Introduction to Medical Anthropology - 201130
Anthropology 1500

Instructor: Dr. Carol MacLeod
Office: B0100
Telephone: 604-323-5722
E-mail: cmacleod@langara.bc.ca
Office hours: M & W: 1-2 p.m.; T & R: 11 a.m.-12 p.m.; M & W: 4:30-5 p.m.; or by appointment.


Grading System:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>87-94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>79-82</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>74-78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Credit granted, but insufficient mastery to proceed to next level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>49 or less</td>
<td>Failing grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regular attendance is a necessary part of receiving credit for the course. If you are absent for a week, you must ask the instructor’s permission to continue the course.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding the prehistoric and historic changes to human health.
- Recognition of the cultural dimension of illness and wellness.
- Understanding the body as mediator of cultural norms and values (world view).
- Increased ability to work in a multicultural context as a health care professional.

Course Evaluation

The major text for the course is a collection of readings edited by Elizabeth Whitaker, Health and Healing in Comparative Perspective. Questions on specific articles will be assigned, and students will discuss the articles in small groups. The class participation mark is directly related to these assignments. The articles, lecture material, supplementary audio-visual material, and points raised in class discussions will constitute the examinable material for the mid-term and final essay exams. The mid-term
will allow students to prepare answers to questions given ahead of time (in-class essays, closed book), whereas questions for the final exam will be given in the examination room. Students will be required to read a case study related to medical anthropology, or to write an analytical essay on a medical anthropology topic. Each student will give a short explanation of the selected topic to the class, and submit a formal essay that places the material in a critical framework.

The breakdown of the evaluation process is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term In-class essay exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical review of case study</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework assignments/discussion groups</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Course Description**

Medical anthropology views illness and health from a cross-cultural and evolutionary perspective. Its central focus is the body and our experience of our social selves through the physical. Our human journey has taken us from a simple life in the forest 5 million years ago to the complex world we know today, and our diet, health, anatomy, and physiology are all a product of this evolutionary and historical process. Anthropology gives us the perspective to understand how and why our bodies are shaped by culture as adaptations to particular environmental and historical conditions. By recognizing cultural intervention in the physical self, the student is freed of unconscious assumptions and attitudes, and is better able to meet life with an open mind. This course is useful to all students, but is especially mindful of the need for health professionals to be aware of the cultural baggage of their medical practices.

**Course Outline**

I. Introduction to key concepts in medical, cultural and physical anthropology.

II. Evolutionary and archaeological perspective on nutrition, health, and development.


B. Physiological adaptations to sweating (savannah life, foraging) (Reading: The vital role of the skin in human natural history, by Bruce A. Cohn, pp. 156-161).

C. Primate origins
1. Chimpanzee diet, ecology, social organisation, and behaviour.
2. Milton's study of spider and howler monkeys; the relationship between gut size and brain size.
3. Mother's energetic budget, gestation length, lactation length, brain and body size: data from nonhuman primate studies.
5. Fossil hominids and the appearance of Homo erectus; meat eating and the expensive tissue hypothesis.

Cross-cultural approaches to breastfeeding and weaning; Margaret Mead's study of the Arapesh and Mundugumor.

D. Feast or famine foragers


E. The Neolithic Revolution and the decline of human health.

1. Prehistory of plant and animal domesticates, and associated pathologies.

Cohen and the decline of health with Neolithic. (Reading: Evolutionary health promotion: A consideration of common counterarguments, by S.Boyd Eaton, Loren Cordain, and Staffan Lindeberg; A pox on our genes, by Jared Diamond).


MID-TERM EXAM

III. Cultural interpretations of biological givens.


B. Introduction to the Mindful Body. (Reading: The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology, by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, pp. 296-315).

Bodies in modern, industrialised societies; the epidemic of obesity; the body as machine; anorexia and bulimia; what bodies communicate.

C. Presentation of student work.

IV. Illness and healing

A. Shamanism and ritual.


B. Linking the social body and the body politic with physiology.