

Course delivery with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 landscape may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

ENG2091G 550: Pandemic! Narratives of Contagion and Disease **Department of English and Cultural Studies** **Huron University College** **Winter 2022**

Class: Mondays 6:30PM-9:30PM

Room: W108

Instructor: Dr. Sarah Blanchette (she/her)

Email: sarah.blanchette@uwo.ca

Office Hour: Wednesdays 2:30-4:30pm (or by virtual appointment)

Land Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay-wuk) and Chonnonton (Chun-ongk-ton) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. With this, I respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service. (This statement is from Western's [More than Words Land Acknowledgement](#)).

Course Description:

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak to be a global pandemic. COVID-19 is the deadliest pandemic in human history since the so-called “Spanish flu” or H1N1 influenza pandemic of 1918-1920 that killed approximately 20 – 50 million people across the globe. Consequently, all of us have experienced an extraordinary historical event that has radically altered our society and our lives. To engage with the traumatic realities of the pandemic and its after-effects, we must arguably rely on storytelling as a means of making sense of our experiences and to move forward to a post-pandemic chapter. This course will offer the opportunity for students to reflect on the contemporary COVID-19 pandemic and its after-effects. How do we rely on narrative to understand disease on an individual and global scale? How do stories of illness become “viral” and “infect” the minds of

those they reach? How can we utilize fiction as a means of escapism/survival from bleak realities?

This course explores popular culture narratives of contagion and disease to unpack why literary and cultural works utilize literal and fictional narratives of deadly pandemics. There is an extensive history of pandemic literature, and the genre arguably originates with Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), set in the twenty-first century after a global pandemic causes humanity to become extinct. Other notable examples of pandemic literature include Nobel Prize winning authors Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985) and José Saramago's *Blindness* (1998). These examples gesture towards our longstanding cultural fascination with the idea of pandemics, both real and imagined, because of our analogous interest with societal breakdown, as well as how the idea of contagion or viral spread threatens borders and our associated feelings of security. What are the societal "illnesses" that metaphorically plague our communities?

The course will be divided into three sections that examine:

- 1) historical fictional accounts of real pandemics;
- 2) fictional pandemics that focus on the "outbreak" narrative (i.e. how deadly viruses spread);
- 3) the post-apocalyptic genre (i.e. the after-effects of a pandemic)

This class of 2091G will strive to create a setting in which everyone feels that their dignity, identity, privacy, personal space, and autonomy are respected. While it is impossible to guarantee that the classroom will remain a safe space or be entirely confidential, it will be an accountable space. Sensitive topics such as oppression, discrimination, and violence will come up in this class. We will not skirt difficult issues. This course contract details some of these topics. Talk to your instructor if you have any concerns about course material or about respectful language. Please keep in mind that pejorative language will not be tolerated. I encourage all my students to speak to me if they ever feel uncomfortable in the classroom and to challenge my own use of language when they find it problematic.

Course Methods

This course meets on Mondays (6:30-9:30PM). It will include lecture, active discussion, breakout groups, and interactive course components in-person and online.

*The course has temporarily been moved online due to recommendations from MLHU. We will use synchronous virtual lectures to help smooth the transition between in-person and virtual classes.

Learning Outcomes

- improve your critical reading and writing in ways that will enable success in a wide variety of University courses
- explore a wide range of forms of creative expression and further your appreciation of diverse cultural productions and practices
- develop an interdisciplinary perspective on a variety of narrative media: for example, the poem, the novel, and the film

