

# ANTH-145: INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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**Effective Term**

Fall 2026

**CC Approval**

12/05/2025

**AS Approval**

12/11/2025

**BOT Approval**

12/18/2025

**COCI Approval**

02/19/2026

## SECTION A - Course Data Elements

**CB04 Credit Status**

Credit - Degree Applicable

**Discipline**

Minimum Qualifications	And/Or
Anthropology (Master's Degree)	

**Subject Code**

ANTH - Anthropology

**Course Number**

145

**Department**

Anthropology

**Division**

Arts and Humanities (ARAH)

**Full Course Title**

Introduction to Medical Anthropology

**Short Title**

Medical Anthropology

**CB03 TOP Code**

2202.00 - Anthropology

**CB08 Basic Skills Status**

NBS - Not Basic Skills

**CB09 SAM Code**

E - Non-Occupational

**Rationale**

Updating as part of regular review cycle.

## SECTION B - Course Description

**Catalog Course Description**

This course introduces students to medical anthropology - the cross-cultural study of health, illness, healing, and practitioner work as complex, mediated social systems. Students will use critical medical anthropology theory, ethnographic field methods, and the biocultural perspective to investigate the human, ecological, and epidemiological dimensions of health. Special emphasis is placed on the intersections of ongoing structural socioeconomic inequality with issues related to ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, disability.

Students will engage with ethnography and case studies that illustrate the lived dimensions of health disparities, cultural healing practices, and medical systems in diverse communities. The course is designed to prepare and inspire health occupations and behavioral science majors to think critically about health and healing in multicultural contexts.

## SECTION C - Conditions on Enrollment

### Open Entry/Open Exit

No

### Repeatability

Not Repeatable

### Grading Options

Letter Grade or Pass/No Pass

### Allow Audit

Yes

## Requisites

### Advisory Prerequisite(s)

Eligibility for ENGL-C1000 or appropriate placement.

## SECTION D - Course Standards

### Is this course variable unit?

No

### Units

3.00

### Lecture Hours

54.00

### Outside of Class Hours

108

### Total Contact Hours

54

### Total Student Hours

162

## Distance Education Approval

### Is this course offered through Distance Education?

Yes

### Online Delivery Methods

DE Modalities	Permanent or Emergency Only?
Hybrid	Permanent
Entirely Online	Permanent
Online with Proctored Exams	Permanent

## SECTION E - Course Content

### Student Learning Outcomes

Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Identify, analyze, and discuss anthropological approaches to human health and wellness in contemporary contexts, using critical medical anthropology theory and methods as the primary means of investigation.

2. Evaluate the relationships between structural inequality, structural violence, and health outcomes in multi-scalar and cross-cultural contexts.

**Course Objectives**

<b>Upon satisfactory completion of the course, students will be able to:</b>	
1.	Describe the history of the field of medical anthropology and how it is organized today, including career paths.
2.	Compare and contrast theories and methods utilized by researchers and practitioners within the field of medical anthropology.
3.	Recognize the role of culture, society, biology, and ecology in the origins and social construction of illness or disease.
4.	Evaluate the role of applied medical anthropology in national and international health development programs and the development of public health policy.
5.	Describe the catalog of symptoms, diagnoses, practices, and therapies of different medical systems across cultures, including non-Western and indigenous systems.
6.	Discuss the basic principles of epidemiology, population genetics, and carrying capacity as they relate to medical anthropology.
7.	Investigate the impacts of colonization, globalization, war, climate change, and other contemporary concerns on global health.
8.	Explain cross-cultural differences in the recruitment, selection, education, and ethical practices of healthcare workers and healers.
9.	Demonstrate intercultural sensitivity and skills that promote cultural competency in diverse healthcare settings.

