SOA U580: Medical Anthropology

Tues/Fri, 11:45am-1:25pm
107 Ryder Hall

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Office Hours: Fridays, 2pm-4pm, or by appointment

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to the anthropological study of illness, health, healing, and the body. We will explore the cultural and historical specificity of what appear to be biological givens, drawing from a variety of anthropological questions, theoretical approaches, and research techniques. Topics covered include the experience of illness, the relationship between body, mind, and society, and the way understandings of disease, health, and dying are affected by—and in turn influence—social, cultural, and political concerns. We will approach biomedicine as one of many culturally produced medical systems, comparing ways of seeing and knowing across traditions, and exploring the power of medicine to act as a form of social control. Finally, we will examine the ways in which local and global inequalities affect contemporary disease distributions, and explore how an anthropological perspective can contribute to discussions about health policy in the United States.

Assigned Texts:


6) Course reader posted on Blackboard.
Course Requirements:

1) Attendance and Class Participation (10% of grade)

The two class sessions per week are a primary source of information for the course. You are expected to come to class regularly and on time. Take notes during lectures and discussions, and be sure that you understand the main points that are covered, any examples that are used, and how they relate to assigned readings. This is a small class, and active participation is required. Please come to class having completed the required readings and prepared to discuss them. Changes to the class schedule may be made as necessary, but will be announced in advance.

Several films will be shown during class sessions and are also required. Take notes during films just as you would during a lecture. Be sure that you can identify the groups and issues covered in each film, summarize its contents, and relate it to that week’s theme.

All cell phones, iPods, and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away during class.

2) Midterm and Final Exams (Midterm: 20% of grade, Final: 25% of grade)

There will be one in-class midterm and a cumulative take-home final exam. Make-up exams will be given only in extraordinary (and well documented) situations. If you are having any problems with the exam scheduling, please let me know before the exam. Exams will contain identification, short answer, and essay questions.

3) Two Research Papers (Paper 1: 20% of grade; Paper 2: 25% of grade)

This course requires two written research papers. For the first paper, you will conduct an interview with someone (a friend, relative, colleague, etc.) about an illness experience and write a 5-7 page “illness narrative.” For the second, you will attend and observe Grand Rounds presentations at a local hospital or medical school, and write an 8-10 page paper analyzing your observations. Further details about both assignments (including Grand Rounds schedules) will be handed out in class and posted on the Blackboard site.

The first paper (the Illness Narrative) will be due in class by Tuesday, October 14. The second paper (on Grand Rounds) will be due in class by Tuesday, December 9. You must turn in a hard copy of each paper for full credit—electronic versions will have points deducted. Please respect deadlines. Ten (10) points will be deducted for each day your paper is late. If you cannot turn your paper in on time due to extreme circumstances, you must discuss this with me before the due date.
Course Schedule and Required Readings:

**Week 1**  
**Introduction to the Course and to Medical Anthropology**

Fri 9/12  
Film: Wit

**Week 2**  
**Making Sense of Suffering: Illness and Experience**

Tues 9/16  


Fri 9/19  


**Week 3**  
**The Culture(s) of Biomedicine; Models of the Body**

Tues 9/23  


Fri 9/26  


### Week 4  
**Body and Self; Body and Mind**

**Tues 9/30**  


**Fri 10/3**  
Murphy, Robert F. *The Body Silent*. Pp. xi-82

Film: Murderball

### Week 5  
**Body and Society**

**Tues 10/7**  

**Fri 10/10**  


### Week 6  
**Explaining Disease**

**Tues 10/14**  
**ILLNESS NARRATIVE DUE**


**Fri 10/17**  
**Week 7**  
**Healing, Symbols, and Ritual**

**Tues 10/21**  


Film: Healers of Ghana

**Fri 10/24**  
**MIDTERM EXAM**

**Week 8**  
**Medicalization, Somatization, and Social Control**

**Tues 10/28**  


**Fri 10/31**  

**Week 9**  
**Epidemics**

**Tues 11/4**  

**Fri 11/7**  

**Week 10**  
**Redefining Death**

**Tues 11/11**  
NO CLASS (Veteran’s Day)

**Fri 11/14**  

**Week 11**  
**Redefining Death, cont.**

**Tues 11/18**  

**Fri 11/21**  
NO CLASS (AAA)
Week 12  Political Economy of Health: Commodification of the Body and Structural Inequality


Film: Transplant Tourism

Fri 11/28  NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Week 13  Political Economy of Health, cont.


Film: Unnatural Causes


Week 14  Wrap-Up and Review

Tues 12/9  GRAND ROUNDS PAPER DUE IN CLASS
TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM HANDED OUT