

SEHE172

Public Health: Then and Now

Dr. Cassia Roth, Associate Professor

M/W 5:00 PM – 6:20 PM

Sproul Hall | Room 2365

Office Hours M 3:30–5pm (INTN 3030)



“Amor não mata” (“Love Doesn’t Kill”), Brazilian Ministry of Health, 1980s

Course Description: 4 Lecture 3 hours; Extra reading 1 hour; Research 1 hour; Written work 1 hour. Surveys the modern history of societal attempts to protect the health of human populations. Centers the lived experiences of individuals and cultures in the development of public health globally.

This course surveys the modern global history of societal attempts to protect the health of human populations. It simultaneously centers the lived experiences of different individuals, cultures, and societies in the development of the field of public health on a global scale. Based in the history of medicine and science, our readings employ an interdisciplinary social science approach, with an emphasis on both historical context and anthropological, epidemiological, sociological, statistical, and cultural issues surrounding the discipline of public health both past and present. The course pays attention to the lived experience of both those who developed and those who have been targeted by public health interventions, emphasizing socio-cultural and medical influences.

Themes will include the causes of the epidemiological transition, the intersection of disease, public health, and colonialism, the gendered and racialized aspects of disease outbreak and public health responses, the tension between civil liberties and the public's health, epidemics, the development of epidemiology and statistical modes of inquiry, and the relationship between clinical medicine and public health. This course will demonstrate how studying public health responses can provide insights into the specific cultures it affected. Most importantly, it will provide a historical perspective from which we can consider the role and limits of public health in confronting current global pandemics such as SARS-CoV-2.

Learning Objectives: This course is for both SEHE students and students in public health or pre-med tracks who are interested in contextualizing their training in health-related fields. Thus, we will read both secondary literature in the fields of history, anthropology, epidemiology, statistics, and public health and primary sources created by and for public health practitioners.

This course has two sets of learning objectives:

First, we will develop a broad knowledge of the main issues, themes, and debates surrounding the global history of public health, with emphasis on the socio-cultural aspects of public health responses to disease outbreaks.

Second, we will learn to critically read and interpret a variety of primary and secondary sources from the perspective of a historian. For primary sources, we will learn to ask what perspectives the sources highlight or marginalize, to pinpoint authors' implicit understandings, and to acknowledge historical uncertainties.

You will then integrate their knowledge of primary sources into an original historical public health campaign. Please see the section on assignments below and the assignments themselves for further detail.

Course Policies

Grading Scale:

100-98: A+	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+	<60: F
93-97: A	83-86: B	73-76: C	63-66: D	
90-92: A-	80-82: B-	70-72: C-	60-62: D-	

Attendance: Because our classroom time is mainly discussion-based, attendance is required for this course. To succeed in my class, you will need to attend all classes. You are allowed **3 total absences (excused or unexcused, including for health reasons)**. After that, **your entire grade will drop by 5 points per absence**. No one should come to class if they are sick, whether with COVID-19 or any other infectious disease. I would advise banking your sick days in case you really need to use them. Additionally, I know that we are in a period of heightened immigration enforcement. If you have concerns over coming to class, please see me during office hours, so

we can come up with a plan together. The course schedule below includes several regular instruction days for which there is no in-person class.

Late Policy: I allow you to turn in *one* assignment *no longer than one week late*. For the policy to go into effect, please notify me of your intentions before the assignment is due. For all other late assignments, I will decide on a case-by-case basis.

Technology: You are welcome to use laptops, tablets, e-readers, and other technology in the classroom to assist with learning. Please refrain from using your cell phone in class.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism – taking credit for work that is not your own – will not be tolerated. Anyone who plagiarizes will receive an F in the class and will be referred to the Dean for disciplinary action. Students who take this course must abide by the [Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures](#) at UCR.

Email Policy: *I answer student emails M-F from 9am to 5pm*. Please ONLY email logistical questions/comments that I can respond to quickly. Come see me during office hours to discuss substantive questions/comments (about course material, your progress in the course, etc.). Remember, emails to your professors are a formal mode of communication. Write in complete sentences, use proper addresses (Professor or Dr. Roth), and check spelling. I do not respond to emails that do not address me respectfully or at all.

