

ANTH 3141(6141): The Anthropology of Healing

Fall 2024

TTh 9:30-10:45 am

Calhoun 204

Subject to change, always check online syllabus and Brightspace modules for updates and current course requirements, readings, assignments, and deadlines

Prof. Ken MacLeish (he/him)

k.macleish@vanderbilt.edu

Calhoun 325

322-0792

office hours:

T 11:00 am–noon (in-person Calhoun 325 and [virtual](#))

W noon–1:00 pm (in-person Calhoun 325 and [virtual](#))

and by appointment

Teaching Assistant: An Hoàng-Xuân

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office hours: 11am-12.30pm

(Robert Penn Warren Center)

DESCRIPTION

Culture and social relations shape the experiences, roles, practices, interactions, and definitions of healing. And correspondingly, healing experiences and practices define humans' shared worlds. This extends to biomedicine itself, which is not only a set of healing and scientific practices, but also a source of meaning and a reflection of powerful social interests, structural forces, and ideas about right and wrong. Above all, healing is a form of shared and subjective experience. This course uses the tools and concepts of anthropology to place that experience, and its connections to meaning and the social world, at the center of how we understand health, illness, and healing in contemporary biomedicine. Much of our focus will be on the US, but will also include historical and contemporary cases from around the world.

The course begins by looking at the concept of culture, healing as a social system, and how studying subjective experiences of healing and their contexts reveals broader patterns of meaning and power. This includes the complicated history of both anthropology and medicine in empire, colonialism, and the production of inequality. And we will discuss anthropological methods that can both support medicine's healing mission and usefully critique its failings. This section will culminate with our reading of *Lissa: a story about medical promise, friendship, and revolution*—an ethnographic graphic novel that explores how people interpret contemporary medicine within and across shared systems of meaning. This first set of readings will also serve as the basis for the mid-term research and writing assignment: an ethnographic interview and analysis of perspectives on healing.

The course then turns to analyzing familiar biomedical healing mechanisms. Organ transplantation, taking and prescribing drugs, taking drugs, replacing organs, interacting with medical technology, and undergoing therapy are all familiar and scientifically grounded practices. Our work in this part of the course will show how even these straightforward mechanisms are fertile terrain for how people interpret and give meaning to their worlds. We will focus on anthropological concepts including personhood and self-making, embodiment, kinship, gender, morality, and narrative. We will also draw on this survey to begin developing group research projects based on ethnographic data and outside anthropological literature.

The final section of the course focuses on forms of illness and healing related to elements outside the sick person—institutions, communities, places, the past and future, and

various forms of violence. The planned materials include war, war injury, and trauma in the US and the Middle East; policing, structural violence, and community resistance; and one additional topic that we will choose together later in the term. Some class time will also be dedicated to refining group-based research projects and presenting them right before and after Thanksgiving break.

EXPECTATIONS

This is a 3000-level course. The course is designed with the expectation that you have some familiarity with critical social science or humanistic analysis. The workload is not light, but if you productively participate, come to class meetings, thoughtfully engage with the material, and thoroughly complete all assignments, you can expect to do well. Review the syllabus and assignments carefully to see if the course is a good fit for you.

I value open and clear communication and I am prepared to be flexible in response to your needs. **When you tell me what you need, it shows me that you respect my time and your capacity.**¹ If you need more time for an assignment, want clearer feedback on a grade, have concerns about course material or difficulties in group work, or anything else, please communicate with me so that we can find the best way for you to have a successful experience of the class. In return, I ask that you **be accountable to class requirements and to your classmates** by communicating proactively and respectfully, meeting agreed-upon deadlines, and doing your share of group work.

I will keep the class updated on any course schedule changes via email, Brightspace announcements, and the syllabus and assignment documents. You are responsible for keeping up with class requirements, including the completion of all readings and assignments by the due date. **It is your responsibility to contact me about missing or late work or excessive absences.** Note that College policy allows Incompletes only for very limited circumstances.

