

History of Medicine

Last Updated: Fri, 01/02/2026

Course prefix: HTS

Course number: 3087

Section: A

CRN (you may add up to five):

35000

Instructor First Name: Dana

Instructor Last Name: Viezure

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

This course is an exploration of health, disease, and medicine in the ancient world, going from about 500 BCE to about 500 CE. While the course is primarily focused on the Greek and Roman world, we will frequently touch on several other ancient traditions, such as those of the Ancient Near East, India, and China. A Reacting to the Past game/simulation unit will give us an opportunity to study the reception of Greco-Roman medical ideas in medieval Europe. Like real historians, we will work with the messy, but fascinating, surviving ancient evidence (texts and archaeological data). Through a combination of lecture and classroom discussion we will explore broad topics that will help us patch together a history of ancient medicine: e.g., understandings of health and underlying theories of how bodies functioned, common diseases and treatments, practitioners and standards of practice. A critical approach will guide us in confronting some of the frustrating features of our ancient evidence: incomplete preservation, difficulties of attribution and dating, difficulties of interpretation, standards of handling evidence different from our own, unchecked biases, underrepresentation of different socio-economic categories, etc.

Course learning outcomes:

1. Students will explain how different ancient societies understood the body, health, and disease
2. Students will compare medical ideas and practices across civilizations and evaluate how social, economic, and religious factors shaped approaches to health and healing.
3. Students will evaluate sustainable, holistic approaches to health and healing in the ancient world, and reflect on the contemporary relevance of these approaches as potential sources of solutions to problems identified under UN SDGs (especially UN SDG #3)

4. Students will analyze complex historical data, both from primary and secondary sources, and practice using the historian's toolkit.
5. Students will collaborate to create a virtual exhibition space that provides key insights into the history of ancient medicine and highlights the relevance of the course material to the UN SDGs (including designing historically-inspired solutions to contemporary problems that the SDGs are intended to address).

Required course materials:

Kristi Upson-Saia, Heidi Marx-Wolf, and Jared Secord, Medicine, Health, and Healing in the Ancient Mediterranean (500 BCE-600 CE): A Sourcebook (2023); ISBN: 9780520299702

Grading policy:

90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, 0-59=F

Attendance and participation in class discussion. NB: this is a discussion-based course with weekly reading assignments of considerable complexity. Assigned primary source readings must be done prior to each class; this is essential to meaningful participation in class discussion. – 20%

Reading quizzes – 30%

Reacting To The Past – 20% (10% speaking/participation; 10% 1-2 short papers)

Presentation (work in progress for virtual exhibition) – 10%

Virtual exhibition and accompanying research portfolio – 20%

Attendance policy:

Attendance is recorded daily. You are allowed two unexcused absences and one make-up quiz. For every additional unexcused absence you will lose $\frac{1}{4}$ of your participation grade. Excused absence=documented illness, documented emergency, and Institute-approved absences; some examples of absences that may not be excused: travel outside of Institute programs, errands, work-/internship-/interview-related absences).

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.

Students are expected to abide by the Georgia Tech Academic Honor Code . Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. According to our Academic Honor Code, plagiarism is the “submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, without adequate credit notations indicating the authorship.”

Use of AI-generated content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism. The penalty for plagiarism will be a “0” grade for the assignment/test in question. A repeat offense will result in a failing grade for the course. All cases of plagiarism will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity.

Core IMPACTS statement(s) (if applicable):

Core Impacts

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the Social Sciences 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 understand human experiences and connections?

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

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

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

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking
- Persuasion