**Course Content**

1. **Introduction to medical anthropology**
  - a. Medical anthropology as a subfield in a four-field anthropological approach
  - b. The historical development of medical anthropology
2. **Theory and methods in medical anthropology**
  - a. Theoretical perspectives—biocultural, critical/ecological, and applied theory
  - b. Models of ecology, culture and health
  - c. Introduction to ethnographic fieldwork theory and methods, including the analysis and interpretation of data
  - d. Cognate academic fields and the cross-pollination of health research
3. **Evolutionary and biocultural dimensions**
  - a. Human biological variation
  - b. Western perspectives and the culture of biomedicine
  - c. Cartesian perceptions of internal and external body
  - d. Disease in evolutionary perspective
4. **Cross-cultural beliefs about health, healing, and disease**
  - a. The concepts of culture, cultural logic, and worldview
  - b. The language(s) of health and medicine
  - c. Social construction of disease and illness categories
  - d. Illness narratives and the ethnographic patient
  - e. Cross-cultural beliefs about the human body
  - f. Cultural understandings of disease causation
  - g. The social production of health and treatment
5. **Gender and reproductive health**
  - a. Cultural and medical understandings of *transgender* and *intersex*
  - b. The medicalization of reproduction
  - c. Maternal health
  - d. Reproductive technologies
  - e. Reproduction and the life cycle
6. **Ecology of health and disease**
  - a. Changing indicators of health from foraging societies to industrialized societies
  - b. Evolutionary and ecological perspectives of disease
  - c. Environmental toxins and community health
  - d. Food systems and nutrition
  - e. Climate change and food insecurity
  - f. The diversity of responses to infectious disease, natural disasters or accidents, and global pandemics

7. **Medical systems across cultures**
  - a. Non-Western and Indigenous medical systems
  - b. Power and organization in medical systems across cultures
  - c. Resource control and decision-making
  - d. Health disparities and inequality
8. **Healing roles across cultures**
  - a. Characteristics, authority and training of healers
  - b. Religious and ritual healing
  - c. Medical pluralism and medical syncretism
  - d. The role of intersectional social movements
  - e. The role of diaspora and diasporic communities in promoting health communication and cultural competence.
9. **Health and the environment**
  - a. Medical ecologies
  - b. Infectious diseases and pandemics in a globalized world
  - c. Health and climate change
10. **Global health**
  - a. The impact of colonization and globalization on global health
  - b. Diseases of development and under (or uneven) development
  - c. Epidemiology and infectious disease
  - d. Emerging diseases and pandemics
11. **Drugs and Medical Technologies**
  - a. Ethnobotany and medicinal plants
  - b. The pharmaceutical industry
  - c. The rise of biotechnologies
  - d. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and human health
  - e. Augmented / Virtual reality (AR / VR) and human health
12. **Mental health and illness**
  - a. The medicalization of mental health
  - b. Culture-bound syndromes
  - c. The role of anxiety and stress in health
  - d. Psychedelics and healing
13. **Applied Medical Anthropology**
  - a. Medical practitioners and bioethics
  - b. Issues in public health
  - c. Engaged anthropology and participatory research
  - d. Anthropology and public policy
  - e. Career paths in medical anthropology
  - f. The role of global advocacy organizations (World Health Organization, United Nations, World Bank, UNICEF, etc.) in promoting equitable health outcomes
14. **Inequality, Structural Violence, and Health Disparities**
  - a. Health disparities in the United States
  - b. The biology of poverty
  - c. Racialized medicine
15. **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

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**Recommended Case Studies / Ethnographies (U.S. Focus):**

1. **Mexican Immigrant Women & Reproductive Health**  
*Patient Citizens, Immigrant Mothers* (Castañeda) – explores prenatal care, reproductive politics, and immigrant experiences in California.
2. **African American Community & Embodied Health**  
*Body and Soul* (Wacquant) – examines health, resilience, and inequality through the boxing gym in Chicago's South Side.
3. **Navajo Healing & Biomedicine**  
*The Scalpel and the Silver Bear* (Alvord) – a Navajo woman's dual role as surgeon and cultural mediator between indigenous and biomedical healing.
4. **Latinx Farmworkers & Structural Violence**

*Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies* (Holmes) – highlights migrant labor, suffering, and health disparities among Oaxacan farmworkers in California.

