

# HEALTH, JUSTICE, & CAPITALISM

HSS 404-H01 History Seminar

## FALL 2025 SYLLABUS

**Prof. Stephen Pemberton**  
Federated Department of History  
New Jersey Institute of Technology

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### **Class Meetings**

10:00 – 11:20 AM Tuesdays and Fridays  
Central King Building (CKB) 220

### **Office Hours**

Fridays 11:30 AM – 1 PM and by individual appointment

### **Office & Contact**

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This senior seminar introduces students to how American society has managed health and disease in recent United States history—particularly during moments of crisis. The themes of justice and capitalism signal two prevailing ways that Americans have commonly managed resources when addressing health and/or disease problems. The course therefore puts common experiences within American medicine and healthcare into conversation with several enduring challenges facing the American society today – including the HIV-AIDS epidemic, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the nation’s opioid addiction crisis. The course readings and assignments therefore provide opportunities for students to think through some of these challenges alongside ongoing efforts in the United States to manage health and disease in both effective and equitable ways. Students will have opportunities to learn, for example, how historians and other scholars of medicine, health, policy, and law have characterized American society’s varied responses to health-based problems since the mid-twentieth century. Another focus of the class is how resources for engaging health problems have been governed within global capitalism (i.e., our principal system for delivering resources). Another focus is how biotechnical innovations aimed at addressing health and disease figure within those systems – for better or worse. The case studies explored in the class provide opportunities for students to explore how government institutions, private enterprise, medicine and public health experts, and social activists have responded to ongoing epidemics and/or disease-based problems. Students will also be exposed to the roles that class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, disability, environment, biology and culture have played in American responses to disease and other health problems. Finally, the topics, readings, and assignments in this course will prepare each student to undertake and complete a research project on a significant health-related issue in the United States. That project will challenge the student to develop historical and critical perspective on health-related matters of contemporary significance while providing opportunities for them to communicate their understanding effectively to their peers.

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* and *describe* key historical events and actors as they relate to a significant health and/or disease problem in the United States and *communicate* their significance for understanding that problem.
- *Describe* and critically *evaluate* the merits of a certain argument in a specific place and time.
- *Research, write, and orally present* an argument on a topic of social and historical significance using primary and secondary sources.
- *Demonstrate* information literacy consistent with being an upper-level undergraduate student: including (1) locating, retrieving and evaluating information relevant to their research project; (2) organizing, synthesizing and communicating that information in clear, persuasive way; and (3) producing projects that employ principles consistent with the ethical and legal uses of information.

### Prerequisites and Honors Credit

HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher, and 6 credits at the 300-level History and Humanities General Education Requirement with a grade of C or higher; 3 credits of the 300-level may be taken concurrently with this class.

This class is designated as an honors class. The course is also open to students who are not enrolled in NJIT's Albert Dorman Honors College with the instructor's permission.

### Course Webpage (Canvas)

There is a Canvas webpage for this course that the professor and class will utilize throughout the semester. The course webpage contains the syllabus, assignments, readings, and other features that will enhance your learning experience this semester. Please consult this website regularly, preferably at least once before every class meeting. Canvas access [here](#) with your UCID.

### Class Meetings & Office Hours

Regular class meetings will take place in person for this course.

***Office hours for this class are Fridays 1130 am to 1 pm. Prof. Pemberton also holds office hours by appointment during weekday business hours. Please email him at least 24 hours in advance for an appointment.***

Individual meetings on Tuesdays and Fridays normally occur in person. Virtual meetings are available by request and will take place via Zoom in the Professor's Personal Meeting Room. (Zoom link available within Canvas.)

## Readings

The required readings for this course include a variety of readings and sources.

Students should follow the semester schedule in the syllabus and Canvas course page to determine what readings to complete for each class period.

Readings: Readings in the course include magazine or news media articles, scholarly essays or articles, or book chapters. All readings are posted on the course webpage as pdfs or weblinks.

Books: To complete the individual research project in this course, some students may need to acquire a handful of books on their research topic in consultation with the professor.

## Assignments and Grading

The primary goal of this course is to promote critical thinking about health and disease in relation to American society, both past and present. All students will be evaluated on their written and oral communication over the course of the semester. This requires that each student complete all assignments dutifully (as directed).

