Difficult Dialogues: HIV/AIDS and other Modern Pandemics

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Course Description
Since the first diagnosed case in 1981, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has dramatically altered the social, political, economic, and demographic landscape of our world today. Understanding the disease and its myriad implications for individuals, families, communities, countries and the world requires insight into the microbiology of the HIV, into addiction and sexuality, into the ways gender systems and race are socially constructed, into international politics, economic, and inequality. Together, these factors shape individual behavior, prevention, and access to treatment and country level responses.

To that end, this Difficult Dialogues course will draw on social theory, biography, biology, and historical accounts to provide an overview of HIV/AIDS today. Moving from the cellular to the population level, this course will address the persistence of the disease as well as the dramatic variability in prevalence within and across populations. Special attention will be placed on social forces like gender, race, migration, and inequality that drive the spread of HIV/AIDS and shape the well-being of those living with HIV/AIDS. These goals will be accomplished through selected readings, film, and respectful and engaged discussion.

As a signature course, this class will also seek to enhance your core academic skills through discussions and readings on note talking strategies, approaches to college level reading, and formal writing skills. By the end of the term we should all be better informed about the HIV/AIDS and other infection diseases, familiar with some basic social science theories, and possess an expanded tool box of academic skills.

Specifically, the course has four objectives. By the end of the course you should possess the following:

1) A general understanding of pandemics and a specific understanding of HIV/AIDS; of how HIV is transmitted, how it develops into AIDS, and how prevention programs and drug treatments have been used to decrease the transmission of HIV and hinder the development of HIV into AIDS.

2) A sociologically informed view of HIV/AIDS and other pandemics. At first pass, this might seem like a course taught by a biologist or a public health professor. A biomedical approach has value but, by the end of the semester, I hope you appreciate the ways social, cultural, historic, and economic forces shape pandemics and can provide important insights towards reducing their spread and impact.

3) A broader worldview. We will discuss the pandemic in the US, the course emphasizes the world outside our boarders.

4) An appreciation for evidence-based opinions and views. Given the key modes of transmission (sex and drugs) and the social status of populations most affected by HIV/AIDS (MSM, sex workers, drug users, Black Americans, those in Sub-Saharan Africa), a dynamic moral narrative has long surrounded the HIV/AIDS pandemic. We will engage with this narrative and work to use empirical evidence to understand more fully the nature of the pandemic.
SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

• This course is designed to be an active and collaborative learning experience. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 is often controversial and changes rapidly. Understanding what is happening in these epidemics demand that scholars and students be able to research and discuss new developments and ideas intelligently. This course will expose you to fundamental sociological and biological concepts and up-to-date information about HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 in an effort to help you become informed social observers of this epidemic.

• As a collaborative learning experience, thoughtful discussion is the cornerstone of the class. You are expected to join the class discussions and share your opinions. All perspectives will be welcomed and discussed. As a student in this class, it is your responsibility to listen closely and respectfully to the viewpoints expressed in the course material and in the remarks of all class participants (including your fellow students and guest speakers). When you have different viewpoints on an issue, you are encouraged to share your views openly and in a courteous manner. Contrasting different views is one of the most effective ways to learn.

• AIDS (and COVID-19) is a politically charged and emotional topic for most people. A complete understanding of disease is only possible through the systematic study of a number of controversial and potentially disturbing issues, including: heterosexual/homosexual sexual behavior, illegal drug use, and death and dying. In some cases, films and/or guest speakers may use profane language and/or explicit sexual and medical descriptions in making their points. If your religious, moral, or psychological sensibilities will be offended, you may have some difficulties with this course.

• During the semester, if you find yourself having difficulty with any part of the course material and you do not feel you can share your questions or concerns in class, please talk to me during my office hours, contact me via e-mail, or make an appointment to see me.

