discussion along with regular presentations by individual and groups of students.

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### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

As stated above, I created a short e-textbook for this course, mainly due to the lack of any adequate textbooks on the subject of disease in world history. The interactive e-book published/hosted by TOP HAT and the other supplemental book listed below are available at the GMU Bookstore online (and elsewhere):

1. Steven Harris-Scott, *A Global History of Disease* (Top Hat, 2018). **ISBN: 978-1773305622**
2. Optional book: Christian W. McMillen, *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2016). **ISBN: 978-0199340071**

This class will also use the TOP HAT classroom response system during lecture portions of class, which will be around 25% of most class periods (sometimes more, often less). You will be able to submit answers to in-class questions using Apple or Android smartphones and tablets or laptops. You can visit the Top Hat Overview (<https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide>) within the Top Hat

Success Center which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as providing a brief overview to get you up and running on the system. An email invitation will also be sent to you by email, but if don't receive this email, you can register by simply visiting our course website: <https://app.tophat.com>. Note: our Course Join Code is **883947**.

Top Hat will require a paid subscription, and a full breakdown of all subscription options available can be found here: [www.tophat.com/pricing](http://www.tophat.com/pricing). Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time, due to the fact that they require specific user information to troubleshoot these issues, please contact their Support Team directly by way of email ([support@tophat.com](mailto:support@tophat.com)), the in-app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491.

This class will also have a Blackboard course page that you should have access to. Most of your assignments will be turned in via Blackboard. If you haven't checked yet, you can access Blackboard through your MyMason portal.

### **INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS MASON CORE COURSE IN GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING**

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From the Core Course page of the Mason Catalog: The goal of the global understanding category is to help students see the world from multiple perspectives, reflect upon their positions in a global society, and be prepared for future engagement as global citizens. While it may include a historical perspective, global understanding courses focus primarily on a contemporary understanding of one's place in a global society.

This course is designed to meet the following Mason Core learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate understanding of how the patterns and processes of globalization make visible the interconnections and differences among and within contemporary global societies.
2. Demonstrate the development of intercultural competencies.
3. Explore individual and collective responsibilities within a global society through analytical, practical, or creative responses to problems or issues, using resources appropriate to the field.

### **WHAT IS THE MASON CORE?**

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The Mason Core is designed to complement work in a student's chosen area of study. These classes serve as a means of discovery for students, providing a foundation for learning, connecting to potential new areas of interest and building tools for success in whatever field a student pursues. Learning outcomes are guided by the qualities every student should develop as they move toward graduating with a George Mason degree. Through this and a combination of courses, the Mason Core program helps students to become:

**Critical and Creative Scholars:** Students who have a love of and capacity for learning. Their understanding of fundamental principles in a variety of disciplines, and their mastery of quantitative and communication tools, enables them to think creatively and productively. They are inquisitive, open-minded, capable, informed, and able to integrate diverse bodies of knowledge and perspectives.

**Self-Reflective Learners:** Students who develop the capacity to think well. They can identify and articulate individual beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, critically reflect on these beliefs and integrate this understanding into their daily living.

**Ethical, Inquiry-Based Citizens:** Students who are tolerant and understanding. They can conceptualize and communicate about problems of local, national and global significance, using research and evaluative perspectives to contribute to the common good.

**Thinkers and Problem-Solvers:** Students who are able to discover and understand natural, physical, and social phenomena; who can articulate their application to real world challenges; and who approach problem-solving from

various vantage points. They can demonstrate capability for inquiry, reason, and imagination and see connections in historical, literary and artistic fields.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Attendance and Participation:** *Students are expected to attend all meetings of the course.* This course is structured to reward students who come to class, complete their readings, participate, and stay on top of their assignments. You will be graded on your assignments AND your participation during interactive class activities. I expect all students to participate and your participation will be documented. To participate effectively you must read the sources that are assigned, any textbook chapters assigned, and watch any assigned videos, plus, most importantly, THINK about the materials before you come to class. Then, you should be prepared to ask questions and think critically about the material. This class is meant to be interactive and that can only occur when both you and the instructor are fully engaged. At various times throughout the semester, there will be in-class work through free writing, reflection, etc. These will be important items in my calculation of your Participation grade.

**Student Class Leaders:** Every student will, as part of a small group of 2 to 4 students, lead class for roughly 20-30 minutes on a specific topic related to that week's overall theme. We will discuss this more during the first day of class and I will model how this will work during the second class meeting. One (or at most two) group(s) of students will lead part of class every session (which, remember, is only every OTHER week!) for most of the middle weeks of the semester. There will be a few steps to this process, which we spelled out further in an assignment document and in our second class session when I model how this will work.

