

# ANTH 15: MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: METHODS & PRACTICE

## Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2025
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture per week (48 total per quarter)
Advisory:	Not open to students with credit in ANTH 15H or 50.
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 4: Social & Behavioral Sciences
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will practice and apply understandings of an evolutionary perspective to changing relationships between human societies, ecologies and illness.
- Students will critically analyze and interpret methods and practice of medical anthropology.
- Students will apply anthropological principles for solving human problems on the local, regional and world scales.

## Description

Introduction to medical anthropology, a subfield of the discipline of anthropology that seeks to understand and highlight how health, illness, and healing practices are culturally constructed and mediated. Students investigate global, cross-cultural, and local issues related to health, sickness, healing, epidemiology, aging, and dying from an applied and biocultural perspective, using anthropological theory and ethnographic fieldwork methods. Students are exposed to diverse cultural interpretations of health, sickness, and healing, the importance of viewing medical systems as social systems, understanding the socio-cultural context of medical decision making and therapy management, the principles of cultural competency, and the recurrent and ongoing problems of socioeconomic inequality and ecological disruptions that have an impact upon the differential distribution and treatment of human diseases.

## Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Describe the history of the field of medical anthropology and how it is organized today, including career paths.
- Compare and contrast theories and methods utilized by researchers and practitioners within the field of medical anthropology.

- Recognize the role of culture, biology, and ecology in the origins and social construction of illness or disease and in the culture specific production of health.
- Describe symptoms, diagnosis, and therapies of different medical systems across cultures.
- Distinguish between the training, and contrast the authority, of healing professionals in biomedical and other non-Western medical systems.
- Evaluate the impact of globalization on health, disease, healing, and health systems.
- Identify the role culture plays in the response of health systems to infectious diseases and global pandemics.
- Recognize the impact of the environment and climate change on health.
- Evaluate the role of applied medical anthropology in national and international health development programs and the development of public health policy.
- Develop intercultural sensitivity and skills that promote cultural competency in a healthcare setting.

## Course Content

- Introduction to medical anthropology
  - Medical anthropology as a subfield in a four-field anthropological approach
  - The historical development of medical anthropology
  - Medical anthropology today: an applied approach
- Theory and methods in medical anthropology
  - Sociocultural, biocultural, and ecological theories
  - Introduction to ethnographic fieldwork theory and methods, including the analysis and interpretation of data
- Role of culture, biology, and ecology on concepts of health, illness, and healing
  - The concept of culture
  - Evolutionary and ecological perspectives on disease
    - Human biological variation
    - Changing indicators of health from foraging societies to industrialized societies
    - Models of ecology, culture, and health
  - Social construction of disease and illness categories
    - Perceptions of internal and external body
    - Beliefs concerning mutilation of the body
    - The social production of health and treatment
    - Culture-bound syndromes
  - The diversity of responses to infectious disease and global pandemics
- Medical systems across cultures
  - Power and organization in medical systems across cultures
    - Resource control and decision-making
  - Health disparities and inequality
- Healing roles across cultures
  - Characteristics, authority, and training of healers
  - Shamanism in a cross-cultural perspective
- Health and the environment
  - Medical ecologies
  - Infectious diseases and pandemics in a globalized world
  - Health and climate change

7. Applied medical anthropology
  - a. Contributions in formulation of public policy
  - b. Work of applied specialists to world health problems and health inequities resulting from globalization
8. Cultural competency in health care
  - a. Cultural and linguistic barriers resulting in health disparities
  - b. Cultural competency history and policy
  - c. Practice of cultural competency skills

4. Conducting research based on secondary sources.
5. Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a local setting.

## Discipline(s)

Anthropology

## Lab Content

Not applicable.

## Special Facilities and/or Equipment

When taught as an online distance learning section, students and faculty need ongoing and continuous internet and email access.

## Method(s) of Evaluation

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

In-class objective examinations, including multiple-choice, completion, matching items, and true/false

In-class and out-of-class writing assignments, including essays and short papers

Oral presentations and/or papers presenting individual or group research or fieldwork

Assessment of participation in class discussions and exercises

## Method(s) of Instruction

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Classroom lectures and discussion using language of anthropology

All-class and small group discussions

Instructor-guided interpretation and analysis

Collaborative learning and small group exercises

Individual or group presentations of major projects followed by in-class discussion and evaluation

## Representative Text(s) and Other Materials

Wiley, Andrea S., and John Allen. Medical Anthropology: A Biocultural Approach, 4th ed.. 2020.

Singer, M., H. Baer, D. Long, and A. Pavlotski. Introducing Medical Anthropology: A Discipline in Action, 3rd ed.. 2019.

## Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments

1. Reading assigned texts, articles, or handouts, and studying class notes.
2. Doing various homework, including writing reading response essays and short papers.
3. Preparing an oral presentation or written research paper based on individual or group research or fieldwork.