

September 4, 2020

To the MCTL Committee,

Over the course of the summer, I developed a new first year seminar (FYS) entitled: “From Harmless to Hazard: Changing Public Health Threats in the United States.” This FYS examines shifting American conceptions and experiences of a range of prominent health threats. The course enables to students to trace and evaluate numerous factors, including how new scientific understandings, social reforms, and broad cultural changes influenced whether particular behaviors or exposures were deemed harmless or hazardous. I also adapted the originally proposed course to incorporate regular discussion and writing of contemporary, rapidly changing understandings of the risks of COVID-19, which so utterly transformed our daily lives this past year. The course now more explicitly connects the past to the present as we survey the American landscape of public health and risk.

I developed the course syllabus (attached) to include a range of different kinds of writing assignments, including both shorter weekly writing as well as a longer overarching project designed to culminate in a final paper at the end of the semester. Weekly writing includes short responses to course readings in a variety of formats, from free writes to responses to short answer questions. Five times throughout the semester, students will also be asked to write short analyses of current events, comparing and contrasting recent news developments to historical public health challenges. I also read and drew on the book *Writing Analytically* to develop free write and other more informal writing assignments as part of the course.

I worked with Muhlenberg librarian Susan Falciani Maldonado to develop an oral history module and project as part of the course. After planning, conducting and analyzing an oral history interview, students will be able to draw on this interview as a source for their final paper, an analysis of changing understandings of a public health risk of their choosing.

In developing this course, I also obtained and read a range of books and articles to incorporate into the course assignments. Some examples include *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health* by Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* by Katharine Anne Porter, and *The Pox of Liberty* by Werner Troesken. I also worked with the Muhlenberg library to make the 1990s film “The Insider” virtually available so that students will be able to view it remotely and write a short reflection based on its examination of the big tobacco industry and public health risk.

In addition to designing new assignments and obtaining new course material, a significant portion of my time this summer in preparing this new course was dedicated to applying lessons learned from our summer “Camp Design Online” program so that I could structure this course as a fully online course. I’ve incorporated new pedagogical approaches that I learned about, such as the use of Zoom breakout rooms and collaborate Google documents, to structure class activities

and assignments to be as engaging and collaborate as possible in an online seminar format. In addition to the course syllabus (attached), here are links to two collaborative Google documents our class has used so far as examples of the kind of online approaches I have adapted for the course:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jFH1WggglUO2cgvAcR2ZFek9oYChY0-9/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs>

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1arRNIoYufbK\\_MUL8p7k918\\_54DHOTHCenemSL8AA39w/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1arRNIoYufbK_MUL8p7k918_54DHOTHCenemSL8AA39w/edit)

Throughout the semester, I plan to learn from the experience of teaching this new course for the first time, as well as teaching in a fully online modality for the first time, so I can continuously improve upon the course should I have the opportunity to teach it again.

Thank you very much,

Sincerely,

Kathleen Bachynski

**From Harmless to Hazard:  
Changing Public Health Threats in the United States  
FYS 166, Fall 2020**

Instructor: Dr. Kathleen Bachynski  
[kathleenbachynski@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:kathleenbachynski@muhlenberg.edu)

Office Hours: Via Zoom  
Zoom meeting room: <https://muhlenberg.zoom.us/j/2217580115>  
Sign-up here or email to schedule me an appointment:  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vZaxmxClxJpb0059zASm2GNrieUtyvqgT\\_aWbYZ35Yg/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vZaxmxClxJpb0059zASm2GNrieUtyvqgT_aWbYZ35Yg/edit)

Required Text: None.

