ANTH 3252: Medical Anthropology

Course Syllabus: Spring 2025

East Carolina University

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays 9-9:50am, 265 Flanagan Building

**Professor: Chad Morris, Ph.D.**

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# Course Description

Comparative and holistic study of cultural behavior in context of health and disease.

Human health – its definition, assumed cause, and practice – is interpreted in a vast array of ways by the different cultures of the world. This course is designed to introduce you to different cultural models of health while allowing you to see some of the conflicts that can arise when health is seen in an ethnocentric way. The course will survey multiple fields of study within medical anthropology, showing how disciplinary interpretations of human biology and culture allow for an understanding of health that nicely augments prevailing biomedical models. We’ll also explore the intersection of health and human rights by investigating contemporary social problems through the lens of health. Throughout, this course is designed to engage the student in active discussion regarding application of course concepts to a larger goal of improved global health, broadly defined. In other words, how can we make the world a healthier place, and why should we try?

This course counts as a 3000-level elective in the anthropology major and minor and is a core course in the medical anthropology minor. The course conveys general education credit in the social sciences. In this course I expect that you will spend at least 12 hours each week completing work inside and outside of class.

# Course Objectives

1. To provide a comprehensive introduction to the subspecialty of Medical Anthropology – its fundamental principles and key concepts.
2. To encourage awareness of cultural health perspectives and issues.
3. To enable application of principles and strategies derived from medical anthropology toward planning, implementing and evaluating health intervention programs.

General Education Competencies

This course receives general education social science credit. As such, it is designed so that

students who complete this course will meet the following competencies:

1. Apply discipline specific knowledge in the social sciences to explain the key factors that

shape social institutions, structures and processes and that shape human behavior and social

interaction.

1. Explain how social, cultural and historical contexts influenced individual behavior, society or

culture.

1. Apply discipline specific theories and modes of inquiry in the social sciences to analyze

contemporary behavioral, social or cultural issues.

**Required Texts:**

Fadiman, Anne. 2012. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Brown, Peter J. and Svea Closser, eds. 2016. *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*. 3rd ed. London:

Routledge.

Additional readings/films as assigned (via Canvas).

**Exams:** Two exams will be given in this course: a Fadiman exam/essay (50 points) and a final (100 points). Both exams will consist mostly or solely of essay questions, though multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, definitions, and other question styles may be used. Per college policy, the final exam will be administered during our exam period (8-10:30am on Friday, May 2nd). The final exam will cover the entirety of the course. Absent specific permission otherwise, you are expected to take the exams when administered. Make-up exams for excused absences (in exceedingly rare circumstances) will be given as soon as possible without penalty. Make-up exams for unexcused absences will be penalized an initial 20%, plus another 10% for each calendar day that passes without the exam being taken.

**Course Paper:** Students will be required to produce a research paper/response given a prompt from the instructor (the prompt will be distributed on or by 2/10). The paper should be 6-8 pages in length (more is fine), typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, standard margins, and should reference at least 6 sources (4 or more of which must be peer reviewed). Successful papers will demonstrate and advance a clear and concise thesis, showing appropriate use of contemporary scholarly literature. Arguments advanced should respond to multiple perspectives found in the pertinent literature, demonstrating critical analysis skills and appropriate depth of research. Grammar and clarity are essential.

To ensure that you have ample chance for success, I’m assigning appropriate projects for you to complete throughout the term. The first is simply a paper topic, due in class on 2/14. In a short paragraph, tell me what you’ve chosen to write about in response to the prompt, and why. I will review your chosen topic and accept or reject it based on the scope of the work you’re proposing. The paper topic submission is required, but ungraded.

An annotated bibliography is due in class on 3/5. This is simply a list of the academic sources you’ve found thus far in your research (at least six), compiled in the appropriate bibliographic format, with a paragraph or two under each entry summarizing the key points of the reference and how you intend to use the reference in your paper. The annotated bibliography is worth 25 points, and is required. Generative AI may not be used for this portion of the assignment.

