

**SOCI 374: Epidemics—Global Responses to Disease Outbreak and Public Health Crises  
Syllabus for Fall 2021**

Professor Catherine Tan  
(She/Her/Hers)

Class meeting:  
KH 134  
Tuesdays at 10:30am to 12:30pm

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Office Phone: (845) 437-5509  
(Do not call me. I never pick up.)

Office Hours:  
Blodgett Hall #304D  
Tuesdays and Thursdays between 3:00pm-4:00pm

**Course Description**

What is an “epidemic”? How are epidemics given social and cultural meaning? How do epidemics mobilize action? This course approaches epidemics (and the idea of “epidemic”) as vehicles to explore the social structures and mechanisms that shape the way societies conceptualize and respond to public health crises. For instance, how does stigma shape experiences with AIDS/HIV? How might these experiences affect access to healthcare? Affect relationships and ties? Students will also consider factors that facilitate the construction of “post-modern” epidemics. For instance, Autism Spectrum Disorder prevalence has increased precipitously over the last twenty years. Autism is estimated to affect 1 in 54 children in the United States and 1 in 38 in South Korea. But exactly what is an autism “epidemic”? What are the factors contributing to this rise? How is the term “epidemic” mobilized? –And what does this achieve? Students will engage with sociological and public health scholarship on HIV/AIDS, Ebola, SARS, Zika, measles, autism, and opioid addiction. Furthermore, in light of our current global pandemic, students will also examine the case of COVID-19 from a sociological perspective.

*NOTE: This is not an epidemiology class. A sociological investigation of epidemics/pandemics focuses on the social structures and mechanisms that shape understandings of and approaches to epidemics/pandemics. It also considers how health crises impact different groups, and in many cases, exacerbate social inequalities.*

**Pandemic Policies**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created multiple uncertainties, which demands flexibility and patience from faculty, students, and staff. By unanimous agreement of the Sociology Department, instructors may require students wear masks in classrooms, or may shift their course to either a hybrid or fully remote format, as conditions related to the pandemic, the college, and our learning change. Currently, the plan for this course is to *meet in person* with no broadcast/recording on Zoom. Masks are required when seated inside our classroom until the college policies change.

*What if EVERYONE moves online?*

We may move online completely at any given moment. If we have to move all students online, then I will host synchronous meetings. These meetings will be recorded and students who are attending asynchronously will have access to the videos.

At any time, if you ever have any safety concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Course Structure and Assignments**

**Required Books**

If for any reason you are not able to access these books, please contact me.

Lakoff, Andrew. 2017. *Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (Ebook available through Vassar library)

Porter, Natalie. 2019. *Viral Economies: Bird Flu Experiments in Vietnam*: University of Chicago Press. (If you need to, you can photocopy my copy.)

Reich, Jennifer A. 2016. *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*: New York University Press. (Hardcopy available through the Vassar Library)

Richards, Paul. 2016. *Ebola: How a People's Science Helped End an Epidemic*. African Arguments. Zed books. (Hardcopy available through the Vassar Library)

**Office Hours**

“Office hours” are times reserved outside of our usual class meetings for students to say hello, have tea, and discuss and/or ask questions about the course materials and concepts with me 1:1. While you are not required to attend office hours, I *strongly encourage* students to see me *at least twice* during the semester even if you do not have a specific question (I will start the conversation. It will not be awkward, I promise). If you are unable to attend scheduled office hours, please email me to set up individual appointments.

**Assignments and Points**

Class Participation*	25
Memos One	25
Memo Two	25
Memo Three	25
Memo Four	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>

\*Whether in-person or online, class participation includes engaging in discussions, asking questions, and attending classes.

**Memos**

Instead of a midterm and final, I will have four memos due throughout the semester. Each memo will be 1.5 to 2.5 pages (roughly, 975 to 1625 words) following formatting expectations (see below). Memos will ask students to reflect on the themes/concepts of the previous weeks, engage with the readings, offer their analysis, and demonstrate their understanding of the materials. Because memos are short, students are expected to write efficiently AND effectively—these are important skills to learn and practice.