**Reading and Homework:** Most importantly, the *Global History of Disease* e-textbook has several questions posted throughout each of the seven chapters that will be due at class time (see the Course Calendar for specific dates). Other readings include (1) primary source readings mostly available via Blackboard (with a few available in or linked from the e-textbook); (2) secondary source readings, mostly scholarly journal articles, which will be available on Blackboard; and, optionally, (3) the supplemental *Pandemic: A Short Introduction* book. There will also be some sort of homework such as reflective activities that will take a variety of forms, either through Blackboard or Top Hat. You will see prompts for these when they are available. Most of these reflections will be short but there will also be a longer "Final Reflection" due at the end of the course.

**Quizzes:** The three online quizzes include a short Syllabus Quiz and two Map Quizzes, one on Afro-Eurasia and the other on the Americas, testing both historical and modern geographic knowledge. These quizzes will be available on Blackboard and occur during the first few weeks of the semester. There may be additional quizzes beyond those, usually done so with at least two weeks' notice.

**Research Paper:** Students will write one major paper in this course due a few weeks before the end of the semester (there will be several smaller writing assignments throughout the semester, however). As part of this assignment, there will be several steps contained within it as well. The tentative due date is listed in the course calendar document, and the specific assignment for the paper will be put up on Blackboard well in advance of its due date. The paper will be a medium-length research paper (around 6-8 pages in length) with the topic relatively wide open to what you wish to learn more about (based at least loosely on our course topics). Guidelines for submitting the paper are listed below under course policies and will be expanded upon in the paper assignment that will be in Blackboard.

**Final Video Project:** As a final video project, students will create a video on depictions of disease in popular culture. In particular, the focus of these videos will be on how disease pandemics—those based on real events or

real diseases, and others based on fictionalized outbreaks like the zombie virus, vampires, werewolves, etc.—are portrayed in movies, television shows, books, or video games. You will be asked to determine what is correct and what is not correct about the depictions of the diseases and peoples' responses to them based on what you will then know about how humans in the past have responded to similar outbreaks. After submitting the final videos, you will also be asked to watch the videos of a few of your classmates and provide peer reviews of them. See the course calendar for dates and an assignment description will flesh this out further.

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

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Last Day to Add:	Mon. 8/28
Last Day to Drop with 100% Tuition Refund:	Tues. 9/5
Last Day to Drop with 50% Tuition Refund:	Tues. 9/12
Unrestricted Withdrawal Period with 100% Tuition Liability:	Wed. 9/13 - Tues. 9/26
Selective Withdrawal Period with 100% Tuition Liability:	Wed. 9/27 - Mon. 10/23

### **GRADING AND DATES OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS**

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Dates for the various major assignments are provided below in brackets [ ] and also in the accompanying Course Calendar document. These due dates are subject to change although they will almost always be pushed later if changed at all. Final course grades will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

RESEARCH PAPER:	25%	[due Nov. 9]
FINAL VIDEO PROJECT:	20%	[due Dec. 4 with reviews due Dec. 8]
FINAL COURSE REFLECTION:	10%	[due Dec. 9]
Participation/In-Class Work:	10%	[including Top Hat classroom activities]
Quizzes; Top Hat TEXTBOOK:	20%	[due at class time, see schedule]
STUDENT CLASS LEADING:	15%	

To do well in this course you must come to class, read, take part in discussions and group work, and work hard on your assignments.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

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**Class absences:** Students are expected to attend all meetings of the course, especially given we will only be meeting EIGHT times in total. In the event that you must miss class, you are responsible for the contents of that class period. On the first day of class, you should exchange email information with the people sitting next to and/or behind/in front of you so that you have someone to ask about class content when you have to miss a class period. Absences will be considered unexcused unless you communicate with me, preferably BEFORE your absence (if possible) whether it's planned or not.

**Asynchronous Portion of Class and Workload:** Students are also expected to engage with the materials for this course in an "asynchronous" manner, meaning it will happen outside of any in-class meetings we have (see the Course Calendar document for specifics). Some of the work for this course is part of the "asynchronous" portion of the class that makes up HALF of our "in class" time while part of the work is more traditional "homework." The way this is determined from a proportion/time perspective is for a 3-credit course like this one, that equates to 9 total hours of work per week including any synchronous class time. This is why a "full class load" equates to 15 credits as that is akin to a 40-hour work week (technically 45 hours, i.e. 9 hours x 5 three-credit classes). In a traditional, 100% in-person, on-campus class, a 3-credit course would physically meet for almost 3 hours with the other 6 hours being homework (this is an average, some classes will be a bit more, others will be a bit less—our course, given that it is a 300-level course, will be right around average or possibly a little above it). For this version of the course, therefore, since we are only meeting for about 2.5 hours every OTHER week, there should be around 7 to 8 hours per week of "asynchronous" work and homework. Plan for this!

