In the winter of 1347 a deadly epidemic reached Europe’s Mediterranean posts and quickly spread inland. Two years later, the disease, known to later generations as the Black Death, had killed about 40% of Europe’s population and shaken Medieval European society to its very core. The Black Death, moreover, occurred as Europe was experiencing what may very well have been the most calamitous century in its long and turbulent history. The disease hit Europe during the opening phase of the Hundred Years’ War; a mere two decades after the Great Famine which had killed 3 million people in seven years; in the midst of the worst crisis the Medieval Church ever suffered; and just a few years before Europe’s peasant population began going into bloody revolts. This was a society in crisis. This course aims to understand the causes, immediate impact, and long-term consequences of this catastrophe and to try to appreciate how a highly developed society deals with extreme crisis.

Prerequisites: Graduate standing in history, HIST 700 or permission of the instructor.

Required Books
John Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse: Confronting Famine, War, Plague and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (New York, 2000)

All articles can be accessed through e-reserve [password “plague”]

Grades
Class Participation: 15% (missing classes will impact this part of the grade. I expect every student to participate in every class)
Book Review: 20%, 1000-1250 words. On any of the above secondary sources, except Gottfried (due the day we discuss the book in class)
Lead a class discussion: 5%
Research Paper Abstract: 10% *(due March 9th)*
Final Research Paper: 20-25 Pages 50% *(due May 18th)*

Readings
All readings are to be done by the time of our weekly meetings.

Part I: Before the Black Death

Feb 2
Class Introduction

Feb 9 – Humans and Disease

Feb 16 – Famine: The Troubles Begin
Jordan, *The Great Famine*

Part II: The Course of the Black Death

Feb 23 – The Pestilence Arrives
Gottfried, *The Black Death*, chs. 1-5

Mar 2 – Results I

Mar 9 – Results II
Gottfried, *The Black Death*, ch. 6
Horrox, *The Black Death*, 158-206

ABSTRACTS DUE

Mar 16 – Individual Meetings on Research Paper

Mar 23 – SPRING BREAK

Part III: Impact
Mar 30 - Impact
Horrox, *The Black Death*, 248-351

April 6 – Changing World Views

April 13 – The Black Death and Sacred Violence
Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*

April 20 – Individual Meetings on Research Paper

April 27 – Rethinking the Black Death
Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed*

May 4 – Crisis
Aberth, *From the Brink of the Apocalypse*

May 11 – No Class
Finish Research Papers

May 18 – Final Things
Gottfried, *The Black Death*, ch. 7
**RESEARCH PAPERS DUE**