

# Designing Disease: Modern Media in the Age of Pandemics

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Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

**Course prefix:** LMC

**Course number:** 3318

**Section:** RMZ

**CRN (you may add up to five):**  
35481

**Instructor First Name:** Jennifer

**Instructor Last Name:** Orth-Veillon

**Semester:** Spring

**Academic year:** 2026

## **Course description:**

Covid, despite modern advances in medical technology, taught us that pandemics are not just about medical or biological phenomena. Preventing the contagion and controlling the outbreak of information gleaned –both accurate and inaccurate–proved almost as challenging as containing and curing the virus. Via the lens of world literature, film, and media, this class will explore ethical questions throughout the history of biology and medicine during pandemics. From the Middle Ages to the contemporary world, we will look at representations of health, disease, and the medical establishment, and the cultural implications of medical innovation. Along with literature, film, and media, students will consult a variety of scientific and cultural artifacts that will add to ethical discussions about pandemics. Over the course of the semester we will reflect on the profound assumptions rooted in the language, images, and media used over time to deal with disease and pandemics.

And, since we are in Metz, we will put special emphasis on Europe, France, and the Alsace-Lorraine region as we take required Friday outings that enhance our inquiry. For example, we will visit WWI sites to learn about war's role during the Spanish flu. We will also travel to Colmar to view the Isenheim Altarpiece to discover art's role in health communication as well as to the Fort de Queuleu concentration camp in Metz to understand Nazi ideology regarding the human body.

## **Course learning outcomes:**

- Through course readings and discussions, students will demonstrate knowledge of the origins and types of pandemic literature and media.

- Students will be able to conduct close textual analyses of selected pandemic writing and research.
- Through course readings and discussions, students will demonstrate knowledge of the moral and ethical issues involved in the act of writing about pandemics.
- Write lucid, well-constructed arguments analyzing and interpreting texts and artifacts.
- Synthesize primary and secondary readings to completed an extended project on the course theme.
- Students will utilize travel writing as a tool for analysis of cultural and political issues relevant to pandemics in Europe, Metz, Alsace-Lorraine, and France.
- Understand basic concepts of intercultural sensitivity, worldview structures and mindful learning
- Situate Metz, France and the Grand Est region and Europe in broad historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts
- Develop and sharpen critical thinking skills and apply them to concepts and debates around pandemics, identity, globalization, and notions of globalism and global citizenship
- Understand and analyze socio-cultural and political developments and current societal debates in France and Europe and be capable of considering these phenomena in cross-cultural, cross-regional and cross-national contexts about disease and pandemics.

### **Required course materials:**

Albert Camus, *The Plague*,

Bernard Marie-Koltès, *Roberto Zucco*

Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba Black Witch of Salem*

All other texts, extracts from texts, and films will be available on the course Canvas site

### **Grading policy:**

Students are expected to read and prepare for intense class discussion and class work, complete one group project and one individual project, participate in class outings, and accurately respond to reading quizzes.

### **Grade Breakdown and Brief Assignment Description:**

- Case History Group activity. In a small group, you will work with a small group to compile a mini case history of a person found in a literary work we study using real

medical evidence and history about a pandemic: 10%

- Ft. de Queuleu/Colmar photo essay outing assignment: On this outing, you will be asked to compile a thematic series of photographs from the sites to accompany a short essay 30%
- Small group presentation project on one work of literature and one pandemic (individual element included): with 1-2 other students, you will give a presentation on one work of literature, film, or media and its corresponding pandemic: 30%
- Participation - see below for description: 20%
- Reading Quizzes: for each work consulted, you will be given a multiple choice short, factual reading comprehension quiz. There will be about 10 quizzes over the semester and I drop the lowest grade: 10%

=100%

## **Grading Scale**

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

- A 90-100% Excellent (4 quality points per credit hour)
- B 80-89% Good (3 quality points per credit hour)
- C 70-79% Satisfactory (2 quality points per credit hour)
- D 60-69% Passing (1 quality point per credit hour)
- F 0-59% Failure (0 quality points per credit hour)

See <http://registrar.gatech.edu/info/grading-system> for more information about the grading system at Georgia Tech.

## **Participation and Classroom Conduct**

Good participation entails not only speaking and sharing your thoughts on a regular basis, but also being considerate and respecting the views of others. To earn high points in the participation part of the final grade, students will have demonstrated their awareness of the different functions of classroom comments by:

1. varying their discussion strategies,
2. considering what they say before they say it,

3. taking intellectual risks, and

4. always respecting the feelings of peers by not interrupting classmates while speaking and acknowledging interesting ideas.

### **Rubrics and Detailed Assignment Descriptions**

For each assignment, you will receive a detailed assignment description well in advance of the deadline, which will include the grading rubric. I aim to return your assignments graded within one week of the due date. Delays may be longer with long travel weekends.

### **Attendance policy:**

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You are required to attend all classes and excursions. You can miss a maximum of 2 class days, no questions asked. Excursions count as classes, but they do not count in the allotted two days of absences. The excursion days entail assignments linked the outing that can only be completed on-site.

Each unexcused absence after 2 will result in 1 point deducted from your final grade. You must have approval and justification from the GTE administration in writing for an absence to be excused and not counted toward your 2 absences.

Coming to class late and leaving early for an unexcused reason will result in an absence. This includes, among other things, leaving early to make a train or plane for independent travel. Coming more than 15 minutes to class for an unexcused reason will result in an absence. Leaving up to 15 minutes early with an unexcused reason will also result in an absence for that day. If you need to leave class early or come late for an excused reason, you must have approval and justification from the GTE administration in writing.

Cancelled or late trains and flights, travel snafus, travel with friends or family DO NOT count as excused unless you have administrative approval. This means written permission from Paul Voss, the Dean Representative.

All extensions must be pre-approved before the due date by the instructor and, if deemed necessary by the instructor, justified by the Gatech administration. Missing class does not automatically grant you an extension on an assignment due date.

### **Academic honesty/integrity statement:**

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's

academic integrity policy.

**Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):**

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Arts, Humanities & Ethics area.

Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad Orienting Question:

- How do I interpret the human experience through creative, linguistic, and philosophical works?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following Learning Outcome:

- Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts in English or other languages, or of works in the visual/performing arts.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following Career-Ready Competencies:

- Ethical Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Intercultural Competence