

# Illness, Healing and Culture Anthropology 154, Spring 2009

Professor: Barbara Miller

Email: [barbar@gwu.edu](mailto:barbar@gwu.edu)

Walk-in office hours: Thursday 3:00-5:00pm; or by appointment

Office: 2112 G St NW, room 101

Grading Assistant: Lyra Spang, MA candidate in Anth/ID

Email: [belize@gwu.edu](mailto:belize@gwu.edu)

## Course content:

This course provides an overview of the subfield of medical anthropology. Content is divided into three sections with the majority of the course focusing on contemporary human cultures:

- illness and suffering in the human past and present
- healing systems in cross-cultural perspective
- linking theories with application and to emerging and urgent health issues

## Course objectives:

- provide exposure to medical anthropology's theories, findings, and relevance
- offer depth and breadth in ethnographic knowledge of health, illness and healing
- develop critical thinking about health issues from an anthropological perspective
- advance critical reading, speaking, and writing skills

## Expectations of student engagement:

I expect students to be engaged with the content of the reading assignments, lectures, and films, to participate in Blackboard discussion, and to put effort, care and critical thinking into the research/writing project. Throughout the course I will provide Reader's Guides for the books and other learning aids.

I expect excellent attendance and I record attendance on a random basis. Students who wish to be excused from class due to a GW-designated religious holiday must inform the Professor, by email, of the planned absence no later than *Friday, January 25<sup>th</sup>*. That deadline is firm. Missing more than three classes without a legitimate excuse will result in a grade drop from, for example, an A to an A-.

I will post each lecture's Powerpoint slides on Blackboard before each class, at least 24 hours in advance. Audiotapes of the lectures will be available through iTunes@GW, after each class for review purposes, but I cannot guarantee that all classes will be taped.

## Other requirements and basis of the final grade:

- **Exams:** three in-class tests ensure "continuing assessment" throughout the semester (questions are a mixture of multiple-choice, true/false, and matching). There is no final exam during the final exam period. Each exam counts for 20% of the final grade for a total of 60%.
- **Research and writing:** a brief paper written in the format of an "Op-ed." One part of this assignment is attendance at a public lecture this semester that is relevant to health and culture. The lecture material, combined with a modicum of supplemental research, will be the basis of your op-ed. Further details are provided at the end of the syllabus and will be discussed in class. The op-ed counts for 30% of the final grade.
- **Participation in discussion on Blackboard:** Students should review the discussion on Blackboard weekly, at a minimum, and contribute meaningful comments at least 5 times during the semester. BB participation counts for 10% of the final grade.

### **Tips for academic excellence in this course:**

☀ Keep up with the readings; use the Reader's Guides to keep on top of key points.

☀ Preview the lecture slides before coming to class. Note: the posted material may not correspond exactly to the class lecture as the professor tends to continue revising lectures nearly up to class time.

☀ If you miss a class, be sure to get class notes from a friend. You cannot depend on simply looking over the posted powerpoint slides since they provide only key points.

☀ Blackboard discussion topics are “testable material.” Read discussion contributions on Blackboard regularly; make contributions regularly (do not wait until the last week!) and thoughtfully. Make sure your contributions to Blackboard discussions have a point that is related to course material. Contributions may include alternate views or supplementary information based on news items, website sources, or even personal experience is fine, but please provide a connection to class material.

☀ Start your research for the op-ed assignment early: do not delay attending a lecture until late in the semester.

☀ Start drafting your paper early to allow for multiple revisions. Our class grader will review and comment on drafts (sent through email) of your op-ed up to *two weeks in advance of the submission deadline*. So early drafting is essential if you want assistance.

☀ If you have reason to worry about your writing skills, get help from the GW Writing Center. They have excellent staff to will help you with organizing the essay, creating an argument, and writing clearly.

☀ The paper must be handed in promptly at the beginning of class on the due date (email submissions are not acceptable). Unexcused late papers, even 5 minutes late, go down by a fraction of a grade for each day late (a day is 24 hours). In other words, an “A” paper that is 1 day late is lowered to an “A-.” A valid excuse for a late paper is a serious medical/personal problem that necessitates extra time provided in writing by a professional (not a parent).

☀ Check course announcements on Blackboard regularly for learning supplements such as “reader’s guides” to some of the books, key concept review lists, and more.

☀ Exams must be taken on the day scheduled. Please enter these dates in your calendar now. Make-up exams will be given to students only with serious health/personal problems that are documented in writing by a professional.

☀ If you wish to go beyond course requirements and learn more about medical anthropology, visit the website of the Medical Anthropology section of the American Anthropological Association: [medanthro.net](http://medanthro.net) and read articles in major scholarly journals such as *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (available electronically through Gelman’s connection to AnthroSource) and *Social Science and Medicine*.

