Course Description: The Black Death of the fourteenth century dramatically changed just about every aspect of medieval society. There are those who even argue that it is what inaugurated the beginning of the modern world. Over the course of the term, we will examine what the Black Death was, how it came to western Europe, and how it impacted the social, religious, political, and economic lives of the people of the fourteenth century. The course will be played as a semester-long game. Class time will consist of lectures, discussions, and game-related tasks. Note that this course only meets for 2 hours per week. The thirdclasstime hour you are expected to devote to the research tasks that are part of the course (and the game).

Course Goals and Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:
A. Contextualize events and occurrences within the basic outlines of late medieval history
B. Analyse primary documents, answering who, what, why, and for whom
C. Accurately identify the main argument and thesis in a scholarly article
D. Identify the holes in their own knowledge, then structure and execute a plan to fill those gaps
E. Work constructively with a team to assign tasks and equitably distribute the workload
F. Analyze problems and devise strategies to solve them

The Game:
This course will be run as a game. You will be part of a team throughout the term. In game parlance, the team is your Plague Hospital, and you are on its staff. Assignments are Monsters, research work is a Quest, in-class activities are Adventures, and there will be badges to earn and experience points (XP) to gain. There are also Side-Quests you can undertake for bonus points. The in-game XP you earn is related to your course grade. You will be assessed primarily on your individual work, not on your team's dynamics. That said, having an effective team will ultimately make your life easier when you do your (solo) final project. All of this is explained in the game manual and will be explained in class.

Expectations:
The basic requirement for participation is attendance and, in HIST 391, attendance is mandatory. The instructor takes attendance each class. Students who do not attend 80% of the classes have not adequately participated in the course and may, consequently, be denied the credit. Students, moreover, must fulfill all the course requirements in order to receive credit for HIST 391. This not only includes attendance in class but also all written assignments and examinations.

History 391 is not a survey course. It presupposes a basic familiarity with the major names, dates, and events of the European Middle Ages. While there is no prerequisite for the course, students may find it advantageous to first take HIST 260. Students who have not previously studied the details of medieval history may find it useful to “brush up” independently on their medieval history and are encouraged to speak with the instructor about appropriate ways to do so. There
will be ample opportunity within the course to fill in your own knowledge gaps. These are things we all have and the best solution is to learn how to efficiently plug the holes.

There are several tools available to help students familiarize themselves with the Middle Ages. The best reference source for quick facts about medieval topics is the Dictionary of the Middle Ages, which is available in the reference department at both the St. Jerome’s and Porter Libraries. The best online academic site for medieval primary sources is Fordham University’s Medieval Sourcebook. The standard textbook used in survey courses on the Middle Ages is Edward Peters’ Europe and the Middle Ages.

Each week’s class focuses on a given theme or topic. The weekly two-hour meeting will be divided between a lecture and a discussion period with required exercises. During this time, students will explore a series of questions pertaining to the facts of medieval history and to the study of primary and secondary sources. The extra hour typically spent in class is to be added to the time spent outside the classroom doing work for this course. The workload for the course has been designed with that extra hour in mind.

Required Text

There is no assigned Black Death textbook. However, I have placed several books on the Black Death on reserve in the St. Jerome’s Library. You will find these books to be an excellent starting point for each phase of your research.