**Formatting**

Please give yourself enough time to make sure that your assignments are in compliance with the formatting expectations before turning in your work. When in doubt, use THIS syllabus as a model. If you have trouble making this format changes on your word processing program, please consult with the college tech services.

- Font: Times New Roman
- Size: 11
- Margins: 1-inch all around
- Left alignment
- Single-spaced
- Consistent in-text references and bibliography (I prefer ASA or Harvard citation styles)

<b>Classroom Etiquette for In-Person and Online</b>
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**Engagement**

Maintaining an academic, respectful, and honest classroom environment is a collective effort. I am relying on you to please:

- Be respectful of others’ ideas and arguments. This means providing space for fruitful debate.
- Do not interrupt each other. You do not have to raise your hand to speak, but please allow the current speaker to complete their thoughts before sharing.
- Arrive to class on time.
- Complete and submit your assignments on the days they are due. I rarely grant extensions.
- For in-person students, you are allowed to use your laptop for taking notes.
- For in-person students, improper use of laptops and cellphones will impact your participation grade.

**Email Policy**

You may email me any time/day, but please do not expect an immediate response. I try to respond to emails within 24 hours. If you do not hear from me within 24 hours, please follow up. I only reply to emails Monday-Friday (so, I might not respond to emails received on Friday until the next Monday). In your email subject line, include the name of the course (i.e., SOCI 374). In the body of your email, please use a proper address (e.g., Dear Prof. Tan) and signature.

<b>College Resources &amp; Policies</b>
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**Title IX Reporting Responsibility and Resources**

Vassar College is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these incidents, know that you are not alone. Vassar College has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware all Vassar faculty members are “responsible employees,” which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone privately, you can contact any of the following on-campus resources:

- Counseling Service ([counselingservice.vassar.edu](http://counselingservice.vassar.edu), 845-437-5700)

- Health Service (healthservice.vassar.edu, 845-437-5800)
- Charlotte Strauss-Swanson, SAVP (Sexual Assault and Violence Prevention) director (savp.vassar.edu, 845-437-7863)
- SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) advocate, available 24/7 by calling the CRC at 845-437-7333

The SAVP website and the Title IX section of the EOAA website (eoaa.vassar.edu/title-ix/) have more information, as well as links to both on- and off-campus resources.”

### Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is a very serious matter (cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, etc.) and will be dealt with accordingly. Students should expect a failing grade for the assignment/exam. The incident will also be reported to the Department Chair and the Dean. For more information on academic honesty, please refer to this link: <https://deanofthecollege.vassar.edu/documents/college-regulations/j/>

### Academic Accommodations

Academic accommodations are available for students registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (AEO). Students in need of disability (ADA/504) accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

<b>Course Schedule</b>
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This schedule indicates the themes and readings of each week and any assignments due. This schedule is tentative and may change to reflect our progress as a class.

Each week’s assigned readings must be completed *before* class. Please be prepared to discuss the assigned readings in class/online.

\*NOTE: Readings may change (except for the books)

**Week One            Introduction/Toward a Sociology of Epidemics**

**Aug 31**                Syllabus.

Dingwall, Robert, Lily M. Hoffman and Karen Staniland. 2013. "Introduction: Why a Sociology of Pandemics?". *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):167-73.

**Week Two            Cultural Portrayals of Epidemics**

**Sept 7**                Tomes, Nancy. 2002. "Epidemic Entertainments: Disease and Popular Culture in Early-Twentieth-Century America." *American Literary History* 14(4):625-52.

Sontag, Susan. 1977. "Part II: AIDS and Its Metaphors." *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador.

Varma, Saiba. 2020. "A Pandemic Is Not a War: Covid-19 Urgent Anthropological Reflections." *Social Anthropology*.

Lepore, Jill. 2020. "What Our Contagion Fables Are Really About." *The New Yorker*, March 23, 2020.

[Prof. Tan hands out memo one prompt]

**Week Three Post-modern pandemics**

**Sept 14** Boero, Natalie. 2007. "All the News That's Fat to Print: The American "Obesity Epidemic" and the Media." *Qualitative Sociology* 30(1):41-60.