A complete rough draft of your research paper is due in class on 4/4 (ungraded). Class time that day will be used for peer review. You may, if you wish, use that review to create an updated draft to share with me at a scheduled individual conference on or around 4/9, when you and I will review your paper in time for you to improve your final paper, which is due in class on 4/21 and worth 100 points. In addition to submitting a hard copy in class, you must also submit the paper electronically on Canvas through TurnItIn. Again, generative AI may not be used for this assignment.

Assignments handed in late incur a 10% penalty per calendar day. Late assignments may be emailed to the professor. It is the student’s responsibility to check with me to make sure I’ve received the assignment. I’ll do my best to acknowledge receipt via an email reply.

Please pay careful attention to the fact that the paper and annotated bibliography combined are worth around a third of your grade in the course. The 6-8 page assignment is misleading in a sense, as I’ll be expecting those pages to be carefully organized and edited, dense in references, and logically strong. The ability to clearly and concisely convey conclusions based on the weighing of complex subject matter is of enormously high value in the medical setting.

**Grand Rounds:** “Grand Rounds” is a longstanding tradition within the medical profession wherein physicians and others gather to discuss the outcome of particularly interesting cases. What happened? Was the outcome satisfactory? Could negative outcomes have been avoided? What can we learn from the case that will assist in improving future care? We’re going to use the grand rounds model on several class days this term in order to foster discussion of cases relevant to course topics. You will be assigned to work with a group of students to research/design a case and lead discussion on one of our grand rounds days. The topic of your case must correspond to the topic of our class discussion during the week you hold grand rounds. Generative AI may not be used for any portion of this assignment.

Your team will assemble the following two items in preparation for the presentation: 1) a case study description with annotated bibliography of the sources you used to arrive at your case study (due on the Monday of your grand rounds week). The case should be thought-provoking and should represent a situation that transcends a mere ethical dilemma. (When in doubt, consult the instructor!) I’ll review your work and suggest any necessary changes to the case by Wednesday; 2) a handout with the case study description and key questions (at least five) for classroom discussion (due via email to me the night before your grand rounds day – I’ll copy this and distribute it to everyone in class). Some of the questions should be clearly tied to our classroom topic for the week (other classroom topics are fair game as well, of course). Your team’s grand rounds day should begin with a ten minute presentation of your case and relevant research (all team members should play significant roles in this presentation). Your team is then tasked with guiding discussion of the case for the remainder of the class period.

Individually, you are responsible for turning in a three page (typed, double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, standard margins) personal response to your group’s case -- in other words, what you learned as the case came together and how you think it’d be best to answer key questions raised by the case. This paper is due in class on your team’s grand rounds day. You are also responsible for turning in a group evaluation (simply give each member of your group, including yourself, a letter grade for their participation, alongside a couple of sentences of explanation for each person. The evaluation is due (email is fine) by the Monday following your team’s grand rounds discussion. The individual paper is worth **50 points**, 10 of which are assigned based on the overall quality of your group’s presentation (including preparatory documents). 10 or more points will be deducted should it be apparent to me – either through my observation of your participation in the grand rounds discussion or my assessment of group evaluations – that you have failed to be an active and contributing team member. An unexcused absence on your grand rounds day will result in an automatic 25-point deduction. A late individual paper results in an automatic five point deduction per calendar day. Late team papers result in the entire team being penalized five points per calendar day. In short, it’s your responsibility to turn everything in on time!

Teams and grand rounds dates will be assigned early in the term, meaning that scheduling of team meetings for grand rounds work is to take precedent over most other campus and off-campus activities. Our goal is for these discussions to be detailed and intellectually stimulating. Your active participation and engagement in these discussion sessions, whether your team is presenting or not, is expected, and will comprise a large portion of your overall course participation grade.

**Participation:** Participation is more than simply attending class. It is defined as *being prepared in class, keeping up with the readings, and contributing regularly to classroom discussion*. Your participation in this course will be worth **50 points**, and is crucial to both your academic success and to the success of this course. This class is generally conducted in a seminar, as opposed to lecture, format. This means that the instructor and your classmates assume that you have read the material prior to our discussion and/or small group work each day. Failure to be prepared will be apparent, will make you feel uncomfortable, and will result in a lower participation grade. Proper reading and participation will give you good grades, a happy instructor, and an overall warm fuzzy feeling.