### **Readings:**

The following books are required reading. They are available for purchase at the GW Bookstore and are on reserve in Gelman Library for two-hour use in the library.

■ Mark Nathan Cohen, *Health and the Rise of Civilization*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

- Shirley Lindenbaum, *Kuru Sorcery: Disease and Danger in the New Guinea Highlands*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1979. NOTE: this book is out of print; the GW Bookstore has obtained some used copies but not enough for everyone; used copies are also available through amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and other internet sources.
- Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.
- Richard Katz, Megan Biesele, and Verna St. Denis, *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy: Spirituality & Cultural Transformation among the Kalahari Ju/'hoansi*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1997.
- Melvin Konner, *Becoming a Doctor: A Journey of Initiation in Medical School*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- Stephanie Kane, *AIDS Alibis: Sex, Drugs and Crime in the Americas*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.
- Paul Stoller, *Stranger in the Village of the Sick: A Memoir of Cancer, Sorcery, and Healing*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

## **Part 1: The Scope of Medical Anthropology and The Study of Illness and Suffering in the Past and Present**

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

- Read: Cohen, pp 1-74
- 1/13 Introduction to the Course, to Anthropology and Medical Anthropology
  - 1/15 Paleopathology: Historic Roots

### **Week 2. Illness and Suffering in Human Evolution**

- Read: Cohen, pp 75-142
- 1/20 NO CLASS: Presidential Inauguration
  - 1/22 Pathology in Human Evolution I: The Fossil Evidence

### **Week 3. Illness and Suffering in Human Evolution (cont'd) and Intro to Ethnomedicine**

- Read: Lindenbaum, pp vii-73
- 1/27 Pathology in Human Evolution II: Evidence from Archaeology
  - 1/29 Ethnomedicine I: What are Health Systems and a Case Study from the Amazon  
SHORT FILM: *Magical Death* (28 minutes)

### **Week 4. Illness and Suffering, continued**

- Read: Lindenbaum 74-146
- 2/3 Ethnomedicine II: Affliction Labels and Categories
  - 2/5 Ethnomedicine III: Prevention and Diagnosis and the Case of Kuru

### **Week 5. Structural Violence and Affliction**

- Read: Farmer, xi-133
- 2/10 Rapid Change and Affliction in the New Guinea Highlands: FILM  
*First Contact* (54 minutes)
  - 2/12 Structural Violence and HIV/AIDS

### **Week 6. Structural Violence, continued**

- Read: Farmer, 135-256
- 2/17 Structural Violence and Refugee Health
  - 2/19 **Exam #1 (covers Part 1, weeks 1-6)**

## Part 2: Ethnomedicine: Healing

### Week 7 Cross-cultural Healing Systems

- Read: Katz et al., Preface through pg 100  
2/24 Local Healing Systems  
2/26 FILM: *Eduardo the Healer* (54 minutes)

### Week 8. Traditional Healing in Asia

- Read: Katz et al., pp 101-201  
3/3 Traditional Chinese Medicine  
3/5 Medical Medicine of India

### Week 9. Healing Substances and Medical Syncretism

- Read: Konner, preface through pg 182  
3/10 Healing Substances  
3/12 FILM: *Macumba: Trance and Spirit Healing* (43 minutes)

☺ SPRING BREAK!

### Week 10. (Western) Biomedicine as Culture

- Read: Konner pp 183-377  
3/24 Healing and Healers in (Western) Biomedicine  
**3/26 Exam #2 (covers Part 2, weeks 7-10)**

## Part 3: Theory Round-Up, Applied Medical Anthropology and the Future

### Week 11. Critical Medical Anthropology

- Read: Kane, pp 1-118  
3/31 Revisiting the Structural Causes of Suffering  
4/2 FILM: *Organs for Sale*  
**THIS IS THE LAST DAY TO SUBMIT DRAFTS OF YOUR OP-ED TO THE GRADER FOR COMMENTS**

### Week 12. Interpretive Medical Anthropology

- Read: Kane, pp 119-194  
4/7 Interpretive Medical Anthropology I: Theoretical Background and Color Symbolism  
4/9 Interpretive Medical Anthropology II: Performance and Other Symbolic Healing

### Week 13. Applied Medical Anthropology

- Read: Stoller, pp 1-100  
4/14 Applied Medical Anthropology I: Scope, Goals, and Activities  
**PAPER DUE. HARD COPY AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS ON 4/14: THE PAPER WILL BE MARKED "1 DAY LATE" EVEN IF ONLY 5 MINUTES LATE! PLEASE SUBMIT \*TWO\* COPIES. EMAIL SUBMISSIONS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE**  
4/16 Applied Medical Anthropology II: Combining Critical and Clinical Approaches

### Week 14. Looking Ahead: The Future of Medical Anthropology

- Read: Stoller, 101-203  
4/21 New Directions in Medical Anthropology  
4/23 **Exam #3 (covers Part 3, weeks 11 through 14)**

## The Op-Ed Paper

For this assignment, you will submit a 500-600 word “op-ed” that links a talk that you attend this semester to both health and culture. You should write it as if you intend to submit it to a prominent newspaper for publication.

