

Subject to change.
Always refer to the syllabus posted on our Canvas page for the most updated version.

UGS 303
Disease/Difference, Pathology/Power:
Critical Geographies of Health

Land Acknowledgment

Whether we meet remotely or in person in the U.S., we are meeting on Indigenous land. I acknowledge and pay respect to the Carrizo & Comecrudo, Coahuiltecan, Caddo, Tonkawa, Comanche, Lipan Apache, Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, Tigua Pueblo, and all the American Indian and Indigenous Peoples and communities who have been or have become a part of these lands and territories in Texas, here on Turtle Island.

Instructor:

Identifying material removed

Teaching Assistants:

Identifying material removed

Course Description

Is access to health care a universal human right?
How are public health campaigns political?
How do different national models of health care compare?
How is disease linked to the problems of patriarchy, racism and poverty?
Should essential medicines for global pandemics be patent-free?
How did HIV/AIDS and H1N1 become global epidemics? Is Ebola next?
Should the global trade in human organs be legalized?

Welcome to UGS 303: Critical Geographies of Health! The questions above demand an analysis of health and disease that centers people, place, and questions of power, key ideas in human geography. In this class we examine how these shape health and health care provision around the world. We focus on how power-relations tied to **class, race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and human/non-human inequalities** underlie, 1) global and historical inequalities in health outcomes and 2) the powerful ways in which different subjects and spaces are represented and depicted in health discourses.

The class covers case studies of health and illness including studies of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, environmental illnesses like toxicity-related cancers, and natural life course events like childbirth and pregnancy that are linked to health and well-being. We will also consider some of the ongoing debates in global and national health policy, the impacts of neoliberal globalization on health and health provision, The links between different kinds of social inequalities and health outcomes, efforts to address health inequities by governments, organizations, activists and individuals and representations of healthy and diseased bodies in popular culture.

Although a study of health may begin with the body, the course material will ask you to identify connections between **the body and local, national, global processes** -- to move beyond a focus on the physiology and biology of health and illness to an understanding of the **socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental context** in which health and illness is produced. In doing so, we will use these studies of health and illness as a way to think critically about **power** – in particular how social relations of power operate through places to produce well and unwell bodies.

Key learning goals

At the end of the class students will be able to:

- *Connect* individual bodily experiences of health and illness with broader socio-cultural, political, economic and historical processes, ie *geographic* processes.
- *Review and critique* a range of geographical approaches to the study of health and illness including political economy, political ecology, feminist, and postcolonial theories
- *Analyze* dominant visual and textual knowledges and representations of health and illness.
- *Discuss* intelligently a range of health-related case studies from a geographic perspective

Key skill-based goals

During the class students will:

- *Critically engage with and evaluate* geographic arguments on health and health care presented in textual and audio-visual media.
- *Practice geographic writing* in a range of formats and for a range of audiences.
- *Collect, critically evaluate and utilize* geographical academic research in order to make a strong argument/answer a carefully crafted research question.
- *Strengthen skills of peer-review* in a variety of forms
- *Develop* technical skills in website development, and possibly short film/podcast production

Required materials. A series of articles, book chapters and media links are available via Canvas or the library. Streamable film material will be available from the library.

Evaluation. Participation (20%), six reading blogs (15%), three exams (30%), section student facilitation (10%), research project steps (25%)

Grading System: Final letter marks are determined through the following scheme:

A: 100 – 96%, A -: 95.99 – 90%, B+: 89.99% - 88%, B: 87.99% - 82%, B-: 81.99% - 80%, C+: 79.99% - 78%, C: 77.99% - 72%, C-: 71.99% - 70%, D+: 69.99% - 68%, D: 67.99% - 62%, D-: 61.99% - 60%, F: Below 60%.

Expectations of you:

The following are strategies for completing this class with a strong and stress-free grade.
Take note!