Finally, we will certainly have many perspectives and opinions within our group. I want to note that this class itself **has a point of view**: as an expression of the field of anthropology, it is committed to curiosity about and dignification of people's lived experience and to the critique of powerful institutional and historical forces. You will find these values expressed in various ways in our readings and in class lecture and discussion, and they will inform all the work we do over the semester.

Readings

There are readings assigned for most meetings, and **you are expected to complete all assigned readings in advance of class time** and to come to class with **notes and annotations from your reading**, as outlined in the [reading guide](#). Even if you have questions about the reading or aspects of it are unclear, reading in advance is crucial to fulfilling course requirements and getting the most out of lectures and class participation. **There are two required texts for the class:**

Hamdy et al., 2014, *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*, University of Toronto Press.

Ralph, Laurence, 2014, *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*, University of Chicago Press.

Both are available from the university bookstore and from online retailers. A small number of electronic copies are available via the library. If you are unable to get a copy of either text,

¹ Thank you to Prof. Aimi Hamraie for this phrasing.

please communicate with Prof. MacLeish at least two weeks in advance of when we will be reading it for help getting one.

All readings and other required materials are posted on Brightspace in the module for each week of class or are available at the campus bookstore or via the library catalog. **If an assigned text does not appear on Brightspace or the link malfunctions, it is your responsibility to [access it via the library web site](#)** by using the [e-journals](#), [database](#) or [google scholar](#) gateway features. You can use the [live chat with a librarian](#) feature if you run into problems.

Writing

This class treats writing as central to thinking, reflection, and learning. Written assignments count for 50% of the final grade. Style, execution, and writing mechanics are important to the clarity of your ideas and figure heavily in grades. Just as important is that your writing conveys your own perspectives and ideas in addition to information from texts. For this reason, **all writing must be 100 percent your own; the use of AI writing tools or outside summaries is not allowed** and may result in an F/0 for the assignment and possible referral to the Honor Council. If you are interested in refining your writing or improving your grades on writing assignments, you are encouraged to meet with Prof. MacLeish and/or the TA for feedback and support, and to make use of [The Writing Studio](#) and the [English Language Center](#).

Group work

Two major assignments for the course, counting for 35% of your final grade, consist of group work. Group work allows for thought, reflection, depth of engagement, and the cultivation of flexibility and compromise that are only possible when working closely with others. When working with your group, you are expected to communicate proactively, make ample time to meet and work outside of class, distribute responsibilities and contributions equitably, and produce final products that are cohesive and well integrated. **You will be asked to evaluate your own and your group members' performance.**

Class Participation

Participation is key to the success of the class as a whole, and creating an atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable contributing is our collective responsibility. A diversity of perspectives and opinions is welcome and encouraged. **Having a point of view** and explaining and reflecting on it enriches discussion for everyone. **Treating other viewpoints with consideration and respect** is also crucial, as is leaving space for everyone to participate by **not talking excessively or dominating conversation**. You can expect an open and supportive class environment, and you should **feel free to approach me for assistance or to voice concerns**.

Attendance at **office hours** with Prof. MacLeish or the TA also counts toward class participation. Office hours are available not only to answer questions about grades or assignments, but to discuss class concepts and problems. If the regular office hours slot does not fit your schedule, email to set up an appointment.

Participation is **graded based on frequency, effort, and thoughtfulness**. Contributions that engage directly respectfully with other students, engage with the specifics of the course materials, and move discussion to details in the texts or course materials are especially valued.

Attendance and Absences

It is more important than ever to be mindful of our own and others' health. **If you feel sick, do**

not come to class. Let the professor know that you will be absent. **Your absence will be excused** and you will not be penalized.

Regular class attendance is required. **Multiple *unexcused* absences (more than two) will negatively affect your participation grade.** Arriving excessively late or leaving early will also negatively affect your class participation grade. In the event of illness, life events, observed holidays, or athletic, military, or interview travel, please **contact the professor/TA as soon as possible in advance of your absence** to have it excused.

If you are absent, plan to stay current with readings and other assignments, get class notes from another student, and view the class slides and participate in the discussion forums on Brightspace. **There is no need to contact the professor/TA about what you missed** unless you have specific questions.