As part of your research, you must attend, in person, a scholarly seminar/lecture/symposium on a health-related topic (films/movies are not acceptable replacements). Take detailed notes about the material presented and, if possible, ask follow-up questions of the speaker(s) after the talk.

Your overall goal is to learn about the health issue *and* link it to its cultural context: you must describe the health issue and address the question “what does culture have to do with it?” It is likely that you will need to do additional research to flesh out what you learn in the seminar. Internet research of reputable sources is acceptable. You must list all sources on which the paper draws, either directly or indirectly, at the end of the op-ed in a section called “List of References” (this list can include Internet sources and websites). You are also required to provide information on the seminar you attended: name of the speaker(s), title of the presentation, date, and location.

Style tip: an op-ed differs from a typical academic paper by being more engaging, energetic, and edgy. It argues a point, takes a stand, and advocates for a new understanding or new policy or new something. Be spirited in an informed way!

The paper must be double-spaced and typed in 12-pitch font. No extra spaces between paragraphs, please. An essay that is much shorter than 500 words is likely to be considered skimpy, while one much longer than 600 words is likely to be “rejected” by the newspaper editor as too long (that is, the editor will read only the first 600 words).

Follow the Writing Tips listed below.

Samples of excellent op-eds from past classes will be posted on Blackboard.

Late paper: the only valid excuses for lateness are serious personal problems, and these need to be documented by a professional *in writing* (such as, a written note from a doctor). Computer problems are not a valid excuse for lateness, so finish your op-ed well in advance of the due date/time, just to be on the safe side.

**NOTE:** write your op-ed as if you really hope it will be published—and maybe it will! In addition, having a clearly written, brief paper in your personal file is often useful for practical matters such as getting an internship/job.

### 20+ Op-ed Writing Tips from Barbara Miller

1. Start the op-ed with a “grabber” point that engages the reader.
2. Use short paragraphs and employ paragraphing effectively for emphasis and clarity; within paragraphs, sentences should have some rationale (not like strands of spaghetti on a plate).
3. Use short and direct sentences.
4. Prune boldly for “lard” (roughly 30 percent in a first draft). “Lard” = wordiness.
5. Avoid the passive voice.
6. Avoid beginning sentences or, in general, using the words “there is” or “there are.” It’s lifeless. Revise whenever possible to create a more energetic sentence.
7. Provide an antecedent for “this...” when you use it to begin a sentence or phrase. By an antecedent, I mean one word or more that explains what “this” refers to.
8. Avoid vocabulary “echoes” (using the same word over and over, or even twice in close proximity).
9. Avoid “adjectives of excess” including “very.”

10. Watch your use of “we” and “ours”—either avoid using these words completely or else make it clear who the reference group is. “I” is okay to use in cultural anthropology but these days it also needs explanation as to what group/category it encompasses.
11. Avoid vague (unspecified) references to culture (or cultures) and society.
12. Avoid informal language (slang), contractions, and sarcasm.
13. Avoid “in-writing” such as “*It is clearly important to consider that poverty is related to mortality...*” or “*It is my belief that...*”
14. Avoid direct quotations in an op-ed unless brief and zingy. It is better to paraphrase.
15. Do not use the words “interesting” (it means nothing to the reader) or “hopefully” (it is ungrammatical in most cases).
16. Avoid using the word “impact” as a verb. Instead, use “affect.” [Be aware of the differences between “affect” and “effect.”]
17. When mentioning a time period (as in: “*recent changes in XYZ*”), be more specific and tag the time period in question to, perhaps, a decade or two or more, if necessary (such as: “*...during the 1990s...*” or “*...in the decade following World War II*”).
18. Write out “percent.”
19. Revise, revise, revise: several revisions are usually necessary in order to achieve a strong and clear paper.
20. Start early: the revision process requires time. You need to work through drafts, re-thinking, revisions, and then allow for a “cooling off” period so that you can look at it with fresh eyes.

**Important questions to ask yourself along the way:**

1. What is the point I am trying to make—in the op-ed as a whole and in each paragraph?
2. Is the material I am discussing/presenting necessary and does it advance the goals of the op-ed as a whole? Does each paragraph contribute to the whole? Does each sentence contribute to teach paragraph? (If not, fix it or delete it).
3. Does the op-ed carry the reader’s attention throughout? If not, how I can make sure it does?