Content Notice: This class studies issues like race, class, gender, sexuality, and violence. You are required to attend all films and read all required texts. Our class aims to foster an atmosphere in which we all feel free to express our ideas without fear of judgment. Please feel free to see me in my office hours if you need to discuss class content.

Required Texts: There are no required texts in this class. All readings are available via the online learning platform.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) Policy: A full GenAI policy is available on the online learning platform. It is your responsibility to read it in its entirety. Here is a summary of my guidelines for using GenAI (programs such as ChatGPT) in your work in this class. Please note, these can change at any time during the semester.

The bottom line is that all work you submit must be your own. You should never include anything that was not written directly by you without proper citation (including quotation marks and CMS footnotes) in your assignment. Doing so will be treated as academic misconduct.

The use of GenAI is *permitted* for the following activities:

- Fine-tuning research questions;
- Drafting an outline to organize your thoughts;
- Checking grammar and style.

The use of GenAI is *forbidden* for the following activities:

- Producing any part of an assignment in its entirety including thesis statements;
- Finding and citing both primary and secondary sources;
- Copying and pasting directly from a GenAI program.

I have based these policies on ones created by [Dr. Noël Ingram](#) and [Dr. David Joyner](#).

If you use GenAI in an assignment, I require you to submit a short paragraph detailing how you used it, including but not limited to: what questions you asked of it and pinpointing specific sentences you edited in the program.

Campus Resources and Policies

Student Disability Resource Center: If you need accommodations because of a disability (permanent or temporary), please inform me as soon as possible. To request academic accommodations (for example, a note taker or special testing arrangements), you must register with the campus office called “Student Disability Resource Center” (951-827-3861). This office is responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students requesting academic accommodations, and for accommodations planning in cooperation with students and instructors, as needed and consistent with course requirements.

Other Campus Resources for UCR Students:

Academic Resource Center (including reading & writing support): <https://arc.ucr.edu/>

Mental health resources: mentalhealth.ucr.edu

Student Health Center: campushealth.ucr.edu

Case management and crisis resources: casemanagement.ucr.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services: counseling.ucr.edu

Wellness Center, preventive health resources: well.ucr.edu

Food, shelter, clothing resources: basicneeds.ucr.edu

Campus advocacy, resource, and education (confidential interpersonal violence and sexual harassment resources): care.ucr.edu

Undocumented student services: usp.ucr.edu/

Coronavirus information and resources: <https://ehs.ucr.edu/coronavirus>

Learning resources: keeplearning.ucr.edu

Research resources: keepresearching.ucr.edu

Office of Diversity, Excellence, and Inclusion: <https://diversity.ucr.edu/>

Ombudsperson (confidential resource): <https://ombuds.ucr.edu/>

Office of Title IX, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action: <https://titleix.ucr.edu/>

Administrative Resolution: <https://administrativeresolution.ucr.edu/>

NOT SURE WHERE TO GO? THEN GO HERE: <https://help.ucr.edu/>

Personal disclosures of relationship violence or sexual harassment: You are welcome to talk to me about your concerns. Before you tell me specifics, you should know that in my teaching role, I have certain mandated reporting obligations. I want you to stay in control of the situation until you decide what you want to do. So, you're welcome to tell me about your situation, in general terms, without identifying anyone. There are other resource people with whom you can talk who don't have the same reporting obligations as faculty and TAs – specifically, the Campus Advocacy, Resource and Education Program.

Assignments

All assignments *except* for discussion participation are due *before class* via Canvas.

Keeping Up, Being There, Breaking the Silence (10%): In this upper-division course, we will engage each other, courteously and constructively, in a thoughtful and reflexive conversation about the impact of race, gender, and health on diasporic experiences. Your major assignment in this seminar is simply being there each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, with reading assignments and podcasts completed, in order to “break the silence,” individually and collectively, about many important issues of race, gender, and health. Everyone is expected to participate in these conversations, which are intended to be very friendly and welcoming, but nonetheless thought-provoking and rigorous. [Text adapted from Marcia Inhorn]

Assignment Calendar (5%): You will have to complete an assignment calendar on the online learning platform. This calendar is to help you map out their coursework for all their courses over the entire quarter. This assignment is a *completion grade only*.

