The global AIDS epidemic devastated a generation. Nearly 40 million people are estimated to have died of complications of AIDS since the start of the epidemic. How can sociology help us make sense of the epidemic, how to address it, and its long-term effects? Because AIDS is embedded in complex relationships of power and sexuality, the scholarship on AIDS gives us a lens into thinking about the relationship between disease and its social conditions, between science and its political context, and between citizens and the state. This course delves into literature on AIDS in sociology and anthropology, alongside film, to consider what these disciplines can add to our understanding of AIDS. What are the social determinants of AIDS? Next, we move into the political struggles over AIDS treatment, research, and prevention. What assumptions shape AIDS science? How have social movements shaped the response to the AIDS epidemic? How has AIDS affected relationships between citizens and the state, and between poor countries and transnational donors? Finally, we look at the global response to AIDS. How have policymakers attempted to put sociological insights into practice in order to slow the epidemic? What are the limits of efforts to stem HIV/AIDS?

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Apply a sociological perspective to HIV/AIDS, its determinants, and its social effects
- Interpret data about patterns of disease transmission
- Discuss the political struggles over HIV/AIDS in global perspective
- Read, write, and speak comfortably about social science scholarship
- Analyze cultural products and medical texts on HIV/AIDS from a sociological perspective

**Course Requirements**

1. **Attendance and Participation (20%)**
   
   Your final attendance and participation grade is an average of your in-class participation throughout the semester, graded with a [letter grade](#) and then adjusted for your attendance. **Class attendance is mandatory!** This class depends on building a sustained conversation with your peers as you tackle difficult topics. You owe it to yourself and your classmates to show up. You are allowed 2 [unexcused absences during the semester](#). For each additional absence, I will deduct 10% of your total attendance and participation grade. Absences due to travel, extracurricular activities, illness, etc. can only be [excused](#) if you [make up](#) the missed work. It is your responsibility to be in touch with me to find out what missed work is required. Make-up work must be submitted within [two weeks](#) of the missed class to be excused. Please note that if you arrive late to class, you may be marked absent.
Participating means engaging actively with ideas from readings, lectures, and your peers. It is our collective responsibility to ensure the learning environment is safe, inclusive, vibrant, and challenging. I will work hard to make sure the burden of working through difficult topics and concepts does not fall disproportionately on a few students—so you must arrive in class prepared to participate. You might participate in a number of ways—sharing your own ideas, working collaboratively in small groups, asking thoughtful questions, bringing in relevant articles, or attending office hours. At the beginning of each class, we will take time to hear reactions and questions from each of you to the readings for the day. If you feel uncomfortable speaking in a classroom environment, I encourage you to see me about it early on. You will receive feedback on your participation and attendance midway through the semester.

2. **Weekly Assignments (10%)**

   Ten times during the semester, you will complete a short assignment in relation to the readings and theoretical concepts for the week. Weekly assignments are usually due by **noon on Mondays on Latte**. Weekly assignments typically involve a 250-300-word response to a prompt about the reading, but will often require you to go beyond the reading, so be careful not to wait till the last minute to complete it. The weekly assignments will drive our discussions in class. They will be graded on an **outstanding/satisfactory/unsatisfactory** scale. You will receive an update on your progress on weekly assignments midway through the semester.

3. **In-Class Presentation (15%)**

   Films have been an important vehicle for public understanding of HIV/AIDS, and provide insight into the cultural and social politics of the epidemic. **Once** during the semester, you will give a 15-minute presentation at the beginning of class on a film related to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and the topic of discussion for the day. Your presentation must summarize, critique, and raise questions about your film. You should also draw on outside material to provide social and political context for your film. I will pass around a sign-up sheet for presentations in the third week of class. Your presentation will receive a letter grade.

4. **Short Papers (30%)**

   This course includes two short (4-5 page) papers, due on **February 13th** and **March 13th**. For the first paper, you will analyze patterns of HIV infection in one country. For the second paper, you will write a critical analysis of an article from a medical journal on HIV/AIDS from a sociological perspective. You will receive each assignment two weeks before the paper is due. Papers receive a letter grade.

5. **Final Project (25%)**

   The final project is an analysis of oral histories of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, due **May 3rd**. A preliminary proposal is due **April 10th**. You will be provided with a list of oral history materials available through the Brandeis Library. Alternatively, you may choose to conduct your own research on a topic of your choice related to the course. Your final paper should be 8-10 pages in length. In the last week of class, you will present your work informally to your classmates. Remember: **This is not a project to complete at the last minute!** Papers receive a letter grade. No extensions will be granted except in cases of documented disability or health emergency.


**Course Policies**

**Office Hours.** Sign-ups for my office hours are online at [https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/tblny](https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/tblny). If you are unable to attend my regular office hours, **feel free to email to set up an appointment** and I’ll do my best to accommodate you. Please come and see me at least once during the semester.

**Email.** I will respond to emails within **48 hours.** If I can't answer your question in a sentence, office hours are best.

**Grading.** If you'd like me to reconsider a grade, you must submit a **detailed written explanation.** A request for a grade change can result in a higher or lower grade.

**Extensions.** You may take **one 24-hour extension** on an assignment during the semester. Beyond that, I will not grant any extensions unless I have heard from your academic advisor about extenuating circumstances.