Sensitive Content

This course deals with topics that are inherently upsetting—racism, colonialism, serious illness, injury, and death, grief and loss, and many forms of discrimination, deprivation, and structural violence.

We are not all affected in the same way by the same upsetting imagery or topics. Material that seems remote from your own experience may hit close to home for others in the class, and vice versa. **It is our collective responsibility to be attentive and sensitive to others' perspectives and experiences.** When sharing passages, images, or outside materials in class and previewing readings for upcoming classes, I will do my best to let you know what specific kinds of content you can expect to see and put any graphic images or stories in context. Please plan to do the same in your own discussions and presentations, and **carefully consider if the use of graphic images or anecdotes or the use of stereotyping imagery or language is necessary or appropriate.**

If you notice particular topics on the syllabus that may be especially difficult for you to engage with in class, please communicate with Prof. MacLeish about it over email or in office hours, and we can discuss possible alternatives for how to approach the topic if necessary. If you have any thoughts about how to make the class environment more supportive and inclusive in general or with regard to specific topics, please feel free to share them with Prof. MacLeish.

Accommodation and Access

If you have a disability or medical issue and would benefit from specific changes or accommodations to make the class, assignments, and materials as accessible as possible for you, **you are welcome (but not required) to contact me by email or in office hours to discuss your specific needs.** You are also encouraged to communicate directly about your needs with [Student Access](#) (615-322-4705) as soon as possible so that you can be supported and protected by the university's policies and resources. If you receive an accommodation from Student Access that is relevant to your work in this class, please communicate directly with me about it as soon as possible.

Plagiarism, AI Tools, Citation, and Academic Integrity

The university takes plagiarism very seriously, and **even unintentional plagiarism can result in serious consequences**—for this course, either an F/0 or no credit for the assignment and the possibility of report to [the Honor Council](#) for further action. You are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the honor code. **All work for this class must be 100 percent your own.**

The use of generative AI tools or external summaries is not allowed for any assignment for this class and constitutes plagiarism. Note that these tools also frequently

produce incorrect information about texts and concepts and summaries or descriptions that are highly superficial.

All writing and research assignments for this class (the interview paper, final project, and any presentation slides/materials) must contain [appropriate author-date citations](#) and **attributions of quoted and source material**. Everything you write that is based on others' work, rather than on common knowledge or your own original claims, requires citations even if it is not a direct quote. Citation and attribution are key academic skills for making arguments, demonstrating competence, and expressing your own insights.

A university guide on how to avoid plagiarism is [here](#). A comprehensive bibliography and citation style guide is available [here](#) and on Brightspace under Contents→Additional Resources.

Devices policy

The use of laptops and tablets for class-related activities is permitted. Texting, messaging, or browsing on any device for non-class purposes during is distracting to you and to others and will **negatively affect your participation grade**. Please **remove earbuds and headphones** during class.

Graduate credit

If you are taking this course for graduate credit (ANTH 6141), please see the additional graduate requirements posted on Brightspace or [here](#).

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES

Assignments for this course include the following:

- **Leading class discussion (10%)**: working in a group of 4-5 to organize questions and prompts for group discussion and suggest key takeaways for the week. Full guidelines [here](#), group roster here [link].
- **Reading responses (30%)**: short written reflections on a specific text assigned that week. You may submit up to 11 responses; the best 7 grades will count. Full guidelines [here](#) and on Brightspace.
- **Ethnographic interview assignment (15%)**: a writing assignment analyzing an ethnographic interview with someone you know about their experiences and perspectives on healing. Guidelines here [link] and on Brightspace.
- **Final group research project (20%)**: in-depth group project on healing practice of your choice, including proposal and pre-submitted outline, review of anthropological literature, collection of ethnographic and cultural data, and in-class presentation, and final product in a range of formats. Guidelines here [link] and on Brightspace.
- **Final reflection (10%)**: a short essay reflecting on the semester and on the possibilities and limits of ethnographic knowledge. Guidelines here [link] and on Brightspace.
- **Participation (15%)**: see above.

Grades of B through A- indicate work done to the standard of the assignment from lower or mixed quality (B, B+) to higher (A-) quality. Grades of A and above are reserved for exceptionally strong or insightful work. Work meeting only some requirements of the assignment will receive a C grade, significantly deficient work a D grade, and incomplete work an F.