- become capable of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting basic narrative elements, such as plot, character, point of view, theme, setting, imagery, diction, tone, figures of speech, and tropes
- write logically and persuasively in fluent, standard English using the appropriate conventions for scholarly-critical writing
- design strong thesis statements and structured arguments in persuasive (original) essays using MLA format and secondary research material integration (i.e. using quotations and paraphrases)
- evaluate the relevance, reliability, and usefulness of research sources, including those obtained through the Internet
- engage with social media as text and develop a critical lens through which to analyze how social media shapes broader social narratives, particularly our ideas of science/technology
- think critically about “contagion” as metaphor and how “outbreak discourse” is often utilized for political ends to reify borders of self/Other underlying white supremacy, colonialism, and xenophobia
- identify how COVID-19 narratives have influenced your own perceptions of science/technology/socio-political events
- examine the role of narrative during and after pandemics, as well as why humans rely so heavily on art/storytelling/cultural productions

Required Novels

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (ISBN: 978-0-385-72167-7)

- Print copy available at Huron Library Service Desk for 3-day Course Reserves Loan
- Available for purchase at UWO Bookstore

Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (ISBN: 978-0-385-35330-4)

- Print copy available at Huron Library Service Desk for 3-day Course Reserves Loan
- Available for purchase at UWO Bookstore

Required Films

Robert Wise, *The Andromeda Strain* (1971)

- DVD available via 24-hr Course Reserve at Huron Library Service Desk (as well as portable DVD player that connects to laptop via USB)
- Streaming Platforms: Apple TV, Amazon Prime

Wolfgang Petersen, *Outbreak* (1995)

- Available via Western Library through “Criterion” – search via OMNI or under “Course Resources” on OWL
- Streaming Platforms: Netflix, YouTube, Google, Apple TV, Prime

Steven Soderbergh, *Contagion* (2011)

- Available via Western Library through “Criterion” – search via OMNI or under “Course Reserves” on OWL
- Streaming Platforms: Netflix, YouTube, Google, Apple TV

Adam Mason, *Songbird* (2020)

- DVD available via 24-hr Course Reserve at Huron Library Service Desk (as well as portable DVD player that connects to laptop via USB)
- Streaming Platforms: Prime, YouTube, Google, Apple TV

Marc Forster, *World War Z* (2013)

- Available via Western Library through “Criterion” – search via OMNI or under “Course Reserves” on OWL
- Streaming Platforms: YouTube, Google, Prime, Apple TV

Bo Burnham, *Inside* (2021)

- No Library Access
- Available on Netflix

Methods of Evaluation

Participation: 10%

Critical Reflection Paper (500 Words): 15% **(Due Jan. 24)**

Social Media Critique (500 Words): 15% **(Due Feb. 14)**

Research Essay (1500 Words): 30% **(Due March 21)**

Final Exam: 30% (To be scheduled by registrar)

Assignments must be submitted by 11:55pm EDT on OWL to avoid late penalty

Brief Description of Assessments

Participation:

While attendance is a necessary pre-requisite to participate, this component of the course evaluates students’ ability to demonstrate their personal engagement with the text(s) in the classroom and to respond/interact with their peers. Students should come to class having read/watched the texts listed under the schedule.

Critical Reflection Paper:

This assignment asks students to illustrate connections between course themes and their personal experiences of COVID-19.

Social Media Critique:

One of the key themes of this course is the role of technology and science as both saviour and villain in narratives of contagion. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become apparent that people frequently rely on social media blurbs or images for scientific information.

Student will select excerpts from contemporary social media (ex. Instagram/Facebook/Twitter post; Government ad/infographic; TikTok video) and make an argument for how technology is being utilized in their selected example and to what ends. What “outbreak narrative” does this social media excerpt proliferate? Who does it benefit and why? This assignment requires an argument and critical analysis of the selected social media excerpt.

Research Essay

A formal MLA-style 1500-word essay written on a single primary text and with the use of at least two peer-reviewed secondary sources.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist of three sections: short answer questions, passage analysis, and a comparative essay.

English and Cultural Studies Department Policies on Assignments:

Detailed assignment instructions will be provided and posted to our OWL site under Assignments. Students are required to consult and follow those requirements. Assignments must be submitted to our course website for plagiarism checking.

