

# The COVID-19 pandemic: A study in Cultural Epidemiology

Fall semester 2021

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*Class hours:* Wednesdays 14.15-17.15

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Although outbreaks, epidemics and even pandemics are technically common, some of them have a profound and long-lasting impact in societies. There is a clear before and after events such as the black plague, smallpox and the Spanish flu, to name a few. The impact of such events is certainly not limited to the health of societies but have a long-lasting impact in the overall society and have been a powerful driver of change in history.

The emergence and global spread of COVID-19 can't be seen as a sporadic event, but rather as a powerful reflection of the current social and environmental conditions created through our relationships with nature and with each other. Likewise, different responses to the crisis around the world are also culturally charged and driven by many economic, political, social determinants. It is therefore important to point out and analyze such determinants in order to understand the possible long-term consequences of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

During this course we will study the COVID-19 pandemic and the social, cultural and political circumstances around it from a comprehensive point of view. We will touch upon a broad range of topic from the biomedical and epidemiological concepts related to the SARS-CoV2 virus to the political, social and economic effects of the pandemic. We will compare important aspects of the effects and response to COVID-19 internationally, with special attention to the cases of Sweden and the US.

**Google Classroom:** In the Swedish Program, we use Google Classroom as the main platform for all the courses. On the course Classroom page, you will find the readings, assignments and instructions for the assignments, as well as the lectures. The course platform is also where you will submit your assignments and functions as a discussion forum outside of class. I will use the course platform to post content relevant to the class, as well as reminders of deadlines. Of course, anything of interest for you can also be shared, participation and discussion in the course platform is a part of your grade.

**Readings:** The material for this course includes chapters from books, scientific and opinion articles. All required readings will be provided to you.

Given that we aim to study an ongoing event, the readings may change to reflect updates in the literature and the interests of the students.

Class discussion will be a central part of this course, students are expected to take an active part on their learning.

**Laptops in the classroom:** You are welcome to use a laptop to take notes during lecture. However, please refrain from using the internet for activities not related to the lecture while in class.

**Grading:** Your grade will be calculated according to the following breakdown:

<i>Attendance:</i>	20%
<i>Participation:</i>	25%
- (Google classroom, article seminars and class discussions)	
<i>Presentations:</i>	20%
<i>Personal assignment, peer review and final presentation:</i>	35%

**Attendance (20%):** Regular attendance is mandatory. If for any reason you are unable to attend (illness, personal or family situation, etc.) get in contact with me or the administration as soon as possible.

**Participation (25%):** This includes participation in class discussions and lectures, as well as online in the course Google Classroom platform.

Active participation is essential during this course. We are studying a topic for which many things are not yet well described, and several opinions exist, all points of view are welcomed! The most important learning tool we have is discussion and critical thinking.

There will be several article discussion seminars in which you are expected to engage and guide the discussion.

Finally, please prepare by writing down the questions you have about the reading material before the lectures and article seminar.

**Presentations (20%):** There will be **two** presentations during the semester. The first will be an article seminar. You will present a summary of the day's article, prepare questions for discussion and guide the discussion with you classmates. The article seminars will be 45 minutes long, the presentations should be no longer than 15 minutes.

The second presentation will be a part of your personal assignment (see below).

**Personal assignment, peer review and final presentation (35%):** The personal assignment will be constantly developed during the semester. You should start early and are encouraged to come talk to me about your project during the first two weeks of the course in order to start choosing a topic.

This project should be a more serious and in-depth analysis of some aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project should use and incorporate what you have learned in lecture and through the class readings. You will be required to hand in reports of your progress on the project throughout the semester. The format of the project is up to you and can be an essay or in the form of a research paper. In any case, project should be around 8-10 pages including references. At the end of the semester you will present your project to the class.

Here is a summary of the instructions for each delivery, detailed information can be found in the google classroom. As the material might change in the course of the program, please review the contents continuously.

*Background and literature review (5%).* This is a 1 to 2-page report summarizing the background of the topic, as well as an explanation of why you want to research this topic. The idea is that you start doing some research on your own and find the area you are interested on. The topic might be changed, but the sooner you define what you like, the better.

*Aim and intended outcomes (10%).* In a brief (2 pages) statement, you will write about what do you expect to find and why. The main idea is to identify any wrong preconception you might have and critically think about the topic you chose.

*First draft of final project (10%).* At this point, you should have preliminary draft of your project. Focus on discussing what you have found and using previous material to create a first complete draft.

*Peer review (10%).* You will critically review the project of one of your classmates and provide a 1-2 page written report including comments and suggestions for improvement. You will also prepare questions and act as an “opponent” during the project presentations.

*Project presentation (10%).* At the end of the course, you will present your individual project and answer to the questions of your opponent and classmates. Presentations should be around 10 minutes in total, with 5 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for questions and discussion.