Waggoner, Miranda R. 2013. "Parsing the Peanut Panic: The Social Life of a Contested Food Allergy Epidemic." *Social Science & Medicine* 90:49.

Clarke, Juane N. 2011. "Magazine Portrayal of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD): A Post-Modern Epidemic in a Post-Trust Society." *Health, Risk & Society* 13(7/8):621.

**Week Four Risk and Preparation**

**Sept 21** Lakoff, Andrew. 2017. *Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (ALL)

**Memo 1 due on Thursday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> by 11:59pm**  
(Covers content from Week One to Three)

**Week Five Communicating Emergencies**

**Sept 28** McCormick, Sabrina and Kristoffer Whitney. 2013. "The Making of Public Health Emergencies: West Nile Virus in New York City." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):268-79.

Sherlaw, William and Jocelyn Raude. 2013. "Why the French Did Not Choose to Panic: A Dynamic Analysis of the Public Response to the Influenza Pandemic." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):332-44.

Washer, Peter. 2004. "Representations of SARS in the British Newspapers." *Social Science & Medicine* 59(12):2561-71.

Roy, Melissa, Nicolas Moreau, Cécile Rousseau, Arnaud Mercier, Andrew Wilson, Jean-Pierre Dozon and Laëtitia Atlani-Duault. 2021. "Constructing Ebola Martyrs, Warriors, and Saviours: Online Heroisation in a Context of Risk and Unease." *Health, Risk & Society* 23(1-2):73-91.

Zhang, Liwei, Huijie Li and Kelin Chen. 2020. "Effective Risk Communication for Public Health Emergency: Reflection on the Covid-19 (2019-Ncov) Outbreak in Wuhan, China." Pp. 64 in *Healthcare*, Vol. 8: Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute.

Durodie, Bill. 2011. "H1n1 -- the Social Costs of Elite Confusion." *Journal of Risk Research* 14(5):511-18. (Quick read)

[Prof. Tan hands out memo two prompt]

**Week Six Experimentation and Intervention**

**Oct 5** Porter, Natalie. 2019. *Viral Economies: Bird Flu Experiments in Vietnam*: University of Chicago Press. (ALL)

**Week Seven Politics of Prevention and Disease Control**

**Oct 12** McCoy, Charles Allan. 2016. "SARS, Pandemic Influenza and Ebola: The Disease Control Styles of Britain and the United States." *Social Theory & Health* 14(1):1-17.

Hoffman, Lily M. 2013. "The Return of the City-State: Urban Governance and the New York City H1N1 Pandemic." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):255-67.

Davis, Mark, Paul Flowers and Niamh Stephenson. 2014. "'We Had to Do What We Thought Was Right at the Time': Retrospective Discourse on the 2009 H1N1 Pandemic in the UK." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 36(3):369-82.

French, Martin and Eric Mykhalovskiy. 2013. "Public Health Intelligence and the Detection of Potential Pandemics." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):174-87.

**Memo 2 due on Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup> (or October 21<sup>st</sup>, you decide for yourself) by 11:59pm**

(Covers content from Week Four to Six)

**Week Eight FALL BREAK**

**Oct 19** \*\*\* NOTHING YAY \*\*\*

**Week Nine Politics of Prevention: Vaccines, Part One**

**Oct 26** Reich, Jennifer A. 2016. *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*: New York University Press. (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, Conclusion)

[Prof. Tan hands out memo three prompt]

**Week Ten Politics of Prevention: Vaccines, Part Two**

**Nov 2** Manca, Terra. 2018. "'One of the Greatest Medical Success Stories:' Physicians and Nurses' Small Stories About Vaccine Knowledge and Anxieties." *Social Science & Medicine* 196:182-89.

Chadwick, Andrew et al. 2021. "Online Social Endorsement and Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in the United Kingdom." *Social Media + Society* 7(2).

Berezin, Mabel and Alicia Eads. 2016. "Risk Is for the Rich? Childhood Vaccination Resistance and a Culture of Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 165:233.

Emanuel, Ezekiel J., et al. 2020. "An Ethical Framework for Global Vaccine Allocation." *Science* 369(6509):1309-12.