To promote participation, I expect that each student will come to class each with a written list of three questions reflecting your critical analysis of the reading. To generate class discussion, I’ll be randomly calling on students to share their questions with the class. Lack of preparedness will reduce your participation grade.

**Quizzes:** I typically don’t give quizzes in courses such as this, but should it become apparent that a majority of the class is failing to adequately keep up with the course readings, I may administer one or more 10 point quizzes. I could also randomly collect the three question assignment (see above) for a quiz grade. An excused absence on a quiz day counts neither for nor against you – the quiz is simply dropped. An unexcused absence on a quiz day results in a recorded zero on that quiz. Keeping up with course readings will reduce the likelihood of quizzes for the entire class, and will prepare you for any quizzes should they become necessary.

**Course Evaluation:** Your final course grade will be based on a 100-point scale (A 100-93, A- 92.9-90, B+ 89.9-87, B 86.9-83, B- 82.9-80, C+ 79.9-77, C 76.9-73, C- 72.9-70, D+ 69.9-67, D 66.9-63, D- 62.9-60, F 59.9 or below). Your grade is determined by dividing the points you’ve earned by the number of points available in the course:

Fadiman Exam: 50 points

Final Exam: 100

Annotated Bibliography: 25

Final Research Paper: 100

Grand Rounds Project 50

Participation: 50

Quizzes: 10 x ??: ??

Total: 375 + 10 points per quiz

Students who fail to complete any of the following: research paper, Fadiman exam, final exam, grand rounds project; will automatically fail the course. I do not curve grades, though I may offer grade-increasing opportunities (extra credit, make-up work) at my discretion. You are welcome to share ideas along those lines if you become aware of an opportunity that might be available to everyone and enhance our work together.

**Attendance:** Attendance is defined as being in class on time, ready to work, and is expected in this course. I will take classroom attendance daily. An excused absence requires the student to inform the professor of the absence *before* it occurs. Excused absences are granted for verifiable illness (I’m pretty flexible here -- e.g. confirmation of a visit to student health, a pharmacy receipt, a doctor’s note), family emergencies, religious observance and college-sanctioned activities; and must be communicated to the professor as soon as possible. When in doubt, ask before you miss! All other absences, including tardiness past the time attendance is taken, will be counted as unexcused absences. You are allowed two unexcused absences in this course. Each unexcused absence over the limit results in a five-point deduction in your course participation grade.

The COVID Codicil: In case of an outbreak, the class may be moved to an online format for up to two weeks.  During this period, the attendance policy above will remain in effect.  If you have poor internet access, contact me within 48 hours of the announcement of the online move to work out a plan for attendance.

In the event of a campus emergency that disrupts academic activities, course requirements, deadlines, and grading percentages are subject to change. Information about changes in the course will be communicated as soon as possible by email, and on Canvas. If we are not able to meet face-to-face, students should log onto Canvas and read any announcements and/or access alternative assignments. (<http://www.ecu.edu/alert>).

**Canvas and Technical Requirements:** In this course, you will have online activities such as readings and paper submission outside of class in Canvas (canvas.ecu.edu). This class requires reliable access to a computer. Webcams are an option for office hour interactions but are not required.

**A Word on Classroom Behavior:** East Carolina University is committed to providing a fair and nurturing learning environment for each of its students. As such, you are asked to refrain from any activity that might disrupt the classroom learning process. Such activities include talking out of turn, sleeping, and cell phone usage. Cell phones, laptop computers, and other electronics must be set to silent before entering the classroom. I prefer for my students to take paper notes – studies indicate that this improves learning and minimizes distractions. Texting during class is forbidden. Failure to respect fellow students in these matters will negatively affect your participation grade.

