

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, as COVID-19 cases increased, the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) recommended that medical students not participate in direct patient care due to concerns about their safety.¹

Medical schools quickly developed virtual curricula that continued to engage students. As Narrative Medicine is fundamentally structured outside of the patient visit, a Narrative Medicine course presented an opportunity to adhere to AAMC recommendations while also allowing students to practice the skill of reflection by processing their early COVID-19 experiences.

METHODS

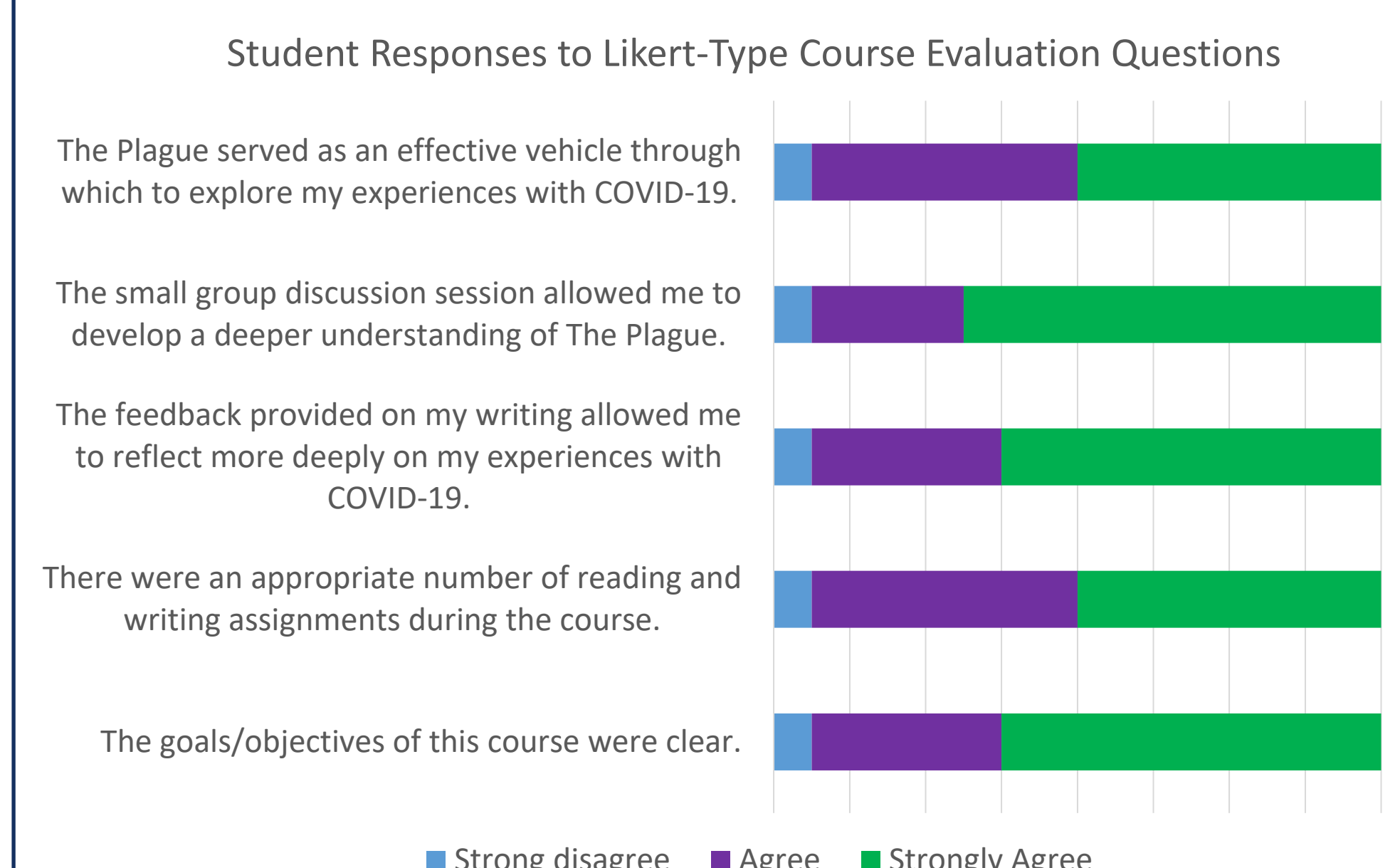
This 1-week course, implemented in April 2020, sought to provide third year students with the opportunity to practice narrative medicine by writing about their COVID-19 experiences and reading and discussing Albert Camus' *The Plague*.² The course structure is detailed in Figure 1.

Following the course, the 22 participating students were surveyed regarding their experiences; 16 (73%) provided responses. Likert-type responses were compiled using descriptive statistics. Short-answer questions were evaluated for themes by two coders, with the final list agreed upon through an iterative process.

RESULTS

16 of 22 (73%) students completed the survey. Results to the Likert-type questions are found in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Responses to Likert-Type Course Evaluation Questions.



Students noted that their favorite part of the course was the writing assignment (n=4) and the small group discussion (n=8). Seven students had no suggestions for improvements; two stated that they would have liked more time to read; one would have liked a longer course and another wanted to hear more about classmates' COVID-19 experiences.

Students identified multiple parallel themes between COVID-19 and *The Plague*; including the isolation of quarantine (n=3), the non-medical public's attitude toward the pandemic (n=3), the uncertainty of the future (2 students), and multiple non-specific similarities (n=3).

