

HIST 3120: History of Medicine, 1400 to Present

(Spring 2026)

Online, Asynchronous

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2:00-3:00pm (in-person), Wednesdays 10:30-11:30am (virtual), and by appointment.

Course Description:

This course surveys the history of medical knowledge and practice from antiquity to the present. No prior background in the history of science or medicine is required. The course takes a broadly chronological approach, blending the perspectives of the patient, the physician, and society as a whole--recognizing that medicine has always aspired to "treat" healthy people as well as the sick and infirm. Rather than history "from the top down" or "from the bottom up," this course sets its sights on history from the inside out. This means, first, that medical knowledge and practice is understood through the personal experiences of patients and caregivers. It also means that lectures and discussions will take the long-discredited knowledge and treatments of the past seriously, on their own terms, rather than judging them by today's standards. Required readings consist largely of primary sources, from elite medical texts to patient diaries. Short research assignments will encourage students to adopt the perspectives of a range of actors in various historical eras.

Course Prerequisites:

None

Course Goals:

Engaged students who come to class regularly, participate actively in discussions, and complete all readings and written assignments, will:

- 1) gain a practical introduction to the fundamental questions and methods of the history of medicine
- 2) foster a nuanced, critical understanding of medicine's complex role in contemporary society.
- 3) compare theoretical approaches to medicine.
- 4) closely read and contextualize primary sources.

Course Format:

This course takes place 100% online, asynchronously. All interactions with me, the Teaching Assistant, and with your fellow students will take place on Canvas. There are 14 units of content that you will move through. Units will open as you completed previous ones. You must complete each assignment and reading in the unit before you will be able to move on to the next.

Subject to change - Check course's Canvas site for the most up-to-date information

Course Communication:

Office Hours: I welcome everyone to my office hours each week. When the door is open, feel free to “walk-in” and come to talk with me about any number of things—whether they be related to the course or other aspects of your University experience. If you need a specific time, I am also available by appointment in-person and on Teams.

Email and Canvas: I try to answer emails quickly during business hours (M-F, 9am – 5pm). I do answer emails at night and on the weekend, but with generally longer delays. I communicate frequently through email and Canvas. Many email questions can be answered by reading the syllabus or looking at Canvas, so please double check those places before you reach out—you might save yourself sometime!

Course Requirements:

- I. Primary Source Analyses (35%):** In some unit, students will apply the skills and knowledge we have learned in class to write their own weekly primary-source analyses of roughly 500 words.
- II. Primary Source Annotations (30%):** In some units, students will work in randomized groups to critically engage and annotate a source related to that week’s readings via Perusall. More instructions on Canvas.
- III. History of Medicine Exhibition Critical Reviews (Midterm, 15%; Final 20%):** Students will supply a short (~1000-1500 word) reflection essay on one of the National Library of Medicine’s online Exhibitions. [The full list of exhibits is available here.](#) More instructions on Canvas

Grading Scale:

A: 100-89.5%	C: 79.4%-69.5%	F: ≤59.4
B: 89.4-79.5%	D: 69.4%-59.5%	

I will round your final grade—not assignment grades—but only on the final decimal place. So, for example, an 89.51 would round to an A; however, an 89.49 would round to a B. There must be a line otherwise everyone is “just .01 away.”

Late Work Policy:

Students may turn in any assignment until the 11:59 pm on last scheduled day of class. For this semester that day is 30 April 2026. Any score is better for your overall grade than a “0” so you are encouraged to turn something in for every assignment.

Assignments will receive a three-point reduction for each day late for the first week after the initial due date. If seven (7) or more days late, the assignment will receive no higher than 50%, but it will be graded.

Subject to change - Check course’s Canvas site for the most up-to-date information

Required Material:

Jean-Noël Fabiani and Philippe Bercovici, *Medicine: A Graphic History*, trans. Edward Gauvin (London: SelfMadeHero, 2020).

