Anthropology 4200.001
Health, Healing, and Culture:
an Introduction to Medical Anthropology
Fall 2016
MWF 10:00 – 10:50 PEB 216

Instructor: Doug Henry
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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Course Content
This course is an introduction to a vast subfield within anthropology – medical anthropology. Medical anthropologists study the relationships between culture, society, disease, health, and healing, both in the US and around the world. This includes disease etiology, the experience of suffering, “ethnomedical” beliefs, “sick role” behavior, the provision of health services, so called “biocultural” aspects of disease, structural violence, and the political economy of illness. My general teaching philosophy about all this: this is not just a course about facts; it’s exposure to new ideas and to new ways of thinking. My goal is to introduce you to how interesting, relevant, and important medical anthropology is, so you’ll want to learn more.

Objectives – Your Development as Scholars
Overview: I want you to learn how to think critically about the material that you are studying, especially what you are reading. Nothing here is holy writ; these are ideas that can be challenged but which must be challenged thoughtfully. Your feelings matter here, but your feelings must be backed up by your thoughts. It is OK to “not like” or “like” something, that’s the beginning of being interested in an idea. But you have to make yourself go a little bit deeper and explain to yourself (and occasionally to me); WHY you like or don’t like something by creating an intellectual framework for your ideas. How does what you are reading relate to something else you have been thinking about?

By the end of the course I expect that:

1) Every one of you will have participated in class to the extent possible in a class this size. I want to hear a comment from every student at least once during class sessions and will try to find ways to make it possible for everyone to feel comfortable speaking in class. I will make an effort to learn everyone’s name.

2) You will have become more comfortable with reading journal articles for class-based reading assignments. You will learn how to read these actively, asking questions and making connections to other sources of information, building on your existing knowledge.
3) You will have become comfortable with regular writing assignments. There will be a lot of writing in this class, and step by step assignments along the way to the ethnography or final exam.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

I expect you to come to every class. Attendance will be randomly taken over the course of the semester, and then calculated as part of your participation grade. MORE IMPORTANTLY, your actual learning (what you’re paying tuition for) depends on listening to, and participating in, class discussion.

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

This is a big class but I would like us as much as possible to be “seminar” in style (ie., incorporate group discussion). In order for discussions to be most useful, I expect you to have completed the reading assignments BEFORE class.

I want you to ask questions and make comments, or email me questions (if that makes you more comfortable) which I will address at the next available class time. There is no such thing as a stupid question! (except to NOT TO ASK one when you have it!). That being said, don’t be the student who dominates discussion every single class- be sensitive to the flow of information around the room.

During classroom discussions, I want to get to know you, so I’ll ask you to remember as much as possible to say your name (at least for the first month or so) before you start in on your comment. Also, I would like you to TALK TO EACH OTHER – not just to me. There will be more to say on this topic as the semester proceeds.

Cell phones must have their ringers turned OFF during class! No exceptions, not even for me.

OTHER REQUIRED READING:

Some articles in the syllabus will be marked “required;” others will allow you to pick one or choose among a group.” Some articles will be available through the online Blackboard Learn site for this course: https://learn.unt.edu; others are available as “e-journal” articles through the UNT Library.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1) 30%. Weekly commentaries. These are short (approximately 250-300 words words) comments on two of the assigned readings for the week, due every Friday as noted in the
Don’t **JUST** write summaries of the reading! Commentaries should also be analytical. Some weeks I have a specific question I want you to cover. Other weeks- if I don’t have something specific, you can approach it creatively. For example:

GOOD commentaries do one of these: (3-4 points awarded)

a. “React” to the readings by writing about how you felt about them – did you agree or disagree with authors’ analyses? Explain why.
   b. Take some specific aspect of the articles that was of particular interest to you and explain why it was interesting to you.

The BEST commentaries also do one of these: (4-5 points awarded)

   c. Compare/ contrast the two readings with each other.
   d. Connect these two readings with previous ideas discussed in class or read about either in the course or on your own.