Participate actively in lecture and section meetings. Your thoughtful and regular participation is central to your peers' learning, and your own. All in-class and homework exercises will connect closely to the tests and assignments. Completing these, whether you are in-person or watching lectures remotely, is a very important and helpful way to obtain a high standard in this course. I understand that family, illness, and unexpected (now expected unexpected) events may require you to miss class. Please let me know as soon as you can if you anticipate extended missed class, e.g. due to quarantine, illness, unexpected care for family members or new financial obligations tied to the COVID-pandemic. Do not come to class or section if you have known contact with someone with COVID-19, if you show symptoms, or if you have tested positive for COVID-19. We follow [University policy](#) regarding excused absences.

Complete all assigned readings before class. All lectures and discussion will assume a familiarity with the assigned readings. You are expected to come to all lecture and section having completed all reading assignments, to be prepared to discuss the reading material and to be able to participate in the class activities on the readings by sharing your thoughts, views and questions. These activities are designed to develop your *critical* reading skills. You will not just complete the readings, but you will put the readings to work. You can do so by asking: What are the connections between the readings and the theories and case studies we've discussed in class? What intellectual perspective is the author writing from? How does the reading help me understand the course material better and/or problematize it? What questions does the reading raise for me? Raising questions about the readings in class, in your blogs and in office hours shows you are engaged and participating. We will often ask you what your questions are, come prepared to raise and discuss them.

Laptops and cell phones. Laptops, phones and tablets can be useful tools for your learning and I recognize that completing our readings online enables you to avoid costly printing/book purchase fees. As we all know, they can also be distracting when used in class. I expect your full attention during our class time. If you use any electronics during lectures, please only use them to access materials related to our course. We will regularly ask you to put them away during class/ section exercises.

Respectful engagement. Your varied life experiences are an important resource for exploring the issues we cover. The course is designed to be provocative, to push you and your peers to rethink taken-for-granted assumptions. Doing so is unsettling and thus productive. That is what learning is all about. But it means we must work harder to ensure we are respectful, empathetic and supportive. How? Recognize and respect your peers' identity-formation, listen actively and attentively to their opinions and thoughts, respect others' ideas even when they challenge your own, and keep confidential any conversations related to particular students. If you recognize yourself as someone who speaks often, work on listening and encouraging others to speak. If you know you are quieter, push yourself to share at least one reflection with the class or in small group discussions during each session. We and our student facilitators will call on you to do so. Overall, I expect your opinions be grounded in interpretations of facts, rather than untruths, and deploy critical thinking. This does not mean abandoning your position, but instead interrogating where your ideas come from and their work shaping our world. As the course instructor I will hold you to respectful engagement at all times, whether in person, over

Zoom or in class-related but unofficial online spaces. If at any point during the class you feel a student's behavior is inappropriate please contact me and I will work with UT services to manage the situation.

What you can expect from us

Intellectual engagement. Our role is to provide you with a foundation in the geographic theories around health and the connections between these ideas and 'real world' examples. To ensure this is as rich, compelling and engaging process as possible we will regularly use a mix of media in class, combining short lectures with group discussion and individual work. Our most important role is to push your thinking beyond taken for granted assumptions using the lecture material, the readings we assign, the assignments we have designed, and the questions we ask you in class. Sometimes (often) we will take on a position that feels uncomfortable for you, sometimes this will reflect our opinions and sometimes not. The point is that we stretch ourselves to think critically about the ways we think about the world. We will encourage you to engage as actively as possible in this process and to push yourselves and your peers, respectfully, as we move through the class together.

Advising and mentoring. The class is structured to facilitate peer-peer learning and mentorship. I model teaching best practices for my TAs, they guide student facilitators in leading fruitful discussion, and students guide, inform and teach us all. Embrace this pedagogical process. You can expect me to be available via email from 930am-330pm on weekdays and to respond to your respectful emails within 2 days (usually far sooner). I will be available after and before classes in our lecture space and once week during my Zoom-based office hours. If you have something personal to discuss, you may also arrange to meet with me by appointment. I would love to respond to your emails outside of working hours but I will be working on my son's latest Minecraft challenge, feeding him etc. Please plan accordingly when preparing for class assignments that might raise questions for you. Your TAs are busy getting their MAs and PhDs, balancing work and life too. They will share their own availability, please respect it.