**Course learning outcomes:** At the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Understand the biological, social, economic and cultural aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evaluating different sources of information critically and develop independent conclusions.
- Be able to prepare and deliver clear and concise presentations.
- Creating a high quality and critical piece related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Date	Lecture	Hour	Activity	Readings
Week 1	Introduction to the course and basic concepts	14:15-15:15	Introduction to the course	-Sign into this free WHO course and watch the four short videos before the class. <a href="https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov">https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov</a> -Ewen Callaway et al. The coronavirus pandemic in five powerful charts. Nature 579, 482-483 (2020).
		15:15-15:30	Break	
		15:30-16:30	The SARS-CoV2 virus and COVID-19	
		16:30-16:45	Break	
		16:45-17:15	continued	
Week 2	Epidemics though history	14:15-15:15	Introduction to epidemiology	-Factfulness by Hans Rosling. Introduction. Epidemiology by Leon Gordis. Chapter 1. Introduction. -Plagues and peoples by William H McNeill. Preface and introduction. Epidemics and society by Frank M Snowden. Chapter 22: Dress rehearsals for the 21 <sup>st</sup> century.
		15:15-15:30	Break	
		15:30-16:30	The history of epidemics	
		16:30-16:45	Break	
		16:45-17:15	continued	
Week 3	Why are we so afraid of infectious diseases?	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Fitzpatrick, et al. "Fear of COVID-19 and the mental health consequences in America." Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy (2020).
		15:15-15:30	Break	
		15:30-16:30	The impact of culture in the response to COVID-19	-The plague by Albert Camus. chapters 1-3. -Airhihenbuwa C et al. Culture Matters in Communicating the Global Response to COVID-19. Prev Chronic Dis 2020;17:200245. -David DeSteno. How Fear Distorts Our Thinking About the Coronavirus. The New York Times Feb11 2020.
		16:30-16:45	continued	-David DeSteno. How Fear Distorts Our Thinking About the Coronavirus. The New York Times Feb11 2020.
		16:45-17:15	Break	-Emily St. John Mandel. You'll Probably Never Catch Ebola—So Why Is the Disease So Terrifying? The New Republic. August 12, 2014
Week 4	Global preparedness	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (presentations)	-Halpern SD et al. Cognitive Bias and Public Health Policy During the COVID-19 Pandemic. JAMA. 2020;324(4):337–338.
		15:15-15:30		

	before COVID-19.	15:30-16:30	Guidelines for the response to epidemics	Managing epidemics. Key factors about major deadly diseases. WHO. Part 1 pages 22-53. Wu, Joseph T et al. Nowcasting and forecasting the potential domestic and international spread of the 2019-nCoV outbreak originating in Wuhan, China: a modelling study. The Lancet, Volume 395, Issue 10225, 689 – 697.
		16:30-16:45		S. Flaxman, et al. Estimating the effects of non-pharmaceutical interventions on COVID-19 in Europe. Nature; 08-06-2020
		16:45-17:15	Interventions against COVID-19	
<b>Week 5</b>	The Swedish response to COVID-19	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (presentations)	Ludvigsson, J.F. (2020), The first eight months of Sweden's COVID-19 strategy and the key actions and actors that were involved. Acta Paediatrica.
		15:15-15:30		-“Health Care in Sweden” Sweden.se Fact Sheet: <a href="https://sweden.se/society/health-care-in-sweden/">https://sweden.se/society/health-care-in-sweden/</a>
		15:30-16:30	Public Health Interventions against infectious diseases	- <a href="https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/the-public-health-agency-of-sweden/communicable-disease-control/covid-19--the-swedish-strategy/">https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/the-public-health-agency-of-sweden/communicable-disease-control/covid-19--the-swedish-strategy/</a>
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	Measuring the impact of COVID-19	-Sanjay K Mohanty et al. Impact of COVID-19 Attributable Deaths on Longevity, Premature Mortality and DALY: Estimates of USA, Italy, Sweden and Germany. medRxiv 2020.07.06.20147009 (preprint). -Irwin, R.E. Misinformation and de-contextualization: international media reporting on Sweden and COVID-19. Global Health 16, 62 (2020). -Gretchen Vogel. ‘It’s been so, so surreal.’ Critics of Sweden’s lax pandemic policies face fierce backlash. Science Oct 6 <sup>th</sup> 2020.
<b>Week 6</b>	The US response to COVID-19	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Weinberger DM et al. Estimation of Excess Deaths Associated With the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States, March to May 2020. JAMA Intern Med. 2020;180(10):1336–1344.
		15:15-15:30		