<u>Assignments</u>		<u>Grading Scale for Assignments</u>	
Participation	15%	A =	89.5 to 100
Class Assignments	15%	B+ =	86.5 to 89.4
Midterm Exam	10%	B =	79.5 to 86.4
Proposal/Bibliography*	10%	C+ =	76.5 to 79.4
Sources Essay*	15%	C =	69.5 to 76.4
Research Presentations*	20%	D =	59.5 to 69.4
Final Research Project*	15%	F =	59.4 to 0
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Course Grade	100%		
<p><b>* This assignment is part of the student's individual research project. 60% of the course grade relates to this project.</b></p> <p><b>Consistent effort and improvement are weighted heavily in grading.</b></p> <p><b>Passing this class with a B+ or higher is unlikely without completing each assignment in a timely fashion.</b> Regular attendance is also necessary.</p>			

### Participation (15% of Course Grade)

The class participation grade will reflect both the student's presence in the classroom and their consistency and improvement in engaging the subject matter across the course. Students should promptly communicate any concerns about their ability to meet the following requirements with the professor. Consistent effort and improvement are weighted heavily in grading participation.

**Attendance Policy.** Attendance constitutes half of the student's participation grade. This course is taught in person, in a twice a week 70-minute class format. Missing even a single class is not recommended. However, each student is allowed to miss two full class periods without penalty to their participation grade. It is highly recommended that you consult with the professor about any missed class time beyond two absences. Class time missed beyond the two excused classes typically results in reductions in the student's participation grade (as calculated as a percentage of formal contact hours for the semester). The professor will consider excusing repeat absences under extraordinary circumstances that can be verified by the Dean of Students Office. See policy on "Student Accommodations" below for further details.

**Student Engagement.** The student's verbal and non-verbal engagements with class activities account for the other half of the participation grade. Each student should come to class promptly and regularly, actively engage any online readings or assignments, and be prepared to ask questions and discuss the readings assigned for the day. Students should strive to respect the learning environment by arriving on time and staying the full term of the session. Students who participate regularly and constructively in discussion are typically rewarded with higher grades in their final participation grade. The student must contribute to the overall learning environment of the class to receive full credit in this area. Meeting the professor in office hours also counts positively toward participation. The professor will also consider improvement and other factors in his assessment of each student's participation grade.

### **Class Assignments (20% of Course Grade)**

The professor will evaluate the quality of each student's engagement with the weekly readings and source material using class assignments – typically an in-class activity. These in-person assignments are not always announced in advance of the class period. The student's grade on these assignments is composed of their three best grades in this category. Collectively, these class assignments amount to **20%** of the student's course grade.

### **Mid-Term Exam (10% of Course Grade)**

There will be a mid-term exam to assess the student's comprehension of the subjects and source material covered in the first 6 weeks of the course. The exam will be hand-written in class. The professor will only provide make-up exams to students who have a documented absence. See student accommodations policy below on the process for documentation.

### **Research Project (60% of Course Grade, split into four separately graded assignments)**

Each student will conduct an individual research project in consultation with the professor.

- (1) Proposal and annotated bibliography. The student will identify a topic and source material and write a proposal statement and annotated bibliography. (10%)
- (2) Sources essay. The student will write a short essay using at least one principal source for their project. (15%)
- (3) Presentation. The student will present their research to the class and receive feedback on that presentation from their peers as well as the professor. (20%)
- (4) Final project assessment. Each student will write a summary of their research project and submit that document to Canvas in advance of a one-on-one discussion of their research with the professor. This exercise will form the basis of the final project grade. (15%)

### **Respect for Persons and the Learning Environment**

In the interest of an open exchange of ideas and collegiality, everyone participating in the class should strive to respect their classmates as persons. The professor will make every effort to facilitate a respectful environment for learning, but students should keep in mind their own responsibilities in the classroom.

The professor reserves the right to ask you to leave the classroom for any behaviors that do not meet the expectations of a proper, professional learning environment.

**Computer and tablet use, web-surfing, texting and social media** usage that is unrelated to class is disruptive of a respectful learning environment. Students are therefore expected to limit electronics use to class-related activities.

**Cell phones** should be put away in bags or pockets, ringers off, and remain unused in the classroom. If you need to use a phone, please leave the classroom before utilizing it.

Students must comply with NJIT policy while in the classroom – including formal and informal codes of conduct for university students.

### **Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

Academic integrity is *enforced* in this course. Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following [NJIT's Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#).

It is the instructor's professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at [dos@njit.edu](mailto:dos@njit.edu).

Students are also responsible for upholding the integrity of NJIT by reporting any violation of academic to the [Dean of Students Office](#). The identity of the student filing any academic integrity violation will always remain anonymous.

Student writing uploaded to Canvas in this course will automatically be reviewed by [Turnitin.com](#), an online service used by NJIT instructors to detect plagiarism and irregularities in sourcing and citation of the written word and claims.