The East Carolina Creed reflects the University’s expectation that students exhibit personal and academic integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, falsification, multiple submissions, and attempting or assisting with an academic integrity violation is a violation of the Academic Integrity policy and the expectations set forth in the Creed. Use of electronic devices during any exam will be considered a breach of academic integrity. You may not collaborate with other students on papers or exams in this course, with the sole exception of collaboration on grand rounds case study creation . Course materials, including lectures, quizzes and exams, may not be distributed or uploaded to any website without explicit permission from the instructor. Students are expected to know and adhere to the Academic Integrity policy. Penalties for violating the Academic Integrity policy can include a grade penalty up to and including an F for the course.

Any work submitted using Artificial Intelligence tools to create or augment text will be treated as though it was plagiarized. If any part of this is confusing or uncertain, please reach out to me for a conversation before submitting your work. I can’t wait to see how AI helps us learn and communicate with one another. We’ll take some time in class to discuss your experiences with this new technology and the cultural change it portends, but generative artificial intelligence (such as ChatGPT) would hamper your ability to achieve our learning goals this term.

**Subject to Change:** A syllabus is designed to give you a clear understanding of course requirements in a given term. Please understand that any required changes will be deeply considered and announced as far in advance as possible. While changes may readjust your workload on a given day or days, in no case will your overall workload for the course be increased.

**That Being Said…** I look forward to this being an enjoyable and rewarding course. I encourage you to come to class, participate, and keep up with the reading. If you do these things, I predict success in the course for you. I am always available should you have any questions about the course, anthropology, the health care field, or collegiate life in general. Good luck!

**ANTH 3252 Course Schedule:**

(chapter assignment in parentheses: F = Fadiman, B = Brown and Closser)

1/13 Course introduction

1/15 (F 1-3) Introduction to the Hmong

1/17 (F 4-7) Initial biomedical experiences

1/20 **No Class: MLK Day**

1/22 (F 8-10) Trying to combine two cultures

1/24 (F 11-14) Difficulties in translation

1/27 (F 15-16) Multiculturalism, pluralism, assimilation

1/29 (F 17-19) Conclusion, Solutions?

1/31 Fadiman wrap-up

2/3 Fadiman Exam

2/5 (B 1) Defining Health and Medical Anthropology

2/7 (Baer on canvas) Theoretical Perspectives in Med Anth, Origins of Biomedicine

2/10 Origins of biomedicine, cont’d, **Research paper prompt distributed**

2/12 (B 23) Disease vs. Illness

2/14 Grand Rounds Discussion, **Paper Topic Due**

2/17 (B 16) Popular/Folk/Professional Health Care Sectors

2/19 (KFF US Health Data on Canvas) The U.S. Health Care System

2/21 Grand Rounds: Group One

2/24 (B 17,18) Ethnomedicine

2/26 (B 19) Ethnomedicine and White Coats

2/28 Grand Rounds: Group Two

3/3 (B 20,21) Placebo and Nocebo

3/5 (B 29) Mental Health, **Annotated Bibliography Due**

3/7 Catch-up day

3/10-14 **No Class: Spring Break**

3/17 (Singer on canvas) Critical Medical Anthropology

3/19 (B 11, Farmer on canvas) Structural Violence and Health

3/21 Grand Rounds: Group Three

3/24 (B 13,14) Structural Violence Case Studies

3/26 **No Class: Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meetings** (work on rough draft)

3/28 **No Class: Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meetings** (work on rough draft)

3/31(B 2) Medical Ecology and Human Variation

4/2 (B 8) Epidemiology in long view

4/4 **Rough Draft Due,** In-class peer review assignment

4/7 (B 4,5) Race and Health

4/9 (B 33,35) Cultural “Competency”

4/11 Bending the Arc film in class, Fixing it: Applying our Knowledge toward More Effective Care

4/14 (Finish film)

4/16 (B 32) Film discussion

4/18 **No Class: Good Friday**

4/21 **Research Paper Due,** Research paper de-brief

4/23 (Morris on canvas) Community Health

4/25 (TBD) Catch up day, or bonus topic chosen by class

4/28 Wrapping up: Final Exam Review

**Final Exam**: 8:00-10:30am, Friday, 5/2 (Final Exams will not be given early, per university policy.)