5. **Asian American Refugee Health**

*Aching for Home* (Phan) or equivalent studies in transcultural psychiatry – mental health, trauma, and healing among Southeast Asian refugee families

**Methods of Instruction**

**Methods of Instruction**

Types	Examples of learning activities
Activity	Activities in using anthropological field methods and theory to better understand an issue or problem. For example: 1. Health Mapping: Students map local neighborhood resources (clinics, grocery stores, parks) and analyze health inequities spatially. 2. Students explore the evolutionary and adaptive mechanisms of skin color by viewing a TED video from Nina Jablonski.
Critique	Critiques that give students the opportunity to explore alternative viewpoints or analyze a particular topic. For example: 1. Critical Media Review where students evaluate a form of media or media product using network theory. 2. An evaluation of pharmaceutical labelling or advertising to different consumer groups.
Discussion	Discussions provide opportunities for self-reflection and peer review of responses. For example: 1. Illness Narrative Sharing (with consent): Students bring in short illness stories (their own, or published patient narratives) to discuss cultural framing of symptoms and care. 2. Discuss Chapter 2 of "Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies", and compare with Chapter 5 of Jason de Leon's "The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail."
Field Experience	Field experiences can be analog or digital and allow students an "emic" opportunity for learning about local organizations. For example: 1. Meeting with a Farmworker Advocacy Organization: Visit a migrant worker support organization to learn about health challenges tied to labor conditions. 2. Visit a historic cemetery to understand how cultural perspectives on death and dying have changed through time and can be seen in modern archaeology.
Group Work	Group work that encourages peer collaboration and collegiality, for example: 1. Ethnographic Mini-Project: Students work in teams to interview (ethically and with approval) people about cultural understandings of health or healing practices in their communities. 2. Health Policy Advocacy Proposal: Teams identify a health inequity (e.g., maternal mortality among African Americans) and draft an advocacy plan informed by anthropological perspectives.
Lecture	Lectures expand on required readings and/or bring additional content not covered in the reading(s). For example: 1. A lecture that discusses modern uses of CT and MRI scanning in forensic cases. 2. A lecture explaining the cultural differences in women's expressions of pain during childbirth.

**Online Adaptation**

Types	Examples of learning activities
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### Instructor-Initiated Online Contact Types

Announcements/Bulletin Boards  
Chat Rooms  
Discussion Boards  
E-mail Communication  
Telephone Conversations  
Video or Teleconferencing

### Student-Initiated Online Contact Types

Chat Rooms  
Discussions  
Group Work

### Course design is accessible

Yes

## Methods of Evaluation

### Methods of Evaluation

Types	Examples of classroom assessments
Essays/Papers	For example: a. Three essays are scheduled as preparation assignments for the final paper: Proposal, Annotated Bibliography and Final Research Paper. The Proposal is a one-page statement of interest, the Annotated Bibliography critiques the sources located for the research, and the Final Research Paper presents the final research.
Exams/Tests	For example, a final exam based on the textbook readings and lectures.

Projects	In-class discussions demonstrate the student's interest in the course, understanding of the materials, as well as practicing critical thinking, verbal, and writing skills. For example: Option 1: Focus on reviewing and assessing an anthropologist's contribution to our understanding of a selected health issue, the people studied, research methods used, and the importance of cultural knowledge in addressing healthcare. Option 2: Focus on a locally based health issue (for example, the health of farmworkers in Napa or the availability of contraception at UC Berkeley). It may involve interviewing, participant-observation with a social group or organization, use of ethnohistorical documents, secondary analysis of data, or other methods with instructor's approval. Option 3: Focus on a cultural group discussed in class (for example, Navajo/Diné in the US, recent immigrants to New York, etc.). Outline the ways in which this group's medical system(s) operate and discuss the possibility for integration into a biomedically-based medical system. Would it work? Could it work? Why or why not?
Homework	For example, reading a chapter of the textbook or a collection of short articles for the upcoming lecture.
Oral Presentations	For example, participating as an actor in a short demonstration of cultural miscommunication and body language.
Projects	Student may do singular or group projects related to course material. For example,  1. A solo project that details the changes to the Affordable Care Act since 2010 and what those changes might mean for people in California. 2. A group project that presents information about wellness-focused NGOs in Sacramento County and the populations they serve, including an assessment of available data online.
Quizzes	For example, a terminology quiz that solidifies student knowledge of key vocabulary in Medical Anthropology.
Other	Other methods of evaluation as determined by the instructor and course format.

## Assignments

### Reading Assignments

- Selected readings from textbook and supplemental materials, including films. Sample reading assignments include:
  - Read the first chapter (pp. 3-23) of Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Be prepared to discuss the qualitative and quantitative research methods and populations sampled by Martin in her research.
  - Read the Introduction (pp. 1-19) of *Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer*. Be prepared to discuss the aspects of the introduction that are emic and etic.
- Written discussion questions based on reading assignments and/or films and brought to class.