### **AI Policy in this Course**

Unauthorized use of AI in this course will be considered an academic integrity violation. \

**In other words, the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology is prohibited in this course – except where the professor explicitly authorizes its use for a particular activity.** There are some research-related activities in which a limited level of AI technology

use may be acceptable. We will discuss these limited (i.e., “authorized”) uses as the course proceeds. In the meantime, see [NJIT’s Guidance to Students on AI](#) (pp. 13-15 especially).

**Note:** Questions about what does or doesn’t constitute generative AI use should be directed to the professor well in advance of turning in an assignment. After the fact discovery of unauthorized AI use will likely lead to your receiving a failing grade on the assignment. I strongly recommend that you err on the side of doing the work yourself. This is particularly true in the conceptualization and writing of your course work.

### **Ethical Research and Writing**

NJIT’s Van Houghton Library has numerous tutorials to help you succeed in your research and writing in this class. They are designed to ensure you are meeting acceptable standards of ethics as well as scholarship.

The tutorial appropriate to doing acceptable research and writing in a history-based humanities class can be found [here](#).

Tutorials that explain acceptable academic writing for this humanities-based course are available at NJIT’s Van Houghton library website devoted to ENGL 101/102, [here](#).

Tutorials on how to evaluate appropriate online source material can be found [here](#).

Finally, and arguably most critical, tutorials on how to cite sources ethically in your academic writing can be found [here](#).

Citing your sources properly will help you avoid plagiarism. I prefer that students use the author-date citation format from the [Chicago Manual of Style \(CMS\)](#) in their writing for this course.

**NJIT’s Librarians** can field your questions about how the library resources can help you succeed in this history class. They are experts who are happy to help you. **You can reach them via the [Ask A Librarian](#)** link on the library website.

Again, all students are expected to abide by the norms outlined in these websites, this syllabus as well as the Canvas webpage for this class; students can be penalized for failure to do so. Please consult the professor if you have any concerns about academic integrity, academic reading, writing and citation, plagiarism or their meanings in actual practice.

### **Student Accommodations and Privacy**

**Instructors can only accommodate a student at the direction of the Dean of Students (DoS) Office.** This NJIT policy helps ensure your privacy and accords with U.S. federal law.

If you need accommodation for unexpected events (illness, accident, death in family, etc.), University Policy dictates that students must inform the [Dean of Students Office](#).

You can request absence verification [here](#).

If you wish to have accommodations made for a **disability**, please contact the [Office of Accessibility Resources & Services \(OARS\)](#) to address your specific needs. A Letter of

Accommodation Eligibility from the OARS authorizing your accommodations will be required. Information about accessibility resources and services and forms to initiate accommodation are available [here](#). NJIT policy on accommodations is governed here by the Regulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

If you need cannot attend a class for **religious observance** reasons, you must at minimum follow [NJIT's Policy on Student Absences for Religious Observances](#) to receive accommodation. That policy requires the student to notify the instructor in writing of an upcoming absence for religious observance reasons. At minimum, that written notification to the professor must list the dates of the expected absence and be communicated at least two weeks in advance of the observance day and/or period. Email notification on Canvas is the preferred form of written notification for this purpose.

If you have any further questions regarding accommodation, please consult the DoS webpage devoted to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) to see how you should proceed with your concern.

### **Classroom Recording Policy**

There is an [NJIT Policy for Classroom Recording](#) that prohibits students from making unauthorized recordings of class. If you have a need to record a class, you must consult with professor to ensure that any such recording is consistent with NJIT policy. Disability accommodations sometimes allow for students to record classroom activities but that accommodation should be made through [OARS](#).

The professor reserves the right to record a class (or a portion of a class) when it serves as an educational resource for professor or student. In that scenario, the professor will announce in class if a class or a portion of the class is being recorded and whether the recording and/or transcript will be shared with the class. Any such recording will not be distributed or used outside of this class, in accordance with NJIT Policy and privacy laws.

## Semester Schedule

### **Tues, Sept 2. Introduction to “Health, Justice, & Capitalism”**

In-Class Activities: Introductions, review syllabus, discuss course.