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**2) 25% Mini-Medical Ethnography**

This assignment involves you taking on the role of a student medical anthropologist and actually doing “fieldwork” and reporting on your experience. The main goal of this exercise is to enable you to connect your fieldwork experience with some of the key concepts in medical anthropology that we’ve talked about so far in this course. You’ll have to write observational “fieldnotes” in a notebook, and turn them in as an appendix for your paper. Fieldnotes include what you observe, your thoughts about what people told you, the environment, context- EVERYTHING. Your paper should be 6-9 double-spaced pages, with summary, methods/ recruitment, results, and a discussion of the significance/ relevance of what you found. This last part can include a documentation of the difficulties you experienced while carrying out this exercise – i.e. your “travails” experienced as a medical anthropologist. It helps to also be “reflexive:” Do you think your gender made a difference in how easy or how difficult it was for you to gather the data? Did you experience any discomfort when gathering the data? Did either you or your people under study become self-conscious? Did this assignment teach you anything about what it means to gather data as an anthropologist? I am absolutely fine with you guys doing this with other people from this class as part of your research population. Here are some possibilities for your ethnography project, but this is really open:

1. Engage in an informal conversation with someone who you know has been sick recently, preferably if and when they lived with other people in the house/ apartment. Elicit information on the medical decision-making process that was involved in the sick person’s search for therapy. Identify the patient’s therapy management group. Who all were involved in negotiating the identity of the illness? Who made the most critical treatment-related decisions? Based on the data you gather, spell out the ways
in which the “micropolitics” of therapy management might have been at work in the case at hand.

2. Have a discussion with a sample of 4-5 friends about college students and how they control “sleep/ being alert.” How is the way your sample views sleep different now than it has been in the past? How do men vs. women consider sleep differently? What strategies exist to stay awake? What strategies exist to get to sleep? What considerations go into decisions about medication (including self-medication) or therapies? Is there anything within the social context or environment that shapes your sample’s sleep strategies, how they interpret sleep/ alert problems?

3. Watch a few “weight loss” TV commercials, describe them in brief, reflect on the hype surrounding such commercials, and the consequences you think these commercials have in terms of “behavioral change” among potential customers. Follow this up by going to a restaurant/ the Union, hang out there for a couple of hours, make some detailed observations about the kinds of foods people/ students/friends order/eat. Then talk to your friends, engage in an informal group discussion and/or simply “listen” to “body talk” (self-image, the gym, dieting, calories, weight watching, etc..) among your women and men friends. What differences do you see in the ways in which men and women respond to the hype surrounding weight?

4. Interview someone who has ever consulted an “alternative” health care practitioner (someone other than an MD, nurse, osteopath, etc.). Ask them about their regarding their Explanatory Model for what was going on, including the reasons for the consultation, reasons for the choice of practitioner, their concepts of sickness causation, and their expectations for a treatment or cure.

5. If the idea of fieldwork is too stressful/ time-consuming, I’ll provide a list of medical ethnographies that you can read, and write a book review of. More details to follow.

Other research ideas: high school/ junior high sex ed programs, dancers’ perceptions of their bodies, nudists’ perceptions of their bodies, eating disorders, refugee/ immigrants and health, intimate partner violence, someone you know who’s given birth, someone you know who’s had an abortion, “pro-life/ pro-choice” activists campus, medical marijuana, people whose health has been impacted by fracking, homeless kids and drug use, etc.

3) 25%. Attendance and Participation
I’ll pass around an attendance sheet randomly during the year. Participation is also important, so come to class with things to say!

4) 20%. Final (take home) exam
Plagiarism and Cheating. The Department of Anthropology does not tolerate plagiarism, cheating, or helping others to cheat. Plagiarism is defined as misrepresenting the work of others (whether published or not) as your own. It may be inadvertent or intentional. Any facts, statistics, quotations, or paraphrasing of any information that is not common knowledge, should be cited. Students suspected of any of these will be provided the opportunity for a hearing; if found guilty they can receive an automatic “F” in the course. In addition, I reserve the right to pursue further disciplinary action within the UNT legal system, which may result in your dismissal from the university. For more information on paper writing, including how to avoid plagiarism, and how to use citations, see http://www.unt.edu/anthropology/writing.htm. For information on the University’s policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty, see the UNT Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, http://www.unt.edu/csrr/.