Grades and grading. This is an introductory course, centered on Ds not As. i.e it is about Discovery! We learn via failure, revision, reflection and engagement. Strong participation and engagement grades (worth over a 1/3 of the class grade) are based on student *improvement* and *growth* in their ability to *reflect critically* on the issues we cover in class *via the intellectual approaches* we learn about. This is determined via careful conversation between the TAs and myself, prior to the final grade assignment at the end of the term. For freshmen students under pressure for many years to be the "best," this creates space to learn. It is a vitally important process of growth, but one that students often find challenging to comes to terms with. Please sit with your discomfort, it is part of the learning process, and feel free to discuss this with us at the start of the course. Keep your eye on the true goal of this class, which is the journey of learning not being graded. If you feel under pressure to get A grades, and are not yet ready for other ways of assessing success, please consider taking an alternative class. You can take higher-level courses with me down the road. You can expect your assignments to be carefully reviewed and fairly graded according to transparent grading policies we will share with

you in advance. The TAs and I carefully standardize our assessments. Your assignments and exams will usually be returned within two weeks (and usually far sooner).

Recognition. As a community of students and teachers, we commit to honoring your request to be addressed by an alternate/preferred name or gender pronoun. We are committed to supporting students who learn in different ways and who require accommodations of varied kinds.

Other Important policies

UGS core requirements. Undergraduate Signature courses have several requirements. These include: integration of the University Lecture Series and the University “Gems” (for example the libraries and galleries); Oral and Written skill development; Information Literacy; and Critical Thinking. We integrate each of these elements into the course. A note that this course at the 303 size does not carry a writing flag. However, **writing (and reading) is central to the course.** Indeed, a substantial portion of your grade will come from your written work. That means that you will write regularly, and in varied ways, over the course of the semester. Our writing will include: short informal blogs on the weekly reading material, a series of written mini-assignments related to a research project, written tests, and regular in-class write-to-learn exercises. You will regularly revise your writing, and you will work with your peers in improving their writing. We write together in a supportive, low-stakes, and community-based setting. This is most conducive to improve and learning to love writing! If you’re nervous about writing (and of course if you love writing) this is a great class for you!

COVID-19 Mitigation. Our mental and physical health, and that of our community, is my top priority. The format of this class is hybrid, and will adapt over the course of the semester based on the Covid-19 pandemic. Lecture material will always be recorded and available for your use remotely through our Canvas page. This material is copyrighted, and you must gain my permission to share beyond the online course ‘walls’. You need not come to any weekly class lectures, if you so prefer. TA sections will be online only, subject to change pending the status of the pandemic in our community and the level of our students’ adherence to safety protocols. Take note. At this time, exams will be in-person. This may change.

Using Canvas. Our course will be web-assisted using Canvas at canvas.utexas.edu. You should check this website at least twice a week. You will log in to the site with the same username and password that you use for your email. For tech support with Canvas, contact them via [http://canvas.utexas.edu/](https://canvas.utexas.edu), or see the guidelines for a host of student questions at [http://guides.instructure.com/m/4212](https://guides.instructure.com/m/4212). You can also contact UT tech support via 512-475-9400. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have access to the course website.

Disability Accommodation. Accommodating students with disabilities is an important and valued part of my job. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact

the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities (471-6259) or contact them through their website <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/>. Please inform me as soon as possible of your needs. Note that I inform TAs of your accommodations so that they can assist you appropriately. Right now, we know that students are experiencing heightened and adverse impacts on their mental health. Depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, obsessive acts and even suicidal thoughts are expected and quite rational responses to this current moment. I am here to support you, along with a body of organizations and people at UT. If you're struggling, let me and/or a TA know as soon as you can.