Plagiarism: that is, taking the ideas or words of another author from anywhere, including the internet—is a major academic offence. This course has a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy. If you use your own words and acknowledge where you have borrowed ideas and words from others—i.e. using quotations and proper MLA referencing for citations and paraphrasing—you should not have a problem with this. If you are in doubt, please ask your instructor. More information is provided in the Appendix (below).

Late penalties: Assignment due dates are specified in the reading schedule below. Late assignments will incur a penalty of 2 marks per day, up to a maximum of one week. **After seven (7) days, the assignment will not be accepted and receive a mark of zero.** Late assignments will not be appended with comments.

Please keep in mind that Student Reported Absences (SRA) grant a 48-hour extension only. For example, if your assignment is due May 24th at 11:59pm EDT, with an SRA, your assignment is now due May 26th at 11:59pm EDT. If you require more than a 48-hour extension, please email me to set up an appointment.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities are also entitled to formal accommodations to ensure all class materials and methods of evaluation are accessible. I aim to create all my courses around universal design principles to reduce the need for accommodations, but I am always eager to know how I can do better, so please let me know if there is an aspect of the course design that could be made more accessible.

Please contact your Huron academic advisor and the Student Development Center (SDC) for assistance with formal accommodations and there is more information is provided in the Appendix (below).

Lecture & Reading Schedule

Jan 10: Introduction

Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak (2020)* (to be partially screened in class)

Jan 17: Influenza Epidemic, aka “Spanish Flu”

T.S. Eliot, “Sweeney among the Nightingales” (1918)

Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill” (1926)

Katherine Anne Porter, “Pale Horse, Pale Rider” (1939)

Jan 24: AIDS/HIV

Tim Dlugos, “G-9” (1990)

Beth Brant, “This Place” (1991)

Critical Reflection Paper Due

Jan 31: Alien(ation)

Robert Wise, *The Andromeda Strain* (1971)

Feb 7: Animality

Wolfgang Petersen, *Outbreak* (1995)

Feb 14: Patient Zero (Social Media Critique Due)

Steven Soderbergh, *Contagion* (2011)

Feb 21: READING WEEK

Feb 28: Indigenous Communities & COVID-19

Virtual Guest Speaker: Joe Antone

Wien and Reading's *Health Inequities and Social Determinants of Aboriginal People's Health*

Mar 7: Lockdown

Adam Mason, *Songbird* (2020)

Bo Burnham's *Inside* (2021)

Mar 14: Postcolonialism and Post-apocalypse

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Mar 21: Zombie Theory

Marc Forster, *World War Z* (2013)

Mar 28: Voicelessness

Octavia Butler, “Speech Sounds” (1983)

Research Essay Due

April 4: “Because survival is insufficient”

Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven* (2014)



Appendix to Course Outlines: Academic Policies & Regulations 2021 - 2022

Mandatory Use of Masks in Classrooms

Students will be expected to wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom as per Huron policy and public health directives. Students are now permitted to drink water in class by lifting and replacing the mask each time a drink is taken. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks.

Students unwilling to wear a mask as stipulated by Huron policy and public health directives will be referred to the Dean's Office, and such actions will be considered a violation of the Huron Student Code of Conduct.

Pandemic Contingency

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence during the course that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, typically using a combination of synchronous instruction (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) and asynchronous material (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online at the discretion of the course instructor. In the unlikely event that changes to the grading scheme are necessary, these changes will be clearly communicated as soon as possible.

Student Code of Conduct

Membership in the community of Huron University College and Western University implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who

study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. While in the physical or online classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Please review the Student Code of Conduct at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/sites/default/files/Res%20Life/Student%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Revised%20September%202019.pdf>.

Prerequisite and Antirequisite Information

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites and that they have not completed any course antirequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Attendance Regulations for Examinations

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

Review the policy on Attendance Regulations for Examinations here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/attendance.pdf.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf. The appeals process is also outlined in this policy as well as more generally at the following website: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsundergrad.pdf.