Midterm (20%): There is one in-class, multiple-choice midterm exam, which is closed book.

Vaccine Hesitancy Highlight (25%): You will write one, 400-word news reports on a current event related to vaccine hesitancy. The VHH will address an aspect of the topic of vaccine hesitancy in a *specific* country during the past 5 years. In the first half of the essay, you will provide an overview of the issue. You will dedicate the second half to your own analysis of the issue at hand. You must base their synthesis and analysis on three news articles from reputable news sources or peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Please cite your sources in a bibliography using Chicago Manual of Style. You will submit all written assignments (including revisions) via the online learning platform as a word document.

Although the essay is worth 25% of your overall grade, the initial essay is only the first step in the writing process. I will read and provide feedback on the essay, which you will receive no later than one week after first turning it in. By the following week, you will have to resubmit your revised essay, *and* submit a 300-word response detailing how you have revised your essay. Thus, the VHH essay is broken down into the following percentages: initial essay, 10%; revised

essay, 10%, and written response, 5%. The revised essay grade depends on you effectively incorporating my feedback.

Vaccine Hesitancy Video Assignment (15%): You will write and produce a short TikTok or Instagram Reels video and accompanying script (60–90 seconds) that communicates your policy proposal for a current event (last 5 years) related to vaccine hesitancy that you analyzed in your Vaccine Hesitancy Highlight Assignment.

Final (25%): There is one in-class, multiple-choice final exam, which is closed book.

Course Schedule

All readings, videos, and podcasts should be completed *before* class.

Week 1

March 31: Introduction

- Read: Syllabus

April 2: Concepts in Public Health– Population Thinking

- Read: “Prologue,” and “Chapter 1. Public Health,” in Alfredo Morabia, *The Public Health Approach: Population Thinking from the Black Death to COVID-19*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 1–18.

Week 2

April 7: Concepts in Public Health – Measurements and Statistics

****DUE: Assignment Calendar****

- No reading

April 9: Concepts in Public Health – Infectious Disease

- Read: David M. Morens, Gregory K. Folkers, and Anthony S. Fauci, “What is a Pandemic?” *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 200, no. 7 (2009): 1018–1021.
- Listen: Vassiliki Betty Smocovitis, [“Introduction to the History and Evolution of Infectious Disease.”](#) in *Series: Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine (14:56min).

****Add/Drop ends April 11****

Week 3

April 14: Library Research

****Meet in Rivera Library Room 140****

April 16: The Black Death and the Beginnings of Public Health

- Read: “Plague,” in Alfredo Morabia, *The Public Health Approach: Population Thinking from the Black Death to COVID-19*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, pp. 19–39.
- Read (primary source): “Petition from the Residents of Caffa, 1347,” translation by Hannah Barker.

Week 4

April 21: Epidemiology and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

- *Read:* Jim Downs, [“How the Origins of Epidemiology Are Linked to the Transatlantic Slave Trade,”](#) *Time*, September 2, 2021.
- *Read:* Richard Horton, [“Offline: A Lie at the Heart of Public Health,”](#) *The Lancet* 399, no. 10326 (2022): P704.
- *Listen:* Jim Downs, [“On the Origin of Epidemiology,”](#) *This Podcast Will Kill You*, May 10, 2022 (58:13min). [Please listen from 5:00min–43:00min]

April 23

****No in-person class****

****Due: Vaccine Hesitancy Highlight****

- *Watch:* The Invisible Shield, [“Episode 1: The Old Playbook,”](#) *PBS*, March 26, 2024 (54min).

Week 5

April 28:

****No in-person class****

- *Watch:* The Invisible Shield, [“Episode 2: Follow the Data,”](#) *PBS*, March 26, 2024 (54min).

April 30: Epidemiology in the Nineteenth Century – Cholera

- *Read:* Peter Vinten-Johansen, “Introduction,” in *Investigating Cholera in Broad Street: A History in Documents*. Broadview Press, 2020. Pp. 1–31.
- *Read (primary source):* John Snow, “On the Mode of Communication of Cholera,” [1849] in *Investigating Cholera in Broad Street: A History in Documents*. Broadview Press, 2020. Pp. 42–54.