### **Fri, Sept 5. Introduction (continued)**

Reading: Selection from Beatrix Hoffman, *Health Care for Some: Rights and Rationing in the United States Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

### **Tues, Sept 9. Fact and Interpretation: How to Think in an Epidemic I**

Reading: Selections from Beatrix Hoffman, *Health Care for Some: Rights and Rationing in the United States Since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

In-Class Activity:

### **Fri, Sept 12. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part I**

Reading: Specter, Michael. 2021. “How Act Up Changed America.” *The New Yorker*. June 7, 2021

Selected primary source(s) on Canvas

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

### **Tues, Sept 16. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part II**

Reading: Selection from Nancy Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient: How Madison Avenue and Modern Medicine Turned Patients into Consumers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

In-Class Movie: Selections from *How to Survive a Plague* (2012 Documentary)

### **Fri, Sept 19. Consumerism in American Health Care**

Reading: Selection from Nancy Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient: How Madison Avenue and Modern Medicine Turned Patients into Consumers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

In-Class Assignment

**Tues, Sept 23. AIDS and American Society: What World is This?**

In-Class: Finding Your Research Topic

Reading: Selections from *Blood Products Litigation Documents* [Electronic database] via Canvas, including the primary source, “Advertisements in various gay magazines for plasma donors exposed to hepatitis”

In-Class: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary Movie)

**Fri, Sept 26. Are Healing and Justice Even Possible When Capitalism Prevails?**

Assignment: Sign Up for Individual Meeting Time in October (no exceptions)

Reading: Patricia Siplon, “Blood Policy in the Age of AIDS” in *AIDS and the Policy Struggle in the United States* (Georgetown University Press, 2002) pp. 43-66

In-Class: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary Movie)

**Tues, Sept 30. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part III**

Reading: Primary Sources reading from *PEN Parent Empowerment Newsletter* (November 2010) including Laurie Kelly and Paul Clement, “Bad Blood, Good Movie?”

In-Class: *Bad Blood: A Cautionary Tale* (2010 Documentary Movie)

**Wed, Oct 1. Assignment Due: Sign Up for Individual Meeting Time in October**

**Fri, Oct 3. AIDS in America: Interpreting the 1980s and 1990s, Part IV**

Reading: Selected Primary Sources

In-Class Activity

**Mon, Oct 6. Assignment Due: Project Topic Choice Due**

**Tues, Oct 7 – Fri, Oct 10. Individual Meeting with Professor**

No class meetings this week, but you should study for mid-term exam

and

Meet the professor to discuss your individual project at your scheduled time this week!

**Tues, Oct 14. MIDTERM EXAM**

**Fri, Oct 17. Capitalism and its Critics**

Listen to Podcast: *Throughline* podcast (July 1, 2021) “Capitalism: What Makes Us Free?”

In-Class Activity

**Tues, Oct 21. Fact and Interpretation: How to Think in an Epidemic II**

Reading: Selections from Danielle Allen, *Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus* (Chicago University Press, 2022) and selections from Judith Butler, *What World Is This? - A Pandemic Phenomenology* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

In-Class Activity

**Fri, Oct 24. Chronic Pain in America**

Reading: Selections from Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015)

In-Class: Preparing Your Proposal & Annotated Bibliography

**Tues, Oct 28. The American Health Dilemma: Undertreated and Overmedicated**

Reading: Selections from Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015)

In-Class Activity

**Fri, Oct 31. The American Health Dilemma: Undertreated and Overmedicated (continued)**

Re-Read: Selections from Keith Wailoo, *Pain: A Political History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), as directed for Oct 29.

In-Class Activity

**Mon, Nov 3. Proposal & Annotated Bibliography Assignment Due**

**Tues, Nov 4. Interpreting “Big Pharma”**

Reading: Selected primary sources / Opioid Industry Document Archive (OIDA)

In-Class Activity

**Fri, Nov 7. Interpreting America’s Opioid Epidemic I**

Reading: Selections & Commentary on David Herzberg, *White Market Drugs: Big Pharma and the Hidden History of Addiction in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

**Mon. Nov 10. Assignment Due**

Sign Up for Presentation time (no exceptions)

**Tues, Nov 11. Interpreting America's Opioid Epidemic II**

Reading: Selections & Commentary on David Herzberg, *White Market Drugs: Big Pharma and the Hidden History of Addiction in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020)

**Fri, Nov 14. Workshop Projects in Class**

**Mon, Nov 17. Essay Assignment Due**

**Tues, Nov 18. Workshop Projects in Class**

\* **Mandatory Attendance – Nov 21 to Dec 9.** Students will be doing individual presentations, presenting their research to their peers in class. Each student is required to attend student presentations and participate in the discussions. Part of each student's presentation grade will consist of peer reviewing at least two other student presentations.

**Fri, Nov 21.** Student Presentations\*

**Wed, Nov 26.** Student Presentations\*

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Tues, Dec 2.** Student Presentations\*

**Fri, Dec 5.** Student Presentations\*

**Tues, Dec 9.** Student Presentations\* (Last Class Meeting)

**FINAL RESEARCH PROJECT ASSESSMENT**

**Individual meeting with Professor scheduled between Dec 4 and Dec 19.**