

Pandemics and Epidemics

Old and new diseases In our global world

Course #	20FPA
Format:	Seminar
Moderator:	Rachel Borson
Date and Time:	Tuesday, 1:30-3:30 10 weeks, starting September 22
Location:	Smith College Campus Center, CC102
Maximum number of participants:	16
Auditors accepted:	No

Purpose: As we read updates about the spreading of COVID-19 (a coronavirus), anxiety is high. Understanding how diseases become epidemics and pandemics is key to understanding and taking action to minimize the impact of infectious diseases worldwide.

Description: There are a number of illustrative epidemics that seminar participants will research and present as a way to understand the social, economic, medical and political forces underlying epidemics. From each disease that we explore, commonalities will emerge that will help us understand the larger forces at play. No specific medical knowledge is necessary to understand how diseases such as cholera, influenza or SARS could become major threats to the world's population. Introductory talks will focus on the role of epidemiology and government in the management of epidemics. We will consider the following questions generally and specifically:

- Why and how do epidemics start?
- How do epidemics end?
- How do we understand the mathematics of epidemics?
- What is the difference between pandemics and epidemics?

What is the impact of epidemics on the socioeconomic forces affecting humankind? We will also consider ways of understanding epidemics, e.g., via literature, film and other media.

Role of participants: Each participant will choose a topic, such as a specific epidemic, to research and present to the group. Guided discussion will focus on commonalities and lessons learned from each episode. A list of suggested topics including literature and film will be given at the Preview for the fall semester.

Resources: The following books are recommended, not required; they are available in local libraries, area bookstores and online. *Pandemic* by Sonia Shah (non-fiction); *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel (fiction). The following film is recommended and available at the library or for streaming: *Contagion* directed by Steven Soderbergh. An additional resource list available at the fall Preview.

About the Moderator: The moderator is a retired physician (not an expert on infectious disease) who enjoys detective stories, medical history and current affairs. This seminar will be her second experience as moderator.