**Gadgets. Use of cell phones is not allowed in class.** If I see you using a cell phone in class, you will be marked absent for the day. Use of laptops is at the discretion of the instructor. Please see me if you have any particular learning needs that require laptop use.

**Writing.** For support with writing, one place to start is the Writing Center ([http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/index.html](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/index.html)). Feel free to talk with me about it if you have specific concerns or goals related to your writing.

**Academic Integrity.** Don’t plagiarize! If you feel overwhelmed by the material or by an assignment, come and see me instead. The University’s policy on academic integrity can be found in the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook at [http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/rr/](http://www.brandeis.edu/studentaffairs/sdc/rr/). Plagiarism can carry severe consequences, including failing the course and/or suspension.

**Classroom Environment.** We will discuss difficult topics in this class, and it will take all of our trust, sensitivity, and maturity to create an inclusive and safe environment for conversation. Remember that your classmates have a range of experiences and be thoughtful when you speak and listen. If you have concerns about your ability to participate in class, because of personal experience, trauma, or something else, please do not hesitate to talk with me about it—the earlier, the better.

**Expectations.** Success in this four-credit course is based on the expectation that you will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class.

**Accommodations.** If you have been issued a letter of academic accommodation from Disabilities Services and Support, please see me in the first two weeks of the semester to work out the necessary arrangements. If you need an accommodation and have not yet obtained one, please set up an appointment with Beth Rodgers-Kay (brodgers@brandeis.edu), in the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Office (x63470, access@brandeis.edu).

**Readings.** Readings for the course will be posted on Latte. We may adjust readings as we go along. In addition, the following books are required:

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

(*indicates a day when a weekly assignment is due)

**I. The Social Dynamics of AIDS**

How does social context shape patterns of AIDS prevalence? Is AIDS a disease of poverty or wealth? How is AIDS affected by gendered, sexual, racial, and economic relations?

**Week 1: Introductions**

**Wednesday 1/16 Introductions**

**Week 2: HIV/AIDS, Theory, and Sociology**

**Tuesday 1/22 [Brandeis Monday] Theorizing AIDS*  
In-Class Film Excerpt: *Angels in America* (2003)

**Wednesday 1/23 The Sociology of HIV/AIDS**


**Week 3: AIDS and Global Inequality**

**Monday 1/28 AIDS and Poverty, AIDS and Wealth*  

**Wednesday 1/30 The Social and Political Context of HIV/AIDS**


**Week 4: HIV/AIDS, Gender, and Sex**

**Monday 2/4 HIV/AIDS and Transactional Sex*  
Wednesday 2/6 HIV/AIDS, Gender, and Consumption


Further Reading:

Week 5: AIDS and Marginalization

Monday 2/11 Economies of Risk*


Wednesday 2/13 AIDS, Sexuality, and Race in the United States


In-Class Film Excerpt: Endgame: AIDS in Black America (2012)

PAPER 1 DUE

FEBRUARY BREAK

II. AIDS, Science, and Exclusion

How do social and political marginalization shape the science of HIV/AIDS? What exclusions have biomedical research and policy institutions perpetuated?

Week 6: AIDS and Black Politics

Monday 2/25 Black Invisibility in the US AIDS Response*


Wednesday 2/27 AIDS and Black Institutions

Cohen, Cathy. 1999. The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Chapter 1 (pp. 1-10), Chapter 8].

In-Class Film Excerpt: Tongues Untied (1993)

Week 7: The Global Politics of Knowledge

Monday 3/4 AIDS Science, Gender, and Sexuality*


Wednesday 3/6 AIDS Cosmopolitanism


Week 8: AIDS and Biomedicine

**Monday 3/11 AIDS Denialism and Western Biomedicine***


Wednesday 3/13 Global Pharmaceuticals

In-Class Film Excerpt: *Fire in the Blood* (2013)

**PAPER 2 DUE**

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III. Global AIDS Activism

How have social movements reshaped biomedical discourse on HIV/AIDS? How has HIV/AIDS activism shaped sexual politics globally? How has it shaped the relationships between poor people and the state in the global South?

Week 9: ACT-UP in the United States

**Monday 3/18 ACT-UP and AIDS Science***


*Guest Speaker: Carl Sciortino, AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts*

Wednesday 3/20 Emotions and Activism


Week 10: Global AIDS Activism

**Monday 3/25 AIDS, Activism, and the State***


**Wednesday 3/27 AIDS, Sex Work, and Criminalization**

Week 11: AIDS, Sexual Identity, and Citizenship

Monday 4/1 HIV/AIDS and Sexual Identity*


Wednesday 4/3: AIDS and Citizenship


IV. The AIDS Response

How have HIV/AIDS institutions integrated social science perspectives into the disease response? How do these policies and interventions play out in practice?

Week 12: Addressing Social Structure in AIDS Interventions

Monday 4/8 Addressing Social Structure*


Wednesday 4/10 The Limits of HIV/AIDS Interventions


PAPER TOPIC DUE

Week 13: The AIDS Industry

Monday 4/15 The AIDS Bureaucracy*


Wednesday 4/17 AIDS NGOs


SPRING BREAK
Week 14: AIDS in the Age of Trump

Monday 4/29 AIDS in the Age of Trump*


*Guest Speakers: ACT UP Boston*

Wednesday 5/1 Discussion of Final Projects

*FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY, MAY 3rd, 2019*