Writing Flag: This course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from me to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise assignments, and you will be asked to read and discuss your peers’ work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

I strongly encourage you to use the Undergraduate Writing Center, www.uwc.utexas.edu. The UWC offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any student, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. These services are not just for writing that has "problems": Getting feedback from an informed audience is a normal part of a successful writing project. The UWC’s trained consultants work with you on both academic and non-academic writing. Using methods that preserve the integrity of your work, they help you develop strategies to improve your writing and become a more independent writer. Whether you are writing a lab report, a resume, a term paper, a statement for an application, or your own poetry, UWC consultants will be happy to work with you.

Reading Materials
Required text:
  Majola, Sanyu. Love, Money, and HIV: Becoming a Modern African Woman in the Age of AIDS

Other Readings:
  Reading assignments, marked [READING] in the syllabus, can be found in files section of the class Canvas site.
The hyperlinks for other readings are embedded in the syllabus. Be sure to check the syllabus and Canvas before each class to be up to date with the readings.

http://canvas.utexas.edu

To access the class home page, go to this link and log into Canvas with your UT EID. You will find a link to this course under the heading “My Courses”. All course material will be posted on this web page, including announcements and grades. In addition, some readings can be accessed through this web page.

**Course Requirements**

1. Participation – 10%
2. Letter home – 10%
3. Responses papers – 25%
   - Blanton response – 15%
   - UGS lecture response – 10%
4. Country Profile – 55%
   - Part 1 – 20%
   - Part 2 – 10%
   - Part 3 – 25%

**Class participation.** Class participation is measured in a number of ways. First, as suggested by the course title, dialogue is a central component of this course. In this context, dialogue does not mean that we should be out to win debates with our fellow students or throw out uninformed opinions, nor does it mean that we will strive to come together as a one-view-for-all group. Instead, what we would like to achieve is an **ACADEMICALLY INFORMED** dialogue regarding the issues that are being discussed, using the readings, guests, each other, and previous class discussion as the tools to help us discuss these issues in a civil manner. Thus, you are expected to a) show up and b) complete all readings for the day's class before coming to class. For now, showing up can be virtual – YOU MUST PUT YOUR CAMERA ON – or in person. Also, read as actively as possible. Class time will be an opportunity to discuss and further explore the readings, so it is essential that everyone comes prepared. This is not to say that our personal experiences, backgrounds, and opinions are not important. They are, but our personal experiences and backgrounds are also (very) limited. In short, you are expected to be academically informed, full prepared participants in the discussions that take place. And, of course, a significant part of a good dialogue involves good listening…not just talking.

Second, you will complete a personal narrative. A really good way for me to get to know you is by having you write up your responses to a set of questions that provide me a window into who you are and how I can help you be as strong a student as you can be. For example, where are you from? why are you taking this course – are you particularly interested in the topic or did it fulfill a requirement? what parts of the syllabus look most and least interesting to you? what do you find most exciting and most challenging about the transition to UT? The complete list of questions is available on Canvas. It is due on **Tuesday, August 31.**

Third, you will share 2 current newspaper or other media stories related to HIV/AIDS or COVID. These should be turned in over the course of the semester. Stories in the press are SUPER common and bring a ‘real world’ dimension to our conversations. Please print out what you find (or send me the url) and **write up** a brief paragraph long description about what you read/saw. Be prepared to talk about it in class.

**Letter home.** One way to organize what you have learned in this class is through written tests, another is through a letter. Here, I would like you to write a letter—you do not need to send it –describing what you have learned so far. The goal here is to think critically about the introductory material – do you ‘buy’ these arguments, what’s new or different here, how does it help you make sense of your world, how might the recipient – your parent, governor, teacher, grandparent—receive this information? Due **September16.**
**Gem visits and response papers.** Signature courses are designed to draw on university “gems”, the unique resources (e.g., collections, museums) of the University that are available to students. In this class, the Country Profile project will have you take advantage of the exceptional research resources available at the UT libraries. You are also required to attend other Gems this semester. We will take two trips to the Blanton Museum and you will attend a University Lecture.