The course uses the grading scale below. Tenths of a point are not rounded up.

A	93-100	B-	80-82	D+	67-69
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A-	90-92	C+	77-79	D	63-66
B+	87-89	C	73-76	D-	60-62
B	83-86	C-	70-72	F	<60

Assignments are assessed on a combination of **quality of analysis** (insight, thoughtfulness, use of evidence, creativity) and **quality of execution** (completeness of assignment, clarity of speech/writing/materials, mechanics, use of citations). More specific assessment guidelines or rubrics are included with individual assignment descriptions.

TOPICS AND COURSE SCHEDULE

NOTE:

- Readings, due dates, etc. may change
- “A” and “B” indicate which group can submit a reading response for that class (A = last name A-K; B = last name L-Z)
- [Brackets] indicate optional readings/texts

Week 1

Th 22 August

Introductions and course overview

Week 2: Anthropology, medicine, and empire

T 27 August

Review syllabus and read [Reading Guide and Reading Response Assignment](#) document; submit any questions [here](#)

Rivers, W. H. R. [1926] 2010. “Massage in Melanesia.” In *A Reader in Medical Anthropology: Theoretical Trajectories, Emergent Realities*, Good et al eds., pp. 16–17. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. [1937] 2010. “The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events.” In Good et al, Pp. 18–25.

Th 29 August (A&B—mandatory)

Fanon, Frantz. 1965. From “Ch. 5—Colonial Medicine” (pp.121-145). In *A Dying Colonialism*, H. Chevalier trans. New York: Grove Press.

Week 3: Culture, power, and contemporary biomedicine

T 3 September (A)

Kleinman, Arthur. 1988. “The Meaning of Symptoms and Disorders.” In *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*. New York, NY: Basic Books. **Read pp.1-9, skim 10-30.**

Kleinman, Arthur, and Peter Benson. 2006. “Anthropology in the Clinic: The Problem of Cultural Competency and How to Fix It.” *PLOS Medicine* 3 (10): 1673-76.

Th 5 September (B)

Holmes, Seth M. 2012. "The Clinical Gaze in the Practice of Migrant Health: Mexican Migrants in the United States." *Social Science & Medicine* 74 (6): 873–81.

Week 4: Meanings of medical promise**T 10 September (A)**

Hamdy, Sherine, Coleman Nye, Sarula Bao, Caroline Brewer, and Marc Parenteau. 2017. *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. North York, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press. Pts I and II, pp.15-143

Th 12 September (B)

Hamdy et al., *Lissa*, Part III and "Key Concepts", pp.135-235 and 264-27

Week 5: Social bodies and healing kin**T 17 September (A)**

Crowley-Matoka, Megan, and Sherine F. Hamdy. 2016. "Gendering the Gift of Life: Family Politics and Kidney Donation in Egypt and Mexico." *Medical Anthropology* 35 (1): 31–44.

Th 19 September (B)

Kaufman, Sharon R. 2000. "In the Shadow of 'Death with Dignity': Medicine and Cultural Quandaries of the Vegetative State." *American Anthropologist* 102 (1): 69–83.

Week 6: Explaining illness and healing**T 24 September (A)**

Erickson, Barbra E. 2007. "Toxin or Medicine? Explanatory Models of Radon in Montana Health Mines." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 21 (1): 1–21.

Th 26 September (B)

Dumes, Abigail A. 2020. "Lyme Disease and the Epistemic Tensions of 'Medically Unexplained Illnesses.'" *Medical Anthropology* 39 (6): 441–56.

Week 7: Taking pills**T 1 October**

In-class ethnographic writing workshop—bring interview materials

Th 3 October (B&A)

Lowe, Jaime. 2015. "I Don't Believe in God, but I Believe in Lithium." *The New York Times*, June 25, 2015, sec. Magazine.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/28/magazine/i-dont-believe-in-god-but-i-believe-in-lithium.html>.

Martin, Emily. 2006. "The Pharmaceutical Person." *BioSocieties* 1 (3): 273–87.