All other reading material, such as the weekly primary sources, will be available via Canvas in accessible formats.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1) What is the “History of Medicine”

- Welcome and Syllabus Overview
- Introduction Material

Unit 2) Back to Basics I -- Medicine in the Ancient Mediterranean World

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 1*
 - “Medicine at the bedside”, *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction*
- Primary Source Readings:
 - *The Hippocratic Oath*
 - Hippocrates “On Humors”
 - Galen, “On Hippocrates’ On the Nature of Man”

Unit 3) Back to Basics II -- Medicine in the Medieval Mediterranean World

- Textbook and Secondary Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 2*
 - “Chapter 5: The Middle Ages”, in *A History of Medicine* (Manger)
- Primary Source Readings:
 - “On the Conditions of Women”, *The Trotula*

Unit 4) Pulling through the Plague -- The Black Death and Coming of Early Modern Medicine

- Textbook Reading: Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 4*
- Primary Source Readings
 - Various Literary and Narrative Sources on the Black Death
 - *Watch*: “The Black Death and Its Aftermath,” *Origins*, OSU (8 min)

Unit 5) Making Early Modern Medicine -- The Early Modern Body and Medicine

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 3 and 5*
 - “The Fabricated Body: The History of Anatomy” in *A History of Medicine, Second Edition : A Scandalously Short Introduction*, Jacalyn Duffin (UNT Library)
- Primary Source Readings:
 - Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica*, 1555.
 - Selections from Paracelsus

Unit 6) European Medicine “cures” the New World -- The Early Modern Atlantic and Native Medicine

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- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 17*
 - Vanessa Harding, “Reading Plague in Seventeenth-century London,” *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 32, no. 2, (May 2019): 267–286.
 - Kathleen Kole de Peralta, “Dying to Heal: Women and Syphilis in Colonial Lima, Peru,” *Nursing Clio*
- Primary and Secondary Source Readings
 - Samuel Pepys’ Diary, June-August 1665 (<https://www.pepysdiary.com/diary/>)

Unit 7) The Medical Revolution -- Medicine in Eighteenth Century Western Europe and America

- Textbook and Secondary Source Readings:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 6 and 7*
 - "Why is blood special? Changing concepts of a vital humour" in *A History of Medicine, Second Edition : A Scandalously Short Introduction* (Duffin)
- Primary Source Reading:
 - Benjamin Rush, "An enquiry into the effects of spirituous liquors upon the human body"
 - Blundell, “A Case of Obstinate Vomiting”

Unit 8) Midterm

- Explore: NLM’s online Exhibition: [The full list of exhibits is available here](#)
- Assignment: History of Medicine Exhibition Critical Review

Unit 9) The Early Nineteenth Century and Western Medicine -- Professional Medicine in the Modern Age

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 10 and 11*
 - “Medicine In the Hospital”, *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction*
 - Dora B. Weiner and Michael J. Sauter, “The City of Paris and the Rise of Clinical Medicine,” *Osiris*, 2nd series, vol. 18 (2003): 23 – 40.
- Primary Source Readings
 - Florence Nightingale, “Notes on Hospitals”

Unit 10) Plagues Again?!?! -- Epidemics and Medicine and in the Nineteenth Century

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 16 and 18*
 - Projit Bihari Mukharji, “The ‘Cholera Cloud’ in the Nineteenth Century ‘British World’: History of an Object-Without-an-Essence,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 86, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 303 – 332.
- Primary Source Reading
 - Sources on British Cholera Outbreak

Unit 11) Sterilizing the Practice of Medicine -- Germ Theory, Antisepsis, and Modern Medicine

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter 8 and 9*

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- "Medicine in the Community" in *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction* (Bynum)
- Harriet Deacon, "Racial Segregation and Medical Discourse in Nineteenth-Century Cape Town." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 287–308.
- David G Cox, "Blue Gums, Black Bodies, White Supremacy: Narratives of Racial Contagion in the Late Nineteenth Century." *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 23, no. 3 (2024): 267–89.
- Primary Source Reading
 - Joseph Lister, "On the Antiseptic Principle in the Practice of Surgery," 1867.

