Faculty: Anne-Emanuelle Birn  
Associate Professor and Canada Research Chair in International Health  
ae.birn@utoronto.ca  

Time: Fridays 10 am - 12 pm, Winter 2005 plus 2 Mondays: 28 Feb & 28 March  
Place: 150 College St., Room 129  

Office Hours: Fridays 12:15-1:30pm. McMurrich Bldng, Room 109C  

Class Size: Cap of 20 students  

Summary  

Polio. Plague. Pox. How and why have such epidemics emerged in urban settings and  
how has the city shaped these diseases? This graduate seminar will use historical,  
sociological, journalistic, epidemiological, documentary film, and literary sources to  
explore urban disease outbreaks and human responses from ancient to modern times, in  
cities throughout the world. By examining cases such as plague in Florence and Hong  
Kong, yellow fever in Charleston and Veracruz, smallpox in Rio de Janeiro and Bombay,  
AIDS in New York and Kampala, SARS in Toronto and Beijing, and air pollution in  
Barcelona and Mexico City, we will seek to understand the role of urban ecological  
factors in the emergence of disease, the cultural politics of blame and responsibility, and  
the nature of social, scientific, and civic authority responses to urban epidemics.  

Objectives  

1. To become familiar with a sample of recent and classic scholarship on epidemics  
in the urban context.  

2. To increase the ability to think critically about disease outbreaks in urban settings  
through scientific, political, and cultural lenses.  

3. To develop the ability to view contemporary epidemics in historical perspective.  

4. To develop skills in oral discussion and debate and in research and writing skills.
Assignments

1) Each week one or more students will be charged with commenting on the readings (up to 10 minutes), raising questions, and leading discussion. Please prepare a 1-page handout to accompany the discussion.

2) Write a 10-page (typed, double-spaced, standard margins) short story (science fiction or historical fantasy) in which you invent an imaginary urban epidemic and build a narrative that captures the human experience and public health challenges of the epidemic. Make sure that your story includes discussion of: a) the disease and its mode of transmission (however this is understood in your story’s era); and b) the city as a key player. **Due 4 February 2005.**

3) Pick an actual urban epidemic in any city of the world at any time in the present or past and prepare a 15-page (typed, double-spaced, standard margins) background paper for a documentary film you are proposing to the CBC. Use newspapers, medical journals, and other available sources to reconstruct “all sides” of the story. A more detailed description of the assignment will be distributed in class.

**Outline and Annotated Bibliography due 28 February 2005.**
**Paper Presentations (using powerpoint) to be scheduled for last month of class.**
**Optional Draft (ungraded) due 24 March 2005.**
**Final Paper due last day of class.**

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Class Discussion</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short story</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outline and Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper presentation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assignments handed in after the due date will be penalized.

Readings

**All students are expected to do the required reading before each class session.**


Starting December 8, 2004, the readings will be available to photocopy in the short-term loan section of Gerstein library. Many of the journal articles are also available through U of T Library e-journals (on-line access), as indicated on the syllabus by this symbol: ++.
Class Sessions
7 January 2005 Introduction: Epidemics in the Urban Setting

Chapter 13. What is an epidemic? AIDS in historical perspective. pp.278-292

Chapter 3. The ecology of everyday urban life. pp. 47-81

Recommended:

14 January Plague and (Early) Modernization


Camus, Albert. The Plague (any edition) Read during New Year’s break.


Recommended:
+++Daniel Defoe. "Journal of the the Plague Year” (London 1665) (any edition)

Film: “Epidemics, products of progress”
21 January The Unsanitary City: Cholera and Typhoid


Chapter 7: Cholera goes out of control. pp. 116-139
Chapter 8: The British Connection. pp. 140-159


Recommended:


Film: “Typhoid Mary: the Most Dangerous Woman in America”

28 January Urban Medicine in the “Tropics”: Yellow Fever and Smallpox


**Recommended by way of contrast:**

4 February **Public Health and Morality: Syphilis in the City**

**Short Story Due**


11 February **AIDS and the New World Order**


Film: “Welcome to the new world order: AIDS in Vietnam”

18 February **NO CLASS-Reading week**
28 February Public Health, Prosperity, and Polio

**Monday!**  **Outline and Annotated Bibliography due**


Film: "Conquering the Crippler: History of Polio in Canada"

4 March Persistent Poverty and the Surging and Resurging of Tuberculosis

Student Presentations


Recommended:


11 March Respiratory Globalization, Part I: Influenza

Student Presentations

Chapter 2. The advance of the influenza virus. pp. 17- 36
Chapter 3. Three explosions Africa, Europe and America. pp. 37-41


Film: “Influenza 1918”
18 March Respiratory Globalization, Part II: SARS
** Optional Draft Due 24 March in Prof. Birn’s mailbox by 5pm**
Student Presentations

++“Renewal of Public Health in Canada” A report of the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health October 2003, passim
Available at: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/protection/warnings/sars/learning/index.htm
Also peruse website: http://www.sarssickness.com/sars_history.htm

28 March Respiratory Globalization, Part III: Asthma and Air Pollution
!!Monday!! Student Presentations


++ Guest editorials by Devra Davis et al. and David Bates in Environmental Health Perspectives December 2002, 110(12):A734-5.

Peruse Series on pollution in Mexico City:
“Mexico City losing gains in air quality, more and more cars put city in a pollution jam.” Chicago Tribune, Jul 5, 2001.
**1 April** 
**Urban Flames: Fire and Heat Waves**  
**Student Presentations**


OR


**Final Evening Session: Date/place to be decided  (Week of 4 April)**

**A Better Future? The Healthy Cities Movement**  
**Final paper due**