Writing Assistant: Sophie Sarnitsky  
[ssarnitsky@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:ssarnitsky@muhlenberg.edu)

**Overview:**

Amazed to see *Mad Men*-era doctors smoking? Astounded to discover that ice hockey goalies once stopped slap shots without protective masks? Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social, cultural and technological changes transformed American health practices, behaviors, and understandings of which health risks were acceptable or preventable. This first year seminar will examine shifting American conceptions and experiences of a range of prominent health threats. We will trace and evaluate numerous factors, including how new scientific understandings, social reforms, and broad cultural changes influenced whether historical behaviors or exposures were deemed harmless or hazardous. Medical studies, oral history interviews, news stories, and literary accounts will enable us to study these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective. We will also examine current, rapidly changing understandings of the risks of COVID-19, which so utterly transformed our daily lives this past year, connecting the past to the present as we survey the American landscape of public health and risk.

**Learning Goals:**

The learning goals of this course include:

1. Promote critical thinking, reading, and research skills
2. Engage in regular writing, sharing of writing, and revising of writing based on both peer and instructor feedback

3. Critically analyze the values and assumptions behind scientific and social understandings of risk
4. Address ambiguity and uncertainty as part of the process of changing scientific interpretations, the development public health knowledge, and the process of learning

**Course Objectives:**

After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. *Place understandings of health risks in context:* Examine how both new scientific knowledge and changing social and cultural contexts influence how we conceptualize health risks
2. *Connect past public health challenges to the present:* Draw on primary historical documents, oral histories, literary accounts, and other interdisciplinary approaches to compare historical processes of change to shifting understandings of contemporary public health risks
3. *Strengthen writing and research skills:* Use questions about concepts of risk, safety, and public health as a way to strengthen research and writing skills

**Grading:**

Your grade will be based on the following:

Discussions and Reading Responses	25%
Current Events Reflections (5)	10%
Project Interview and Proposal	10%
Project Short Drafts	10%
Project Peer Edits and Revisions	10%
Group Presentation	10%
Final Project Paper	20%
Class Engagement Reflections	5%

**Total** **100%**

Based on the percentage of points earned, your equivalent letter grade will be as follows:

Percentage: (Numerical grades will be rounded up to the next highest number ONLY if the decimal is > or = .5)

94-100=A	90-93=A-	87-89= B+	84-86=B	80-83=B-
77-79=C+	74-76=C	70-73=C-	60-69=D	Below 60=F

## **Course Format**

This course will be delivered fully online, and I plan to make all course information, resources, assignments due dates, etc. available through Canvas (either directly in Canvas or linked from Canvas).

Please be sure to regularly check your Muhlenberg email as this is the email address I will use to communicate with you. If you do not regularly check this email account, be sure that you have made the necessary changes so that emails from this account can be forwarded to whatever email account you check.

**NOTE: There will be no Zoom session on Tuesday, November 3 because this is the day of the U.S. election.**

## **Writing Assistant**

We are fortunate to have Sophie Sarnitsky join our class as a writing assistant. You will be expected to meet with her *at least* twice this semester: once in a small group, and once one-on-one. However, you are most welcome and strongly encouraged to meet with her more often, as needed.

Here is a message from Sophie: "I will work closely with Dr. Bachynski throughout the semester to discuss both students' progress and the progress of the class as a whole. You can think of me as a fellow student whose goal it is to help foster the analytical thinking skills that are crucial for writing at the college level! Whether we meet one-on-one or in small groups, I hope that our discussions will encourage you to find confidence in your voice and in your writing."

## **Discourse**

Everyone's input is important. **Civil discourse is expected.** Please note that everyone in the class is expected to voice their ideas and opinions without fear of ridicule, retribution, or intolerance from others in the class. If we all think about things the same way, then we are going to have a very boring and unconstructive class. While you may not agree with an opinion or idea, it is important to consider others' points of view. When responding to the notion of the *idea*, no verbal attacks on the *person* who voiced the idea will be tolerated.

## **Engagement**

You will be able to demonstrate engagement with the course material in a variety of ways, including attending and engaging in synchronous classes, volunteering to present/discuss current events during class, adding relevant comments and questions in the class, working with groupmates in an effective manner, interacting with the writing assistant and the professor, and contributing insightful and thoughtful comments on the Discussion Board. You will be asked to describe and reflect on the ways you engaged with the course material as part of your final grade.