****M 7 October: Interview paper due by 11:59 am via Brightspace****

Week 8: Psychological recovery

T 8 October (B&A)

Kaiser, Bonnie N., Saiba Varma, Elizabeth Carpenter-Song, Rebecca Sareff, Sauharda Rai, and Brandon A. Kohrt. 2020. "Eliciting Recovery Narratives in Global Mental Health: Benefits and Potential Harms in Service User Participation." *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 43 (2): 111–20.

[OPTIONAL: MacLeish, Kenneth. 2019. "Damaged and Deserving: On Care in a Veteran Treatment Court." *Medical Anthropology*.]

Th 10 October—fall break, no class

Week 9: War, trauma and violence 1—global war and Palestine

T 15 October (B)

Mazzarino, Andrea, Marcia Inhorn, and Catherine Lutz. 2019. "Introduction: The Health Consequences of War." In *War and Health: The Medical Consequences of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, edited by Catherine Lutz and Andrea Mazzarino, 1–40. New York: New York University Press.

Th 17 October (A)

Alloh, Hammam, Yousef Al-Akad, Reda Abu Assi, and Maya Rosen. 2023. "We Have Lost the Ability to Provide True Care." Jewish Currents. October 30, 2023.

<https://jewishcurrents.org/we-have-lost-the-ability-to-provide-true-care>.

Human Rights Watch. 2023. "Gaza: Israeli Attacks, Blockade Devastating for People with Disabilities | Human Rights Watch." November 1, 2023.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/01/gaza-israeli-attacks-blockade-devastating-people-disabilities>.

Rabaia, Yoke, Mahasin F. Saleh, and Rita Giacaman. 2014. "Sick or Sad? Supporting Palestinian Children Living in Conditions of Chronic Political Violence." *Children & Society* 28 (3): 172–81. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12061>.

Week 10: Project preparation

T Oct 22

Project groups meet and brainstorm

Read [assignment document](#), [complete topic brainstorming](#) form before class, select topic, begin drafting group proposal

No readings or responses

****W Oct 23: group proposal due by noon [via Brightspace/google form](#)****

Th Oct 24

Project group conferences with Prof. MacLeish, group work time

No readings or responses

Week 11: War, trauma, and violence 2—the US and its military

T 29 October (B)

In-class screening of *Tattooed Under Fire* (2007)

Scandlyn, Jean, and Sarah Hautzinger. 2014. "Collective Reckoning with the Post-9/11 Wars on a Colorado Homefront." Providence, RI: Watson Institute for International Studies.
<https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2014/ScandlynHautzinger%2061615.pdf>.

Th 31 November (A)

Wool, Zoë. 2020. "Veteran Therapeutics: The Promise of Military Medicine and the Possibilities of Disability in the Post-9/11 United States." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* n/a (n/a).

Week 12: Community injury, community healing**T 5 November (B)**

Ralph, Laurence. 2014. Introduction: The Underside of Injury, or, How to Dream Like a Renegade pp.1-20 and Ch 4 Disability, or, Why a gang leader helps stop the violence (119-142). In *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.

Th 7 November (A)

Ralph, 2014, Ch 5 Disease, or, How a will to survive helps the healing (141-166) and Conclusion: The Frame, or, How to get out of an isolated space (167-180), In *Renegade Dreams*.

Week 13: topic TBD**T 12 November (A&B)****Project progress check-in**

Readings TBD

Th 14 November

No class—project work time, Calhoun 204 available for group work

Week 14: final presentations**T 19 November**

Groups 1 and 2 present

Th 21 November

Groups 3 and 4 present

T 26 and TH 28 November—no class, Thanksgiving break**Week 15: final presentations and wrap-up****T 3 December**

Groups 5 and 6 present

Th 5 December (A&B)

****re-read**** your choice of Evans-Pritchard, "Witchcraft"; Fanon, "Colonial Medicine"; Kleinman, "Illness Narratives"; or Hamdy, "Key Concepts" interview
Evals, wrap-up, and final essay prep

****M 9 December: Final essay due via Brightspace by 11:59 pm****