Unit 12) Advancing Medicine in the Modern Age -- Technology, Education, and Modern Medicine

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter* 14 and 21
 - "Medicine in the Laboratory" in *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction* (Bynum)
- Primary Source Readings
 - Abraham Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching* (New York: Carnegie Foundation, 1910), Selections.

Unit 13) Globalizing Western Medicine -- Public Health and International Organizations

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter* 19
 - "Medicine in the World" in *The History of Medicine: A Very Short Introduction* (Bynum)
 - J.H. Proctor, "Scottish Medical Missionaries in South Arabia, 1886-1979," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 1 (2006): 103-121.
- Primary Source Readings
 - Medical Missionary Work at Konia, Asia Minor

Unit 14) Navigating Global Medical Crises -- Surviving Contemporary Epidemics from AIDS to COVID

- Textbook and Secondary Source Reading:
 - Fabiani and Bercovici, *Chapter* 20 and 15
 - Joseph E. Hower; "I Want to Know How to Protect Myself without Scaring Our Patients": AFSCME, AIDS, and the Limits of Solidarity, 1981–2001. *Radical History Review* 1 May 2021 (140): 49–77.
- Primary Source Readings
 - HIV/AIDS Source Selections, (<https://www.glbthistory.org/primary-source-setaids>)

Final: History of Medicine Exhibition Critical Review (II) *due Monday, 4 May 2026 at 11:59pm*

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Course/Learning Environment:

Every student in this class should have the right to learn and engage within an environment of respect and courtesy from others. We will discuss our classroom's habits of engagement and I also encourage you to review UNT's student code of conduct so that we can all start with the same baseline civility understanding ([Code of Student Conduct](#)). UNT strives to offer you a high-quality education and a supportive environment, so you learn and grow. As a faculty member, I am committed to helping you be successful as a student. To learn more about campus resources and information on how you can be successful at UNT, go to unt.edu/success and explore unt.edu/wellness. To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to scrappysays.unt.edu.

A Note on Texas Senate Bill 17:

This recent law that outlawed diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at public colleges and universities in Texas, *does not* in any way affect content, instruction or discussion in a course at public colleges and universities in Texas. Expectations regarding academic freedom for teaching and class discussion have not been altered post-SB17. You should not feel the need to censor your speech pertaining to topics pertaining to race and racism, structural inequality, LGBTQ+ issues, or diversity, equity, and inclusion within our classroom discussion. You can read about UNT and SB17 in [on the UNT Compliance webpage](#).

Course Accommodations:

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](#) website. You may also contact ODA by phone at (940) 565-4323.

Academic Integrity:

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University's actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence.

Generative AI/ChatGPT Policy:

The use of ChatGPT or any other AI program is strictly **prohibited** in this class. Use of an AI program will result in an automatic zero grade and a one-on-one meeting with me about the subsequent steps. There are quite a few reasons why I ban ChatGPT and AI in my classroom:

1. You are in this class (and college!) to enhance your analytical skills, which means you must be able to write and explicate your own ideas. If you depend on AI to write, you're not learning. And to be honest, you (or someone is...) are paying a lot of money for this education...why not take full advantage of that by learning and doing the work?
2. AI programs steal and/or regurgitate information. These bots cannot make up their own thoughts; instead, they take it from scholars, writers, artists, and others. Using these programs is a form of plagiarism.
3. These programs do not produce accurate or well-written responses to the prompts. This class will teach you how to effectively write and interpret literary analyses with robust, mature, and interesting theses; a bot doesn't know, nor can it know, how to do that.
4. It destroys the environment. Read about it in [an article from the San Francisco Examiner](#), [an article from Just Security](#), [an article from The Guardian](#), and [an article from TechRadar](#).
5. OpenAI programs support nightmarishly horrifying labor practices in nations around the world. Read about it in [an article from Time Magazine](#), [an article from Aljazeera](#), [an article from El Pais](#), and [an article in the Wall Street Journal](#).

In all, you don't want to use these AI services. You're doing yourself a disservice as someone in a unique scholarly position to advance your intellectual abilities. At the end of the day, ChatGPT is unethical to use.