For example:

- What are the cultural variations of the "Placebo Effect," according to Moerman? What methods does he use to show that these variations exist?
- Explain the difference between the medical packaging of antidepressants in the United States versus Latin America. How does cultural knowledge inform these designs?

### Writing Assignments

For example:

- Write a five-page comparative essay about preventative versus curative medical systems in the Caribbean region. Discuss the underlying social, political, and cultural factors that influence the maintenance and efficacy (or inefficacy) of these systems.
- Focus on reviewing and assessing an anthropologist's contribution to our understanding of a selected health issue, the people studied, research methods used, and the importance of cultural knowledge in addressing healthcare.

### Outside-of-Class Assignments

Other related assignments at the discretion of the instructor that meet one or more of the Course Learning Outcomes for the course.

## SECTION F - Textbooks and Instructional Materials

### Material Type

Textbook

**Author**

Wolf-Meyer, M.J., & Kitanaka, J. (Eds)

**Title**

Mapping Medical Anthropology for the Twenty-First Century

**Edition/Version**

1

**Publisher**

Rutgers University Press

**Year**

2026

**Rationale**

Upcoming new textbook for Medical Anthropology (2026)

**ISBN #**

978-1978845909

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**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Mendenhall, E.

**Title**

Invisible Illness: A History, from Hysteria to Long COVID

**Edition/Version**

1

**Publisher**

University of California Press

**Year**

2026

**Rationale**

Upcoming textbook in Medical Anthropology.

**ISBN #**

978-0520421523

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**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Irons, R., Gibbon, S.J., Cook, J., & Parkhurst, A. (Eds)

**Title**

An Anthropology of Global Immunization: Vaccine Politics and Realities in Ethnographic Perspective

**Edition/Version**

1

**Publisher**

Berghahn Books

**Year**

2026

**Rationale**

Relevant ethnography for Medical Anthropology

**ISBN #**

978-1836953203

**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Martin, E.

**Title**

The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction

**Edition/Version**

3

**Publisher**

Beacon Press

**Year**

2001

**Rationale**

This is a classic text in Medical Anthropology now in its third printing

**ISBN #**

978-0807046456

**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Wiley, A.S. & Allen, J.S. (Eds)

**Title**

Medical Anthropology: A Biocultural Approach

**Edition/Version**

4

**Publisher**

Oxford University Press

**Year**

2020

**Rationale**

This is a popular textbook for Medical Anthropology as taught in the U.S.

**ISBN #**

978-0197515990

**Material Type**

Textbook

**Author**

Ippolytos Kalofonos

**Title**

All I Eat is Medicine: Going Hungry in Mozambique's AIDS Economy (California Series in Public Anthropology)

**Publisher**

University of California Press

**Year**

2021

**Rationale**

Excellent ethnography

**ISBN #**

9780520289406

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**SECTION G - Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity**

**How does your course and/or course outline of record reflect strategies for accommodating and engaging diverse student populations, advancing equitable outcomes, and fostering inclusion for all students?**

This course provides multiple pathways for student learning by diversifying both the instructional methods, the overall content, and the assessment methods for assignments. There are opportunities for visual learning, spatial and auditory learning, singular as well as group work, and options for disabled students. The course can be offered either on campus, hybrid, or fully online. Course material is scaffolded such that basic concepts and "reconnaissance" practices are completed before investigating more advanced content. There are no prerequisites for this course. Finally, the dedicated, applied exploration of cultural and ethnic groups that have historically been silenced within the United States are paramount to understanding what is anthropological about Medical Anthropology.

**Course Codes (Admin Only)**

**CB00 State ID**

CCC000502848

**CB10 Cooperative Work Experience Status**

N - Is Not Part of a Cooperative Work Experience Education Program

**CB11 Course Classification Status**

Y - Credit Course

**CB13 Special Class Status**

N - The Course is Not an Approved Special Class

**CB23 Funding Agency Category**

Y - Not Applicable (Funding Not Used)

**CB24 Program Course Status**

Program Applicable

**Allow Pass/No Pass**

Yes

**Only Pass/No Pass**

No