You will write two 2-3 page (double spaced) response papers about these experiences. The University Lecture Series Response should describe the event you observed and provide a critical discussion of how this event fits or fails to fit with the materials we have discussed in class. This is due **October 14.** The art response is due by **November 11.**

**Country Profile.** This is a multistage project that you will work on throughout the semester. Broken into three parts, this assignment will seek to expand your understanding of the global nature of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and enhance your ability to critically assess the reliability and validity of information available at UT and on the web. Finally, this assignment will enhance your ability to use the data you have collected to write up a compelling, evidence-based discussion of HIV/AIDS in your country of choice.

I will provide more detailed instructions as we move through the class. In brief, Part 1 of the assignment, you will write an empirical portrait of your country’s demographic profile and experience with HIV/AIDS. I will provide a more detailed rubric as the semester progresses. This paper is worth 20% of your final grade and is due on **September 30.** Part 2 requires you to identify academic papers and other relevant written material that speak to HIV/AIDS in your country (and reflected in your data) and submit an annotated bibliography. Part 2 is due on **October 19** and is worth 10% of your final grade. Part 3 builds on Parts 1 and 2 and will include an introduction plus some of the data you collected in Part 1 and a revised annotated bibliography. The final paper will be 4-5 pages long. The first draft of the introduction is due **November 4,** the revised draft is due on **November 18** (we will do a peer review exercise in class), and the final draft is due **November 23** and is worth 25% of your final grade. I strongly encourage a visit to my office hours to discuss your progress on this paper.

**Select University Notices and Policies**

**Personal Pronouns.** Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. We will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc). Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

This course takes part in UT Austin’s SHIFT initiative and incorporates protective factors to promote student wellness and mitigate the risks associated with drug and alcohol misuse, including adverse academic outcomes. Learn more at [https://shift.utexas.edu/](https://shift.utexas.edu/).

**University of Texas Honor Code.** The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

In this course, that means we will all work to ensure that the discussion space is shared relatively equally among the participants, and to maintain an atmosphere of respect for each other’s perspectives and arguments, especially when there are strong disagreements.

**Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT.** Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT’s Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php)
Faculty members, TAs, and certain staff members are considered “Responsible Employees” or “Mandatory Reporters,” which means that we are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee.

Starting January 1, Senate Bill 212 (SB 212) means the professor and TA for this course are required to report for further investigation any information concerning incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking committed by or against a UT student or employee. This means we cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with us. If you need to talk with someone who can maintain confidentiality, please contact University Health Services (512-471-4955 or 512-475-6877) or the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (512-471-3515 or 512-471-2255). We strongly urge you make use of these services for any needed support and that you report any Title IX incidents to the **Title IX Office**.

If you have concerns about the safety or behavior of fellow students, TAs or Professors, call BCAL (the Behavior Concerns Advice Line): 512-232-5050. Your call can be anonymous. If something doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t. Trust your instincts and share your concerns.

**Students with disabilities.** Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Please contact me as early in the semester as possible to let me know if you need anything to participate fully.

**Religious Holy Days.** By UT Austin policy, students are required to notify me of a pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will certainly give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

**Grading**

A (95 – 100) Excellent grasp of subject matter; provides relevant details and examples; draws clear and interesting connections, exceptionally original, coherent and well-organized; explains concepts clearly; ideas clearly written/stated, outstanding classroom participation
A- (90 – 94) Very good grasp of subject matter; provides relevant details and examples; draws clear connections; explains concepts clearly; ideas clearly written/stated
B+ (86 – 89) Good grasp of some elements above, others need work
B (83 – 85) Satisfactory grasp of some elements above
B- (80 – 82) Uneven, spotty grasp of the elements above
C+ (76 – 79) Limited grasp of the above
C (73 – 75) Poor grasp of the above
C- (70 – 72) Very poor grasp of the above
D (60 – 69) Little evidence of grasp of material, having done readings, attended class, or completed assignments
F (0 – 59) Insignificant evidence of having done readings, attended class, or completing assignments

**Internet Accessibility**

It is assumed that all students have access to the internet, the ability to go to various websites as needed, and the routine use of email. Some assignments will require the use of various websites.

