

COVID-19: A LIBERAL ARTS APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has touched our natural, social, and human worlds in profound and unprecedented ways. To understand the massive and complex effects of this global pandemic requires tools that draw from multiple perspectives. Taught by experts from disciplines across the college, this course will introduce students to many different facets of COVID-19, pushing them to think about the interconnections between the Sciences, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities in helping make sense of a global crisis of such magnitude.

COORDINATING PROFESSOR

Dr. Shampa Biswas, Paul Garrett Professor of Political Science (biswassa@whitman.edu).

COURSE ASSISTANTS

The following current Whitman students are assisting with this course. They are available to help you figure out course logistics, engage with you in discussions, help brainstorm on your final essay, and answer questions about life at Whitman. Please feel free to reach out to them at the email address listed next to their names:

1. Nikita Adhikari (Psychology): adhikan@whitman.edu.
2. Isaiah Banta (Computer Science): bantaib@whitman.edu.
3. Cameron Conner (Politics and Rhetoric, Writing, and Public Discourse): connercn@whitman.edu.
4. Jessica Robinson (Mathematics): robinsjc@whitman.edu
5. Cade Schott (Economics): schottch@whitman.edu.
6. Gavin Victor (Philosophy): victorgj@whitman.edu.

REQUIREMENTS

Please note the following four requirements for this course:

1. **Lectures:** Each student must watch a minimum of seven recorded lectures. You may watch as many lectures as you want, but you will need to complete a very short assignment (see below) on seven of these lectures. You are advised, but not required to

pick at least one lecture from each of these three categories: Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Humanities and Arts. More instructions on watching videos is provided below.

2. **Discussion Board:** Each student will respond to the question posed by the professor at the end of each lecture on an accompanying discussion board. At a minimum, each student will post one response on seven different boards, but you may continue to engage with others also posting on the discussing board as often and as many times as you please. Current Whitman students will be moderating these discussion boards and may engage with you on them. More instructions on discussion board postings are provided below.
3. **Journal:** Each student will keep a daily journal from the start (the day you watch the first lecture) to the end (the day you submit the final essay) of the course. This is a self-directed, ungraded assignment. More instructions on writing journal entries are provided below.
4. **Integrative Essay:** Each student will write a short essay (three pages) on a prompt whose purpose is to think about COVID-19 in a cross-disciplinary way. More instructions on the integrative essay are provided below.

Instructions for watching videos

Whitman professors are scholars doing cutting-edge work in their respective fields. Their classrooms are vibrant and dynamic and involve a lot of active interaction with students. A recorded video cannot mimic the energy of an in-person classroom, but these lectures provide an excellent opportunity for you to hear how these professors are using their expertise to think and teach about COVID-19.

- As a student, it is your responsibility to pay close attention to the lecture, as you would in an in-person classroom. Put away other distractions; watch the lectures without interruptions, pausing and rewinding as necessary; take notes in your journal; and write down the final question posed by the professor at the end of the video.
- Spend a little time thinking about the question posed by the professor and either post a response to the discussion board or take some notes on the question before moving on to the next lecture.
- Note down any questions raised in your mind by the lecture. You will have an opportunity to ask the professor those questions during a virtual office hour held during the final two weeks of May. Asking professors questions in their offices after classroom lectures and discussions is a very common and highly-encouraged practice at Whitman.

Instructions for Discussion Board Postings

Discussion with your peers is an important means for exploring difficult questions and reconsidering ideas. This assignment is designed to help you develop those skills.

- Please post a response to the question posed by the professor at the end of the video. That question is analytical or reflective rather than factual. That means that the professor is not asking you to simply regurgitate material in the lecture in your response to the question, but rather think through it. Your response should reflect that thinking.
- Posts that begin with “I think...” are preferred over “I like/dislike...”
- Your post can be as long as you want, a couple of sentences or a paragraph. You can end your post with questions of your own, to which other students or course assistants may respond.
- Your post does not need to be polished, but please be respectful and thoughtful. Reflect on the material of the lecture, rather than the personal characteristics of the professor.
- If there is an active discussion on the discussion board, please be respectful toward your peers, engaging with arguments rather than personalities. Please feel free to disagree with others, but do so in a way that furthers the discussion in a productive direction.

Instructions for Journal Writing

We are all living in an unprecedented, possibly transformative time during which our lives have been upturned, albeit in different ways. This journal provides you an opportunity to reflect upon some of your thoughts and feelings as you help make sense of the changes around you through taking this course. In years to come, you will appreciate having a written account of what it was like to live and think during this time.

- Your journal may be a paper notebook in which you write in longhand or a file on your computer.
- In addition to keeping notes and questions related to the lectures that you are viewing, please write a daily paragraph (or longer if you feel inspired) based on your own experiences of, and reflections on, the pandemic. Feel free to play with form and style (write full sentences, compose poetry or songs, insert occasional drawings, or whatever moves you on a particular day).
- Here are some guiding questions to keep in mind for these daily journal entries, providing you with some of the skills you would be honing in methods classes in different areas of studies at Whitman:

- a. Observation: What changes are you observing in your surroundings? Have the changes in your life enabled you to see new realities that were less visible before?
 - b. Analytical Inferences: Are you noticing some patterns in behavior or phenomena? What explains those patterns? Do you expect these patterns to recur?
 - c. Sources of Knowledge: How are you learning about the pandemic? What sources do you find reliable and why? How can you discern facts from conjecture? How do different forms of expression (news reports, science essays, fiction, poetry, music, art) help you learn about the pandemic differently?
 - d. Reflection: How do you feel about the changes in your own life and the world? How do you make sense of those feelings?
- This is an ungraded assignment since this is a space for you to process your own thoughts and feelings in an unencumbered way. Much of your college education will depend on the extent to which you are self-directed and take ownership of your own learning. This is a great time and place for you to start developing those habits. So please take this assignment seriously even if nobody will be checking up on your work.

Instructions for Integrative Essay

Integrating and analyzing information from diverse sources in order to develop your own ideas and communicate your argument to others are key skills of a liberal arts education. This essay will help you synthesize some of what you learned in this course.

- Please write a 750 words (roughly three pages) essay that responds to the prompt: *Life after COVID-19 will return to normal.*
- You may agree, disagree, find a position anywhere in between those two options, or fight with the question itself, but your essay needs to articulate a clear argument that uses evidence from the lectures.
- You must use at least three of the lectures you have attended to answer this question. You are welcome to use more. At the end of the paper, please list the lectures you used in a “Works Cited” page.
- The paper must have your name, a title, and be edited and spell-checked before submission.
- Please feel free to reach out to any of the course assistants if you want help brainstorming your essay.
- The essay is due on May 31st. You will receive feedback on this essay.

GRADING

This class is offered on a **pass/fail** basis. In order to receive a passing grade

- You must post on at least seven of the Discussion Boards associated with the recorded lectures you view. Course assistants will be monitoring these discussions.
- Receive a C or better in the Integrative Essay assignment. These essays will be graded by faculty members.