Due Dates. Our class will lean heavily on participation week by week. For this reason, it is very important that you stay on top of weekly deadlines. Due to COVID-19 accommodations, and the pedagogical design of the class, late work, e-mailed work, or makeups for participation credit completed in class, review sessions, course assignments, or exams will rarely be accepted. The exception is a medical/ family (broadly conceived) emergency that is verified via the UT-Austin emergency medical services OR if you are a primary caregiver (e.g. parent or sibling of a child in your primary care). If you cannot make one of the scheduled exams dates, please choose an alternate class.

Academic Integrity. Plagiarism, cheating and other misconduct are serious violations of your contract as a student. You are expected to know and follow the University's policies. Plagiarism includes: using another writer's words or ideas without proper citation, citing your source but reproducing exact words without quotation, borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting them, copying from a peer the main argument, use of examples, concepts etc. in your work, buying or borrowing the work of other students, sharing quiz or exam answers or working together on these (unless we say you should), using of non-sanctioned shared review documents (like google drive/docs) to memorize set answers for quizzes and exams. (Review guides that you compile together with your peers, TAs and myself as part of the course are welcomed. You will know the difference.) Assignment design, review and assessments and the community we develop together are carefully structured so that it is unlikely you will plagiarize or otherwise "cheat". If you do so, it also means it will be easy to identify. Any student who plagiarizes in any form, however minor, will receive no credit for the assignment/exam in question. Without exception and however minor, in cases of plagiarism I instigate the required procedures with the university administration. This is for your longer-term benefit and that of your peers. I use this process to report integrity violations: <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/reportanincident.php>. Please see the following resource for avoiding plagiarism: <https://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/cwgs/files/pdf-4/ai2012.pdf>

Grade Contestation, Disclosure and Incompletes. All information concerning your performance in this course is covered by federal privacy legislation, known as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). No grades or status questions will be provided by telephone or over email. You are welcome to come to my Zoom-based office hours to discuss your performance. I work closely with your TAs to determine grade rubrics and assignments. Once assigned, I defer to our TAs on grade determinations. Contestations (to me, not your TA, and in writing please) will receive a response within a week. On rare

occasion, I offer an incomplete (“I” grade) if you have completed most of the class but have serious medical/family-related issues that have affected your ability to finish it. Please come to me as early as possible once you recognize that this applies to you.

Copyright Policy Statement. All materials used in this class are copyrighted. These materials include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, recorded lectures, and any additional problem sets. Because these materials are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy, share or distribute unless permission is expressly granted. Class Recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. They should not be shared outside of class. Violation of this will lead to student misconduct proceedings.

Campus Carry. Texas state law now authorizes licensed adults to carry a concealed handgun in University classrooms. The law requires that the handgun be completely concealed at all times. Please note that in accordance with University guidance, if a gun is seen at any time during class, the carrier will be reported immediately to the police.

Course assignments

1. Three exams (30%). *Due during class sessions.* You will complete three tests during our class. The tests will assess your comprehension of the course reading and lecture material, and support your engagement with this material. We will discuss the form of our class tests in more detail during the semester. For now, tests will be in-person, with remote options, Covid pending. If you can’t make the test dates, switch to another class.

2. Participation (20%). *Due during class sessions.* You are expected to attend all lectures and sections and to come prepared to discuss the readings assigned for that week. All students will be called upon to participate. Examples of ‘participation’ include the following and will be a useful way to prepare for in-class tests and writing exercises: Noting down the key words that arose for you from the readings, commenting on the readings and connecting readings to the lecture/other student’s comments, raising questions about the content of the reading or lecture material, responding to questions, providing insights into your understanding of the key concepts, connecting different students’ comments and ideas together, balancing speaking with listening actively and carefully. In addition to these requirements, your participation grade will assess your improvement and engagement over the course of the entire semester. This portion of your participation grade will be assessed via thoughtful reflective consultation between the TAs and myself at the end of the semester. This portion of your grade will not be posted to canvas but may be shared with you only in one on one meetings.