Announcements, exercises, and other information will sometimes be sent to students over email or posted on the course webpage, so it’s important that you check your email and the webpage at least once a week. If you need any help in the basics of email, word processing, or web browsing, please let me know immediately, and suitable help will be arranged.
Course Outline and Assigned Readings

Section I. The Big Picture
This section introduces the sociological imagination and provides an overview of pandemics. It is organized around the McMillian, Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction plus other readings. It also places the pandemic within the broader, historical pattern of health and mortality.

Week 1
Introduction
Global picture of pandemics

Week 2
Tuesday
Omran. The epidemiologic transition: A theory of the epidemiology of population change [Readings]

Pandemics that Changed History [Readings]
https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/pandemics-timeline

Complete Personal Narrative and upload

Thursday
Farmer. Social inequalities and emerging infectious disease [Readings]
Hill Collins Chapter 1. Black Sexual Politics

Week 3
Tuesday
#MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram [Readings]

Thursday
McMillian, Introduction, Chapters 1 & 2

Week 4
Tuesday
McMillian, Chapters 3 & 4.

Thursday
McMillian, Chapters 5 & 6
Letter Home, due September 16

Week 5
Tuesday
An introduction to COVID [Readings]
David Taylor, guest lecturer

Thursday
continued.

Section II. HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa
This section focuses on HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa and considers the social and cultural factors that produce higher than expected levels of HIV in this part of the world.

Week 6
Tuesday
Whiteside—HIV, Chapter 1 and 2 [Readings]
https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet

Thursday
Trip 1 to Blanton
Part 1 Country Profile: Due on Thursday, September 30

Week 7
Tuesday  
Global picture, continued.

Thursday  
Love, Money, and HIV  
Chapters 1-2

Week 8
Tuesday  
Love, Money, and HIV  
Chapters 3-5

University Lecture Series  
10/11 –When Texas Froze Over  
10/12 –COVID-19: A Retrospective from Campus Leaders

Thursday  
Love, Money, and HIV  
6-7, Epilogue  
https://www.unaids.org/en/topics/education-plus

Response Paper: University Lecture Series: Due October 14th

Section III. Social Forces and HIV/AIDS in the US  
This next section introduces a sociological understanding of key statuses that shape risk and exposure to HIV/AIDS in the US.

Week 9
Tuesday  
America’s Hidden H.I.V. Epidemic [Readings]

Part 2 Country Profile: Due on October 19

Thursday  
D’Emilio, Capitalism and Gay Identity [Readings]

Mackenzie, Reframing masculinity: Structural vulnerability and HIV among black men who have sex with men and women [Readings]

Week 10
Tuesday  
Liesl Nydegger, guest lecture

Thursday  
Moonlight [film]

Week 11

Tuesday  
Moonlight

Thursday  
Blanton Trip 2

Section IV. Politics and Infectious Disease

Week 12
Tuesday  
Hobbes, Why did AIDS Ravage the US more than Any Other Developed Country? [Readings]

Public Health and Liberty: Beyond the Millian Paradigm  [Readings]

Thursday  
Reiss, Politicization of Science [Readings]
Colvin & Robins, Social Movements and HIV/AIDS in South Africa. [Readings]

Part 3 Country Profile: Due November 4.

Week 13
Tuesday  
How to Survive a Plague [movie]

Thursday  
Part 3: Revised draft due of Country Profile November 14
Peer review exercise

Week 14
Tuesday

Final draft of Country Profile - Part 3 due on November 23

Week 15
Tuesday  
Wrap up