Phelan, Alexandra L, Mark Eccleston-Turner, Michelle Rourke, Allan Maleche and Chenguang Wang. 2020. "Legal Agreements: Barriers and Enablers to Global Equitable Covid-19 Vaccine Access." *The Lancet* 396(10254):800-02.

**Week Eleven      Magnification of Social Inequalities**

**Nov 9**      Farmer, Paul E., Bruce Nizeye, Sara Stulac and Salmaan Keshavjee. 2006. "Structural Violence and Clinical Medicine." *PLOS Medicine* 3(10):e449-e49.

Sparke, Matthew and Dimitar Anguelov. 2012. "H1N1, Globalization and the Epidemiology of Inequality." *Health & Place* 18(4):726-36.

Pirtle, Whitney N Laster. 2020. "Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States." *Health Education & Behavior*.

Igra, Mark, Nora Kenworthy, Cadence Luchsinger and Jin-Kyu Jung. 2021. "Crowdfunding as a Response to Covid-19: Increasing Inequities at a Time of Crisis." *Social Science & Medicine* 282:1.

**Memo 3 due on Thursday, November 11<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm**  
(Covers content from Week Seven to Ten)

**Week Twelve      Racializing Epidemics and Racialized Experiences**

**Nov 16**      Netherland, Julie and Helena Hansen. 2017. "White Opioids: Pharmaceutical Race and the War on Drugs That Wasn't." *BioSocieties* 12(2):217-38.

Eichelberger, Laura. 2007. "SARS and New York's Chinatown: The Politics of Risk and Blame During an Epidemic of Fear." *Social Science & Medicine* 65(6):1284-95.

Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. "Color-Blind Racism in Pandemic Times." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 0(0):2332649220941024.

Tan, Catherine and Janani Umamaheswar. 2021. "Structural Racism and the Experience of "Tightness" During the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*:1-22.

*Extras:*

Li, Yao and Harvey L. Nicholson Jr. 2021. "When "Model Minorities" Become "Yellow Peril"—Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Sociology Compass* 15(2):e12849.

Carter, Chelsey and Ezelle Sanford, III. 2020. "The Myth of Black Immunity: Racialized Disease during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Black Perspectives*. <https://www.aaihs.org/racializeddiseaseandpandemic/>

Bearman, Jean and Catherine J. Taylor. 2020. "#courageisbeautiful but PPE is better: white supremacy, racial capitalism, and COVID-19"  
<https://contexts.org/blog/courageisbeautiful-but-ppe-is-better-white-supremacy-racial-capitalism-and-covid-19/>

**Week Thirteen Thanksgiving Break**

**Nov 23** Independent catch-up for SOCI 255. Not meeting in person.  
 [Prof. Tan hands out memo four prompt Thursday]

**Week Fourteen Gendered Experiences**

**Nov 30** Smith, Julia. 2019. "Overcoming the 'Tyranny of the Urgent': Integrating Gender into Disease Outbreak Preparedness and Response." *Gender & Development* 27(2):355-69.

Ribeiro, Barbara, Sarah Hartley, Brigitte Nerlich and Rusi Jaspal. 2018. "Media Coverage of the Zika Crisis in Brazil: The Construction of a 'War' Frame That Masked Social and Gender Inequalities." *Social Science & Medicine* 200:137.

Godderis, Rebecca and Kate Rossiter. 2013. "'If You Have a Soul, You Will Volunteer at Once': Gendered Expectations of Duty to Care During Pandemics." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 35(2):304-08.

Umamaheswar, Janani and Catherine Tan. 2020. "'Dad, wash your hands': Gender, care work, and attitudes toward risk during COVID-19." *Socius*. 6: 1-14

**Week Fifteen Lay Expertise  
 Case Study: AIDS & Ebola**

**Dec 7** Epstein, Steven. 1995. "The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials." *Science, Technology & Human Values* 20(4):408-37.

Richards, Paul. 2016. Ebola: How a People's Science Helped End an Epidemic. African Arguments. Zed books. (Introduction, Chapter 1, 5, 6, Conclusion)

**Memo 4 due on Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup> by 11:59pm**  
 (Covers content from Week Eleven to Fifteen)