3. Section student facilitation (10%). *Twice during the semester, with 2-3 peers. Starts week 3.* Students will lead section discussion each week. To prepare for your facilitation you should review your peers’ blogs and prepare answers to the following questions. Bring 1 page, single spaced, of typed notes on the following for your peers (1 per 2 to 3 students is fine). What did your peers identify as the main argument in the material, what was it for you? What were 1-3 key words/ ideas that kept coming up? How did the material make your peers feel? Note the feelings that were articulated in the blogs, and what prompted these feelings.

What critical geographies of power (ie related to the interaction of people and places infused with racial, class-based, gendered, sexualized etc power) emerged in these readings? What ties can you identify (at least 1) between this material and other week's material? Most importantly, what were **2-3 of the most thought-provoking and/or helpful questions** raised by your peers in their blogs? (Their questions will be **bolded** for easy access!)

4. Six Blogs (15%). *Due by 5pm Thursdays. Blogs receive 0, 1 or 2pts/blog. Select at least 1 set of readings in each "system" to blog on.* Over the course of the semester you will post 7 short (350-400 word) blogs to Canvas. The word limit is important and will be *strictly* monitored. Why? Writing at least 350 words ensures you engage in the required depth, keeping within 400 words develops your skills in editing and crisp writing, and it protects the time of our class TA. Over the remainder of the course you are required to post once for each "system" we cover, as per your interest. Regardless of whether you have blogged that week, you will be accountable for the reading material in class sessions, tests, assignments and, most notably, in section discussion. Note that keeping up with your blogs is key to a strong class grade. Plan ahead and select your blog weeks according to your academic and personal schedule, tests and other assignments in this and other classes, and your excitement about the material.

Your blogs will provide a thoughtful commentary and critical engagement with the readings assigned for the week. Your blog should compare/contrast the readings for the week. Your blog must be original. Copying words and ideas from other students constitutes plagiarism and will result in disciplinary action and a failing grade. The first blog has particular guidelines (see the text box below). Subsequent blogs should follow the 4 similar, but more general, guidelines detailed below:

1. Open with a catchy blog title (not included in the word limit)
2. Include 1-2 sentences reviewing the heart of the readings, what they have in common and/or how they differ. Unless readings are optional, your review should touch on all of the readings, even if just briefly.
3. Describe how 1 or more of the readings make you *feel*? Discuss the most interesting/ frustrating/ exciting/ engaging etc aspect of the pieces for you and tell us why they made you feel that way.
4. Close with 1-2 thoughtful questions raised by the readings to prompt in-class discussion. Write these in **bold text**. Your facilitators will thank you.

How to ask good questions. Raising questions about the class materials is one of the most important ways you can demonstrate you are engaging critically and actively. To ensure these questions are useful to us as a class take note of the following:

- ⊗ Avoid very big, general and open-ended questions ("When will these problems ever end? What can we do about this?" "What does the future hold?" "Why does this problem exist?") These are important, but they are fairly easy to pose and don't push you to really engage with the specific material in front of you. These kinds of questions will probably result in reduced points. Instead use this blog space to articulate questions that would make for constructive discussion and that are answerable (even if several answers are possible).

- ☺ Pose questions that put the readings/audio-visual material into conversation (“How do author x and author y’s understanding of z differ? What would author x have to say about author y’s argument? How does author x’s example/argument challenge that of author y?”)
- ☺ Pose clarifying questions (“What does author x mean when she uses the word “y?””)
- ☺ Connect readings/class material from across the weeks (“How does the argument presented by author x connect with the readings on y from week z?”)