Week 6

May 5

****In-Class Midterm Review****

May 7

****In-Class Midterm****

Week 7

May 12: *Focus on Today*

****Due: Vaccine Hesitancy Highlight R&R****

- *Watch (in-class):* John Oliver, [“RFK Jr. and HHS,” Last Week Tonight](#), April 27, 2025.
- *Read:* Beth Mole, [“RFK Rejects Cornerstone of Health Science: Germ Theory.”](#) *Ars Technica*, April 30, 2025.

May 14: *Vaccines and Controversy – Then and Now*

- *Read:* Fiona Godlee, et. al., “Wakefield’s Article Linking MMR Vaccine and Autism Was Fraudulent,” *British Medical Journal* 342, no. 7788 (2011): 64–66.
- *Read:* David Douglass, [“Two Autism Controversies.”](#)
- *Read:* Kristen Pathnagani, [“Why Criticizing Anti-Vaxxers Often Backfires.”](#) *You Can Know Things*, April 28, 2025.
- *View (primary source):* Rio de Janeiro, “Revolt Against Vaccines,” *O Malho*, October 29, 1904.

Week 8

May 19: *The Development of Risk*

- *Read:* David Shumway Jones and Gerald M. Oppenheimer, “If the Framingham Heart Study Did Not Invent the Risk Factor, Who Did?” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 60, no. 2 (2017): 131–50.

May 21: *The Origins of Fat Phobia – BMI Then and Now*

- *Read:* Holly Ann Russell, “Is It Time to Say Goodbye to BMI?” *Family and Community Health* 47, no. 1 (2024): 16–19.

Week 9

May 26

****No Class: Memorial Day****

****Due: Vaccine Hesitancy Video or Advocacy Assignment****

May 28: HIV/AIDS– Global and Local

- View (primary source): [“AIDS, Posters, & Stories of Public Health: A People’s History of a Pandemic.” National Library of Medicine.](#)
- Read: Marcos Cueto, [“Global AIDS: How Unique was Brazil?” National Library of Medicine,](#) December 5, 2024.

Week 10

June 2: Public Health Bioethics

- Reading depends on group assignment. Please see Canvas for reading assignments.

June 4

****In-Class Final Exam****

Primary Source Links:

Harvard University, Curiosity Collections, [Contagion: Historical Views of Disease and Epidemics](#)

Internet Archive, [Medical Heritage Library](#)

Johns Hopkins University, History of Medicine, [Historical Medical Images](#)

Johns Hopkins University, History of Medicine, [Primary Sources](#)

National Library of Medicine, [Digital Collections](#)

World Health Organization, [Public Health Campaigns: Getting the Message Across](#)

Yale University, [Medical Historical Library](#)

Oregon Health & Sciences University, [There’s a Cure For That: Historic Medicines and Cure-Alls in America](#)

Hansen, [“The image and advocacy of public health in American caricature and cartoons from 1860 to 1900” American Journal of Public Health](#)

Secondary Source Links:

Center for Disease Control (CDC), [Diseases and Conditions](#)

Center for Disease Control (CDC), [Past Influenza Pandemics](#)

Center for Disease Control (CDC), [Gateway to Health Communication](#)

Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, [“Series: Perspectives on ‘Race Science’ and Scientific Racism”](#)

Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, [“Trust in Science: Vaccines”](#)

Consortium for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, [“Series: Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic”](#)

Erin Walsh and Erin Allman Updyke, [This Podcast Will Kill You](#)

Johns Hopkins University, History of Medicine, [Secondary Sources](#)

National Library of Medicine, [Historical Collections](#)

Smithsonian Museum, [“Pandemic Perspectives: Stories Through Collections”](#)

World Health Organization (WHO), [Health Topics](#)

Los Angeles Review of Books, [Legacy of Eugenics](#)

Disclaimer: The syllabus is a general plan for the course; I may announce deviations to the class when necessary.

If you’ve read this syllabus in its entirety, please send me your favorite picture/meme of a cute dog at cassia.roth@ucr.edu