		15:30-16:30	Organization of healthcare and Public Health in the US	<p>-The American way: How the world's most powerful country is handling covid-19. The Economist May 28<sup>th</sup> 2020.</p> <p>-Hsiang, S. et al. The effect of large-scale anti-contagion policies on the COVID-19 pandemic. Nature 584, 262–267 (2020).</p> <p>-Nuzzo JB, Bell JA, Cameron EE. Suboptimal US Response to COVID-19 Despite Robust Capabilities and Resources. JAMA. Published online September 16, 2020.</p>
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	A closer look to the US response	
<b>Week 7</b>	Who was more affected by COVID-19?	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (presentations)	Elgar, Frank Jat et al. "The trouble with trust: Time-series analysis of social capital, income inequality, and COVID-19 deaths in 84 countries." Social Science & Medicine (2020): 113365.
		15:15-15:30		<p>-VanderWeele TJ. Challenges Estimating Total Lives Lost in COVID-19 Decisions: Consideration of Mortality Related to Unemployment, Social Isolation, and Depression. JAMA. 2020;324(5):445–446.</p> <p>-Merlin Chowkwanyun et al. Racial Health Disparities and Covid-19 Caution and Context. N Engl J Med 2020; 383:201-203</p> <p>-Bo Burström, et al. Social determinants of health and inequalities in COVID-19, European Journal of Public Health, Volume 30, Issue 4, August 2020, Pages 617–618,</p>
		15:30-16:30	Measuring the impact of COVID-19	
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	Does COVID-19 affect vulnerable groups more?	
<b>Week 8</b>	Governance and COVID-19	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (presentations)	Nancy Krieger. ENOUGH: COVID-19, Structural Racism, Police Brutality, Plutocracy, Climate Change—and Time for Health Justice, Democratic Governance, and an Equitable, Sustainable Future American Journal of Public Health 110, 1620_1623.
		15:15-15:30		<p>-David S Jones. History in a Crisis — Lessons for Covid-19. N Engl J Med 2020; 382:1681-1683.</p> <p>Stevens, A. Governments cannot just 'follow the science' on COVID-19. Nat Hum Behav 4, 560 (2020).</p> <p>-Gregg Gonsalves et al. Political interference in public health science during covid-19. BMJ 2020; 371.</p>
		15:30-16:30	Governments and COVID-19: Why did some countries get affected more?	
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	The effects of government in the	

			different COVID-19 responses	
<b>Week 9</b>	Conspiracy theories and fake news. What is their impact?	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Saitz R, Schwitzer G. Communicating Science in the Time of a Pandemic. JAMA. 2020;324(5):443-444.
		15:15-15:30	Break	
		15:30-16:30	Science communication and public health	From plandemic to breadcrumbs: conspiracy-theory slang. The Economist. Sep 17 <sup>th</sup> 2020. Fisher KA, Bloomstone SJ, Walder J, Crawford S, Fouayzi H, Mazor KM. Attitudes Toward a Potential SARS-CoV-2 Vaccine: A Survey of U.S. Adults. Ann Intern Med. 2020 Sep 4:M20-3569.
		16:30-16:45	Break	
		14:15-15:15	Face masks, travel bans and other controversial interventions	Elaine He and Lionel Laurent. The World Is Masking Up, Some Are Opting Out. Bloomberg July 17 2020. Gostin LO, Wiley LF. Governmental Public Health Powers During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stay-at-home Orders, Business Closures, and Travel Restrictions. JAMA. 2020;323(21):2137-2138.
<b>Week 10</b>	Globalization, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Andrew P. Dobson et al. Ecology and Economics for Pandemic Prevention. Science 24 Jul 2020: Vol. 369, Issue 6502, pp. 379-381
		15:15-15:30		-Paolo Giani et al. Short-term and long-term health impacts of air pollution reductions from COVID-19 lockdowns in China and Europe: a modelling study. The Lancet Planetary Health -Ian Goldin Covid-19 proves globalization is not dead. The Financial times August 26 <sup>th</sup> 2020. -WHO. Climate change and human health - risks and responses. Summary. Available at: <a href="https://www.who.int/globalchange/summary/en/index5.html">https://www.who.int/globalchange/summary/en/index5.html</a>
		15:30-16:30	Looking at the bright side. Did pollution really drop during the pandemic?	
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	Impact of urbanization and	

			deforestation in infectious diseases	
<b>Week 11</b>	Global economy, international relations and COVID-19	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Sumner, Andy et al. "Estimates of the Impact of COVID-19 on Global Poverty." UNU-WIDER, April (2020): 800-9.
		15:15-15:30		
		15:30-16:30	Macroeconomic systems as a cause of COVID-19	The covid-19 pandemic is forcing a rethink in macroeconomics. The Economist July 25th, 2020.
		16:30-16:45		Daniel W. Drezner. The Song Remains the Same: International Relations After COVID-19. International Organization 74, Supplement 2020,
		16:45-17:15	Macroeconomic consequences of COVID-19	Scott R Baker, et al. The Unprecedented Stock Market Reaction to COVID-19, raaa008, The Review of Asset Pricing Studies. 18 July 2020 Sumner, A. et al. (2020) Precarity and the pandemic: COVID-19 and poverty incidence, intensity, and severity in developing countries. WIDER Working Paper 2020/77. Helsinki: UNU-WIDER.
<b>Week 12</b>	The role of science in society	14:15-15:15	Article Seminar (student presentations)	Gillens, M et al. (2014). Testing theories of American Politics: Elites, Interests Groups, and Average Citizens. Perspectives on Politics, 12(3), 564-581.
		15:15-15:30		
		15:30-16:30	Policy making in times of emergency. Evidence based?	Kari Lancaster et al. Making evidence and policy in public health emergencies: lessons from COVID-19 for adaptive evidence-making and intervention. Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, Volume 16, Number 3, August 2020, pp. 477-490(14)
		16:30-16:45		
		16:45-17:15	Continued	
<b>Week 13</b>		14:00-17:00	Student presentations and peer-reviews	