Blog grade feedback. (0pts = late/not completed, 1 pt = under/over word count, missing/weak on **any** one of 1-4 elements listed above, or failing to demonstrate some engagement with all the readings for that week (though you can do so briefly and then focus in on one piece), 2 pt = a nice job, the blog addresses the 1-4 points listed above, demonstrates engagement with all the readings, and is within the word limit). You can expect feedback from Dr Faria during class session in week 2, and from your TAs via Canvas and in section, for your first and perhaps second blog. After that time, you have the information you need to achieve a 2 pt score for each blog. We will divert our time at that point to other aspects of the class. If you receive a 1 or 0 pts on the blog after week 2, check this syllabus and our comments carefully to understand why.

5. Research project mini-assignments (25%): *Series of mini-assignments, no final research project.* Over the course of the semester you will explore a health-related issue related to our UT-Austin community. Via a series of mini-assignments, you will take a critical geographic perspective. i.e you will consider the role of *power* (race, gender, class, citizenship, etc) and *place* and spaces (the body, nation, region, urban, rural for example) in creating, spreading, reducing or otherwise shaping your health-related issue. You will use geographic sources (articles from geographic journals) and methods (interviews, focus groups, participant observation, mapping etc) as part of your research. A note that in this class, we review three *geographic* perspectives that you can draw on: political-economy, political ecology and feminist. You may choose to focus on one or a range of these.

Course Content

Each week you will work with at least ONE academic geographic article and at least ONE popular article, piece of creative writing, audio-visual piece, podcast, image etc. This material will mostly be made available on Canvas at least one week prior to its use. To build your research skills, we will sometimes ask you to **locate these materials yourself** via the UT library system. Readings must be completed before our class meets on Tuesdays. In lecture and section you will be asked to connect the material to that week’s assigned readings via discussion, pop-quizzes and/or group or individual class exercises. In these exercises, we emphasize the reading material heavily. Take note.

Week 1, August 23rd – 27th

Introductions

First class day: 8/26

Due: Please Review of our Canvas page and this syllabus prior to our first class meeting

Weeks 2-3, August 30th – September 10th

The Immune System: health care research and provision in global perspective

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitation

Due: Blog week 2, Thursday, 9/2 **OR**

Due: Blog week 3, Thursday, 9/9

Week 4-5, September 13th – 24th

The Circulatory System: globalization and global flows of health and disease

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitations

Due: Blog week 4, Thursday, 9/16 **OR**

Due: Blog week 5, Thursday 9/23

Week 6-7, September 27th – October 8th

The Digestive System: critical geographies of food and eating

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitations

TEST 1: Week 6, Tuesday 9/28

Due: Blog week 6, Thursday 9/30 **OR**

Due: Blog week 7, Thursday 10/7

Week 8-9, October 11th – 22nd

The Renal System: toxic environments and the critical geographies of waste

Librarian visit during Tuesday's class 12th October (tentative)

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitations

Due: Blog week 8, Thursday 10/14 **OR**

Due: Blog week 9, Thursday 10/21 at noon

Week 10-11, October 28th – November 8th

The Reproductive System: Pregnancy and the medicalization of childbirth

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitations

TEST 2: Week 10, Tuesday 10/26, in class.

Due: Blog week 10, Thursday 10/28 **OR**

Due: Blog week 11, Thursday 11/4

Week 12-13, November 8th – 19th

The Exocrine System: hair, skin, nails and the critical geographies of beauty

Due: Weekly readings and section facilitations

Due: Blog week 12, Thursday 11/12 **OR**

Due: Blog week 13, Thursday 11/18

Week 14: Thanksgiving. No lectures or sections.

Week 15-16, November 29th December 6th

Rest, Review, Reflect, Resolve

No new readings or section facilitations

Due: Week 15, 11/30 – Blanton Museum Visit

TEST 3: Week 15, Tuesday 12/2.

Due: Week 16, 12/2 – final project showcase in sections