DETAILED COURSE PLAN (DRAFT!):

**Week 1 Aug. 29 – Sept. 2**

MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: an Overview with Key Concepts

Introduction to course and each other

**Required:**

Due Friday: Write a shorter-than-usual, 100-150 word response, about which “approach” in Medical Anthropology do you either identify with the most, or find the most intriguing? Why? Turn this in on Blackboard

**Week 2 Sept 7, Sept 9**

The Environment, Cultural Ecology, and Health

**Required:**


Choose One:


Due Friday: Week 2 reading commentary (see syllabus)

Week 3 Sept. 12 – Sept 16
“Ethnomedicine” and Illness Beliefs

Required:

Choose


Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #3

Week 4 Sept. 19 - 23
**Therapy, Behavior, Treatment, Cure**

**Required**
Anoko, Julienne, and Doug Henry (draft). Removing a Community Curse Resulting from the Burial of a Pregnant Woman with the Child in her Womb: an Anthropological Approach During the Epidemic of the Ebola Virus Disease in Guinea. (Blackboard)


**Choose:**


**Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #4**

**Week 5 Sept. 26 – Sept 30.**
**CASE STUDY – A MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST IN DOMINICA**


**Friday:** This week, I want you to really pay attention to the Dominican ethnomedical system, and the WHY of people’s treatment seeking behaviors. In about a single spaced page, map out the kinds of sicknesses and problems that bother people. Not really a map, but a “mental template.” E.g.- what kinds of personalist and naturalist ailments exist, what kinds of sectors exist to treat them? How are these ailments related to “ethnophysiology,” and the idea of humors? This all doesn’t have to be written in an elegant style- a page of notes would be perfect.
Week 6  Oct 3 – Oct 7  
The Culture of “Biomedicine”

Required:

Choose:


Due Friday: **Weekly Commentary #6.** In 300 words, how does our medical system have a unique culture? Describe it. What are your personal experiences with it?

Week 7  Oct 10 – Oct 14  
Governmentality and Cross Cultural Mental Health

Required


Choose:


**Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #7**

**Week 8 Oct 17, Oct 19**  
**Gender, Health, and the Local Biologies of Life - I**

**Required**  

**Choose:**  

Kral, Michael (2013). “The Weight on Our Shoulders is too Much, and we are Falling”: Suicide among Inuit Male Youth in Nunavut, Canada. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 27 (1): 63-83. Available on AnthroSource through the UNT Library!


**Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #8. There’s no class Friday, October 21. Instead, I’m giving you this class time to get a REAL jump on your medical ethnography, due in 2 weeks. Now is the time to be doing your research!**

**Week 9 Oct 24 – Oct 28**  
**Gender, Health, and the Local Biologies of Life - II**

**Required:**

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Choose:


Lock, Margaret, Death in Technological Time: Locating the End of Meaningful Life. Medical Anthropology Quarterly 10: 575-600. (Available through the UNT library for free http://www.library.unt.edu/research)


Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #9.

Week 10 Oct 31 – Nov 4
Public Health and Poverty

Required

Choose:


Due Friday: Mini-ethnographies due! Come to class Friday prepared to talk about them!! (no “weekly commentary” this week).
Week 11  
Nov 7 – Nov 11  
**Structural Violence and Global Health - I**

**Required:**
John Oliver, “Tobacco.” Last Week Tonight. YouTube:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UsHHOCH4q8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UsHHOCH4q8)

**Choose:**  


**Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #11**

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Week 12  
Nov 14 – Nov 18  
**Structural Violence and Health - II**

**Required**

**Choose:**


Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #12

Week 13  Nov 21, 23  
Culture and The Body - I

Required

Choose:

Due Nov 23: Weekly reading commentary #13

Week 14  Nov 28 – Dec 2  
Culture and the Body – II: Embodiment

Required:

Choose:

**Due Friday: Weekly reading commentary #13**

**Take home final exam will be handed out this week! (probably Friday)**

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**Week 15 Dec 5**  
**COURSE WRAP-UP and REVIEW**

Come to class with questions!

Friday, Dec 9 – **FINAL EXAM DUE IN ONLINE COURSE FOLDER BY 10am!**