## Course Outline

**College Skills:** Writing, researching, peer editing

**Past Health Challenges:** workplace safety, germ theory of disease, 1918 flu pandemic, etc.

**Public Health Concepts and Present Threats:** COVID19, current events

**Oral History and Final Project:** conducting, annotating, analyzing, writing up an oral history interview that addresses changing understandings of risk

## Course Content Topics Sequence

**Running throughout all topics over the course of the semester:**

Short reading responses

Current event reflections

### Topic 1: Introductions

What is risk?

What is public health?

### Topic 2: Planning an oral history interview

What is oral history?

Planning an oral history interview (with Susan Falciani Maldonado)

### Topic 3: Germ Theory of Disease

Causes of disease

Asymptomatic disease transmission

Conducting an oral history interview

### Topic 4: The 1918 Flu Pandemic

Literary depictions of risk

Traumatic memory and the “forgotten apocalypse”

Analyzing an oral history interview

### Topic 5: The Pox of Liberty

American political institutions and public health

Individual vs. public risk

Using Muhlenberg libraries

### Topic 6: Smoking: *The Insider*

Hazards of everyday products

Journalism and public understandings of risk

Writing to effectively incorporate primary and secondary sources

Final paper proposal

### Topic 7: Communicating Risk

Group Presentations: COVID19 and risk communication

Peer editing final paper; incorporating peer edits

### Topic 8: Contemporary Threats and the Age of Risk

Wrapping up the course: connecting past to present

Scientific knowledge, social contexts, and changing understandings of risk

Final Project Paper Due

## Global Pandemic

This course is being taught during a global pandemic. The resulting upheaval and uncertainty are likely to affect us all in ways that are difficult to predict. Your health and the health of the people around you—in other words, the public's health—are my priority. I hope they will be your priority too. If you are having trouble, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I will work with you.

### Academic Integrity:

Integrity is an integral part of being a good person, citizen, worker, and decent public health practitioner. It is expected that you will practice the utmost in integrity in this course and beyond.

- Please review the AIC which can be found online at : [www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/dean-academic/integrity](http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/dean-academic/integrity) and in the student handbook.
- Also, an online tutorial from Indiana University, Bloomington, is available for you. You may access the tutorial at <https://plagiarism.iu.edu/certificationTests/index.html>. **Start the tutorial for NON-Indiana University students.**

- Students who are caught cheating or plagiarizing will be given a 0 for the assignment and/or may receive an F for the course. Students who are aware of cheating and do not disclose it are violating the AIC and will be penalized accordingly.

### **Students needing special accommodations:**

Students requesting classroom or course accommodations must complete a multi-faceted application/approval process through the Office of Disability Services prior to the development and implementation of an Accommodation Plan. Each Accommodation Plan is individually and collaboratively developed with the Directors or staff of the following Departments, as appropriate: Academic Resource Center, Office of Counseling Services, Student Health Services, and the Office of Disability Services. If you have not already done so, please contact the appropriate Department to have a dialogue regarding your academic needs and the recommended accommodations, auxiliary aides, and services.

### **The Academic Resource Center**

The Academic Resource Center (ARC) offers individual and small-group tutoring, course-specific workshops, seminars of academic success, peer mentoring, and professional academic coaching for all currently enrolled Muhlenberg students. Students may request to be assigned to work with a tutor for the duration of the fall semester starting on Wednesday, September 2nd by using the [online tutor request form](#). (This link will go live on 9/2 at 8 AM.) Additional information regarding academic support is available in the [ARC brochure](#) and on the [ARC website](#). Questions regarding the ARC or any of their services may be directed to [arcstudent@muhlenberg.edu](mailto:arcstudent@muhlenberg.edu).

### **Financial Hardship**

If you are experiencing financial hardship, have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or do not have a safe and stable place to live, I would urge you to contact our CARE Team through the Dean of Students Office for support. Their website is [www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/deanst/careteam/](http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/deanst/careteam/).