CONCLUSIONS

Students—except for one—reported a high level of satisfaction with the curriculum. Students felt that *The Plague* effectively facilitated their examination of COVID-19, and were able to articulate at least one parallel theme between the book and their own experiences. The one dissenting student did not provide comments to further elucidate this dis-satisfaction.

The 1-week format of our curriculum is both a strength and a weakness. Given the succinct nature of the course, it includes only two assignments, which means that

students may not have the time to delve deeply into the presented concepts.

However, its short format means that it is adaptable to different curricular needs; we have utilized two longer versions of this course, with additional assignments. When clinical rotations resumed, these narrative medicine courses enabled students to continue their curricular progress, even if quarantining.

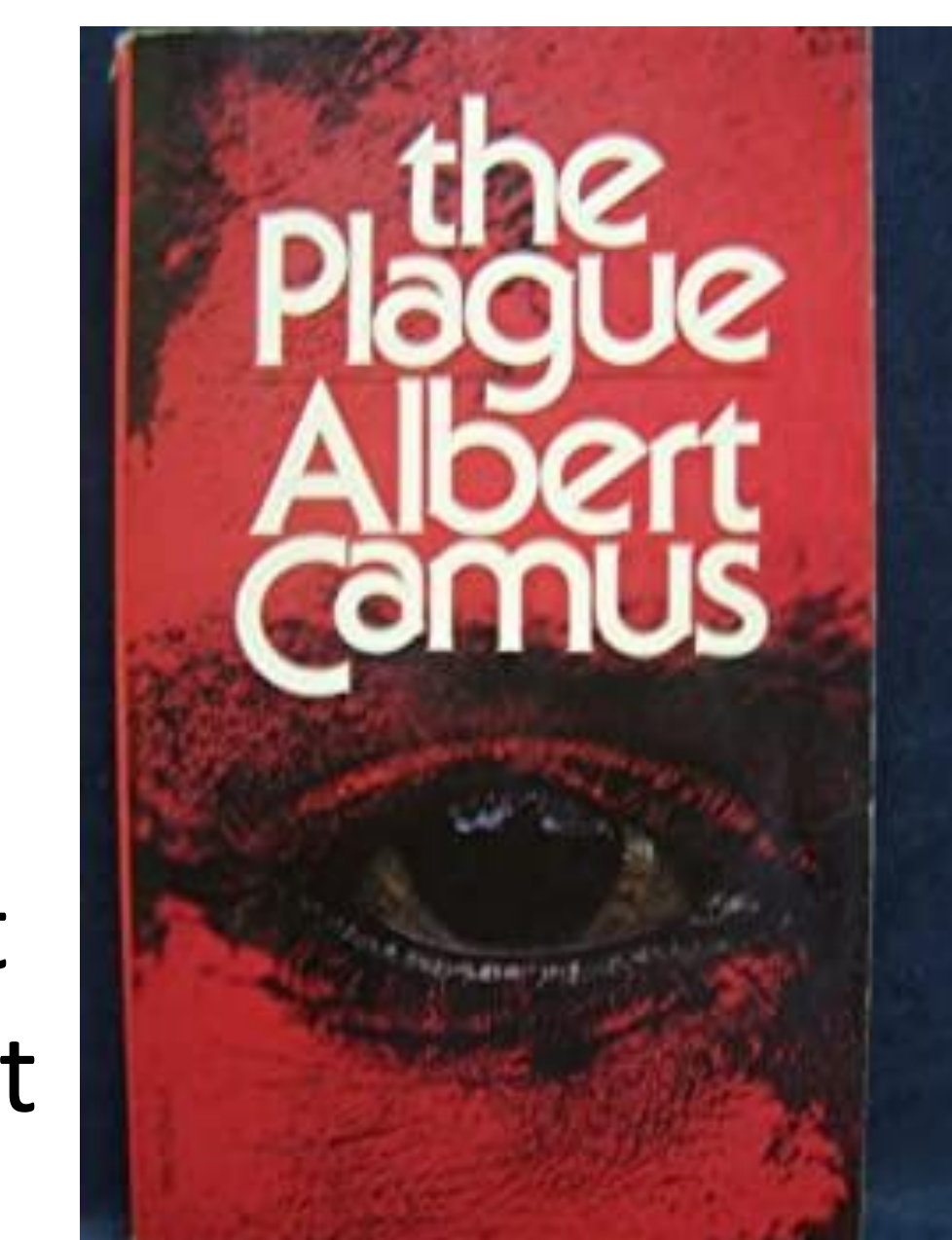


Figure 1. Course structure of Narrative Medicine in the Time of Pandemics.

Orientation

- 30 min session held (via Zoom) on the 1st day of the course
- Review assignments and expectations for the course
- Provide brief background on the History of Medicine and importance of Albert Camus' *The Plague*

Written Reflection

- 1,000 word essay regarding experiences with COVID19
- Students submit draft on Wednesday, receive feedback from faculty grader, and submit final essay on Friday

Small Group

- 2-hour session held (via Zoom) on the final day of the course
- Students read Albert Camus' *The Plague* and must submit 1 passage and 2-3 discussion questions prior to the small group
- Faculty facilitates discussion of students' identified passages and submitted questions

REFERENCES

1. American Association of Medical Colleges. Important Guidance for Medical Students on Clinical Rotations During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak. Available at: <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/press-releases/important-guidance-medical-students-clinical-rotations-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>. 17 March 2020. Accessed October 18, 2020.
2. Camus A. *The Plague*. Random House: New York, 1948.