Turnitin.com

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

It is not appropriate to use electronic devices (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Statement on Use of Personal Response Systems (“Clickers”)

Personal Response Systems (“clickers”) may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else’s clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

Academic Consideration for Missed Work

Students who are seeking academic consideration for missed work during the semester may submit a self-reported absence form online provided that the absence is **48 hours or less** and the other conditions specified in the Senate policy at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf are met.

Students whose absences are expected to last **longer than 48 hours**, or where the other conditions detailed in the policy are not met (e.g., work is worth more than 30% of the final grade, the student has already used 2 self-reported absences, the absence is during the final exam period), may receive academic consideration by submitting a Student Medical Certificate (for illness) or other appropriate documentation (for compassionate grounds). The Student Medical Certificate is available online at

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

All students pursuing academic consideration, regardless of type, must contact their instructors no less than 24 hours following the end of the period of absence to clarify how they will be expected to fulfill the academic responsibilities missed during their absence. **Students are reminded that they should consider carefully the implications of postponing tests or midterm exams or delaying submission of work, and are encouraged to make appropriate decisions based on their specific circumstances.**

Students who have conditions for which academic accommodation is appropriate, such as disabilities or ongoing or chronic health conditions, should work with Accessible Education Services to determine

appropriate forms of accommodation. Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>.

Policy on Academic Consideration for a Medical/ Non-Medical Absence

(a) Consideration on Medical Grounds for assignments worth *less than 10%* of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly and Contact Academic Advising

When seeking consideration on **medical grounds** for assignments worth *less than 10%* of the final course grade, and if the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported absences, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. If documentation is requested, the student will need to complete and submit the [Student Medical Certificate](#). The instructor may **not** collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation.

(b) Consideration on Non-Medical Grounds: Consult Huron Support Services/Academic Advising, or email huronsss@uwo.ca.

Students seeking academic consideration for a **non-medical** absence (e.g. varsity sports, religious, compassionate, or bereavement) will be required to provide appropriate documentation where the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence have not been met, including where the student has exceeded the maximum number of permissible Self-Reported. All consideration requests must include a completed [Consideration Request Form](#). Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor.

Please review the full policy on Academic Consideration for medical and non-medical absence at: https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf. Consult [Huron Academic Advising](#) at huronsss@uwo.ca for any further questions or information.

Support Services

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation, students should email an Academic Advisor in Huron's Student Support Services at huronsss@uwo.ca. An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>.

Department Chairs, Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about individual programs. Contact information can be found on the Huron website at:

<https://huronatwestern.ca/contact/faculty-staff-directory/>.

If you think that you are too far behind to catch up or that your workload is not manageable, you should consult your Academic Advisor. If you are considering reducing your workload by dropping one or more courses, this must be done by the appropriate deadlines. Please refer to the Advising website,

<https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/academic-advising/> or review the list of official Sessional Dates on the Academic Calendar, available here:

<http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca/SessionalDates.cfm>.

You should consult with the course instructor and the Academic Advisor who can help you consider alternatives to dropping one or more courses. Note that dropping a course may affect OSAP and/or Scholarship/Bursary eligibility.

Huron Student Support Services: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/>

Office of the Registrar: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/>

Student Quick Reference Guide: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/student-services/#1>

Academic Support & Engagement: <http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Huron University College Student Council: <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life/beyond-classroom/hucsc/>

Western USC: <http://westernusc.ca/your-services/#studentservices>

Mental Health & Wellness Support at Huron and Western

University students may encounter setbacks from time to time that can impact academic performance. Huron offers a variety of services that are here to support your success and wellbeing. Please visit <https://huronatwestern.ca/student-life-campus/student-services/wellness-safety> for more information or contact staff directly:

Wellness Services: huronwellness@huron.uwo.ca

Community Safety Office: safety@huron.uwo.ca

Chaplaincy: gthorne@huron.uwo.ca

Additional supports for Health and Wellness may be found and accessed at Western through, <https://www.uwo.ca/health/>.