Description: Students will study the history of sexually transmitted diseases from the middle ages to contemporary society. From the first outbreak of syphilis in 1492 to AIDS today, students will learn how physicians and lay citizens drew upon attitudes and knowledge available to them in an effort to understand disease, handle the sufferer, and control the epidemic. Themes will include changing ideas about disease causality, the social and cultural significance of each disease, the organized public health response to each outbreak, and the development and limitations of medical therapeutics.

By studying responses to each disease at different historical moments, students will gain insight into the nature of a specific society. Students will also gain a historical perspective about what it means to be a disease sufferer. Students will apply the themes developed in this course to today’s Ebola and Zika epidemics to gain a better understand how our society is struggling to comprehend and handle these contemporary epidemic threats.