Economics 125-01
Economics and Epidemics

Spring 2014
Monday, Wednesday 2:40 pm – 4:00 pm
Room: SCIE139

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Office Hours:
  Sunday 1-3 pm
  Mon, Wed noon-1:40 pm

Course Objectives

The principal goals of this course are to improve your writing and your economic reasoning skills. The readings and class discussions will examine the effects of major epidemics and the ways in which individuals and societies have sought protection from epidemics. The course will examine the rationales for government intervention in markets to combat epidemic diseases and will emphasize the pivotal role of the production of information about the causes of epidemic disease and the effectiveness of cures. As examples of epidemics, we will read about the Plague of 17th Century England, the cholera epidemic of 19th Century London, a Smallpox outbreak in Washington D.C. in 1894 and the battle against malaria over the centuries. This course is a First Year Initiative course and is limited to first-year students.

Course Materials

Required Books:


Contacting Me/Seeking Assistance

The best way to reach me outside office hours is via e-mail. You are encouraged to visit me regularly during my office hours. You can always talk to me before or after lecture.

Course Requirements

Essays: Students will write 4 essays, the first 3 being less than 500 words and the last being less than 1,500 words. The last will involve both a first draft and final draft. Also, you will be given an opportunity to re-write one of the first three essays. The dates that the essays are due are listed in the Reading and Essay Assignments section of the syllabus. All essays are due prior to class on the day listed and must be e-mailed to me as an attachment. No extensions will be given.

Grading

- Each essay and the rough draft of the 4th essay is worth 18.5% (5\times18.5 = 92.5\%)
- Class participation is worth 7.5%
- Bonus for perfect attendance / penalty for missing more than 2 classes.

Essays are graded based on the clarity of the writing, the quality of the economic reasoning, the relevance of the evidence presented, and proper referencing using the style of the American Economic Review. Excellent essays are enjoyable to read and teach the reader something he or she doesn’t already know. Poor essays are a chore to read, because they are disorganized, littered with misspellings, poorly punctuated or lacking an interesting thesis.

Cases of plagiarism will be taken to the Honor Board. Plagiarism is a serious offence, which harms the offender’s growth as a writer and undermines our collective effort to learn from one another. It is a lousy thing to do. Examples of plagiarism are (1) cutting and pasting (and scrambling) other peoples’ words into to your essays, (2) paraphrasing other peoples’ words without proper referencing, (3) failing to acknowledge ideas that originated elsewhere, pretending that they are yours, (4) submitting an essay written for another course.
TOPIC OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS (all readings are available via the Wesleyan University’s library using Lexis/Nexis, JStor and other online services.)

Mon. 1/27  **Smallpox in Washington D.C.**

*Washington Times.* 1894D. “Progress of the Plague: Including two suspect cases, nine is now the total affected,” October 26.

Wed. 1/29  **Smash Season: The New York Express Derailment**


Mon. 2/3  **What Causes Scurvy?**


Wed. 2/5  **Price Gouging during Emergencies**

**Essay 1** due at the beginning of class (e-mail me the essay as an attachment. It must be less than 500 words)

Mon. 2/10  **Did the Polio Vaccine Work?**


**Wed. 2/12**  The Doctors’ Plague

Nuland, Sherwin B. *The Doctors’ Plague.* Chapters 1-5.

Levitt, Steven and Stephen Dubner. “The Fix is In—And it’s cheap and simple.” *Superfreakonomics,* chapter 4.

**Mon. 2/17**  The Doctors’ Plague

Nuland, Sherwin B. *The Doctors’ Plague.* Chapters 6-Afterword.


**Wed. 2/19**  Epidemic of Sports Injuries, Applications and Smart Drugs?

*Essay 2* due at the beginning of class (e-mail me the essay as an attachment. It must be less than 500 words)

Spaniel, William. “Game Theory 101: The Prisoner’s Dilemma,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lotsMu1J8fA


**Mon. 2/24**  Railway Gauge Dilemmas


**Wed. 2/26**  Battle of the Sexes


**Mon. 3/3**  Overview of the Plague

Brooks, Catherine, 2002. *The Year of Wonders,* pp. 3-78

**Wed. 3/5**  
**Did Clothing Spread the Plague?**


**3/10-3/21**  
**Spring Vacation**

**Mon. 3/24**  
**No Class-Harrington’s in Florida watching Softball**

**Essay 3** due at the beginning of class (e-mail me the essay as an attachment. It must be less than 500 words)  

**Wed. 3/26**  
**Opium Use in the Time of the Plague**


**Mon. 3/31**  
**Malaria**

*The Fever, Chps. 1-3*

**Wed. 4/2**  
**Malaria**

**Optional Rewrite of 1 of first 3 Essays** due at the beginning of class  
*The Fever, Chps. 4-6*

**Mon. 4/7**  
**Malaria**

*The Fever, Chps. 7-10*

**Wed. 4/9**  
**HPV Vaccine: Too Few Being Vaccinated?**


**Mon. 4/14**  
**HPV Vaccine: Too Many?**


Wed. 4/16  **Sleeping Sickness**


Mon. 4/21  **Ghost Map**


Wed. 4/23  **Meetings to Discuss Final Paper**

Mon. 4/28  **Ghost Map**


Wed. 4/30  **Ghost Map**

**Final Draft of Essay 4** due at the beginning of class

Mon. 5/5  **Ghost Map**

Johnson, Steven. 2006. *The Ghost Map*, Pages 111-228

Wed. 5/7  **Wrap-up: Writing Economic Essays about Epidemic Disease**

**Final Draft of Essay 4** due at the beginning of class