**Email:** I am happy to respond to any concerns or questions you have via email, although detailed explanations are best had face-to-face. I will send emails to the class regularly, at least once a week and occasionally more often than that. For this purpose, I will be using your GMU email account ONLY. Mason instructors use only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must use their GMU email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

I respond to emails most quickly Mondays through Fridays, between the hours of 9-5. If you email me within those hours I will often respond within 1 working day (meaning that an email received Wednesday afternoon will usually be returned by Thursday afternoon). If you email me outside of those hours, however, I will respond within 2 working days (meaning that an email received over the weekend will be returned by no later than Tuesday or an email received late Wednesday night may not be returned until Friday). It would thus behoove you to email during the week and during "normal business hours" whenever possible.

**Technology:** The use of laptop computers (or tablets or phones) is required in this class given our usage of Top Hat. You will only be permitted to work on material related to the class, however. Engaging in activities not related to the course (e.g., gaming, email, chat, social media, etc.) will result in a significant reduction in your participation grade. Please be respectful of your peers and your instructor and do not engage in activities that are unrelated to the class. Such disruptions show a lack of professionalism.

**Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:** This class and all of your work as an undergraduate are governed by GMU's Honor Code: "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, factual information, or ideas from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. We will discuss these formatting issues before the first Paper is due. Plagiarism cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.

Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited; this is incorrect. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this rule include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources—what has been called "common knowledge"—or the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly." In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might be unfamiliar with and want to investigate or debate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism.

Cheating means to get help on an assignment without permission. This includes asking another classmate to "see" their paper before writing your own paper OR hiring someone to "edit" your paper. Allowing another student to see your work without permission from the instructor is also considered cheating. You must get permission from your instructor before asking anyone outside of your professors or writing center tutors for help on assignments. If you don't understand an assignment, you need to ask your instructors for clarification rather than your classmates.

Students are expected to follow the GMU Honor Code. Cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with according to GMU guidelines. All work must reflect your own honest academic efforts. Borrowed work must be carefully cited so that it is completely transparent from where each idea in your paper is drawn (e.g. from a particular page of a book or article or from your own investigations or opinions). Quotations must be clearly marked and cited. If there is any confusion on a point of academic integrity, please contact us and ask. Respect for the intellectual property and the need to uphold academic honesty should be of great concern to all of us and we take this responsibility very seriously.

Consult the George Mason Honor Code for more information. <http://oai.gmu.edu/understanding-the-honor-code>

**Submission of Work:** All written assignments should be typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and in a 12-point font. Your name should be on the paper, and all pages should be numbered, even though you will be turning in all papers electronically. All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the deadlines for course assignments. Late work will be penalized TEN points per day. The only exceptions to these policies are when you have explicit, advance permission from your instructor. If you anticipate a problem in submitting your work on time, you must contact the instructor in a timely manner (i.e. days BEFORE the assignment is due) and you may very well be granted an extension.

**Late Adds:** If you add the class late, you must meet with the instructor as soon as possible. You will not be permitted to submit assignments that you have missed without special arrangements.

**Disability Accommodations:** Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to upholding the letter and spirit of the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. Under the administration of University Life, Disability Services implements and coordinates reasonable accommodations and disability-related services that afford equal access to university programs and activities. Students can begin the registration process with Disability Services at any time during their enrollment at George Mason University. If you are seeking accommodations, please visit <http://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500; its email is [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu) ; its phone is (703) 993-2474.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth.

An emphasis upon diversity and inclusion throughout the campus community is essential to achieve these goals. Diversity is broadly defined to include such characteristics as, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. Diversity also entails different viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives. Attention to these aspects of diversity will help promote a culture of inclusion and belonging, and an environment where diverse opinions, backgrounds and practices have the opportunity to be voiced, heard and respected.

The reflection of Mason's commitment to diversity and inclusion goes beyond policies and procedures to focus on behavior at the individual, group and organizational level. The implementation of this commitment to diversity and inclusion is found in all settings, including individual work units and groups, student organizations and groups, and classroom settings; it is also found with the delivery of services and activities, including, but not limited to, curriculum, teaching, events, advising, research, service, and community outreach.

Acknowledging that the attainment of diversity and inclusion are dynamic and continuous processes, and that the larger societal setting has an evolving socio-cultural understanding of diversity and inclusion, Mason seeks to continuously improve its environment. To this end, the University promotes continuous monitoring and self-assessment regarding diversity. The aim is to incorporate diversity and inclusion within the philosophies and actions of the individual, group and organization, and to make improvements as needed.

**Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, and Interpersonal Violence:** George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus (both physical and virtual) that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students who believe that they have been sexually harassed, assaulted or subjected to sexual misconduct to seek assistance and support. As a faculty member and designated "Responsible Employee," I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380). You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; [titleix@gmu.edu](mailto:titleix@gmu.edu)).