“Sickness is more than just an unfortunate brush with nature. It is more than something that ‘just happens’ to people. Sickness is something that humans do in uniquely original and creative ways. Illness is a form of bodily praxis, of bodily action” ~Nancy Scheper-Hughes

Course Description:

What is sickness? What is health? How do these definitions vary across cultures and history? These are the kinds of questions that frame this course and that I expect you as class participants to engage with. I am interested for example, in knowing how you would explain to me how and why exactly some people appear ill or get defined as ill and others do not. What are the means through which we understand these processes? Is it luck of the draw? Poor genes? Discrimination? Or something else entirely? In the U.S. we tend to think that high blood pressure is a sign of illness, caused by stress or salt…in Germany, low blood pressure is understood in the same manner and is cause for concern. Why are there such differences? These and other topics are the focus of this class. Broadly, we will investigate how and why cultures explain what it means to be “well” or “unwell” in society. More specifically we will examine such topics as: western biomedical models of health, the body and gender, access to health care in different contexts, ethics, death, dying, birth and the politics of reproduction, drugs and how we think we “treat” illness or not…all of these will form the basis of our anthropological investigations.

This course introduces students to the central concepts and methods of medical anthropology. Drawing on a number of classic and contemporary texts, we will consider both the specificity of local medical cultures and the processes that increasingly link these systems of knowledge and practice. We will study the social and political economic shaping of illness and suffering and will examine medical and healing systems – including biomedicine – as social institutions and as sources of epistemological authority. Topics covered will include the problem of belief; local theories of disease causation and healing efficacy; the placebo effect and contextual healing; theories of embodiment; medicalization; structural violence; modernity and the distribution of risk; the meanings and effects of new medical technologies; and global health.

Course Expectations:

I have much the same expectations for every class I teach. That is, I expect this course will be a challenge. It will be a challenge in the sense that it will suggest to you alternative ways of being and knowing. All of which….and I cannot emphasize this enough….are to be considered equally as “valid”. We are trying to be culturally relative in our study and understanding of medical practices and systems that might at first seem really, really different and difficult to grasp. This class will ideally offer you the opportunity to explore what we and other people think is “normal” and how that is valid, interesting and the means through which we can investigate those ideas. That is, engaging with many of these ideas, the challenges they present at times will be intriguing, unsettling and eye-opening. That process should be enjoyable even if what you are learning sounds completely bizarre. I expect you to learn to be critical. That does not mean “critical” in the negative sense, rather I expect that by the end of the semester you are able to look for and uncover the assumptions in any argument and can evaluate data from other contexts in sophisticated and culturally grounded terms. All knowledge is equally as “truthful” – an
often difficult perspective, particularly in our own culture which is very much wedded to the biomedical model. You can expect that I am personally committed to teaching that philosophy and will provide opportunities, materials and my own theoretical and practical data to that end. Basically, I love to talk about how we tend to naturalize things in the US and how truths really vary world-wide. Talking about medicine and health is a particularly interesting way to do that. I welcome you own perspectives at all times, in various formats. Other things I ask of you:

- you will attend class
- you will attend class prepared
- you will feel free to come and talk to me if you are having difficulties or just want to talk more about particular ideas you have
- you will hand in all the assignments in a timely fashion-I will accept late papers but will mark them down accordingly in order to be fair to others
- you will feel free to voice your own insights and thoughtful opinions while simultaneously respecting the freedom and perspectives of others to do the same

Course Evaluation:

Everyone probably tells you this, but let’s be clear: according to the DePauw University handbook the grading system is as follows:

A, A- grades reflect “achievement of exceptionally high merit”

B+, B, B- grades reflect “achievement at a level superior to the basic level”

C+, C, C- grades reflect “basic achievement”

D+, D, D- grades reflect “achievement which falls short of satisfying the quantitative and qualitative requirements yet warrants credit”

What this means for this class is that work that satisfies instruction and basic material will receive grades which reflect that basic achievement-C grades. In order to receive B grades, your work must demonstrate superior work in terms of your own critical insight, synthesis and communication skills. A grades reflect exceptionally high levels of achievement and reflect a high degree of intellectual rigor and carefully considered work. While I will subtract points for errors or deficiencies I will happily add points for carefully written, imaginative thinking and communication. Please let me know throughout the semester if you have any questions or if any aspect of your grade is unclear. This is a dialectical enterprise—a discussion between you and I and the whole point is that we all get something out of it. One last thing—your grade is based upon your own mastery of the material—it is not based on how you compared with others in the class.

*I urge you to do two things this semester: take advantage of the Writing Center – learning to craft a well written essay and communicate ideas in a persuasive manner are cornerstones of anthropology, your education at DePauw and life itself – they are here to help, use the center. Secondly, make certain that you understand the Academic Integrity Policy here at the University. If you are at all uncertain about what counts as plagiarism please ask – what we learn is grounded in the work of others but learning to interpret and communicate new ideas based upon that knowledge and in our own manner is essential.

**This is course is designated a W course. Many of you may already have a W, and are worried. I can only be truthful, there is a lot of writing expected in here, but it will (hopefully) be both challenging and rewarding. And frankly...its good for you ☺️...your writing will always get better, the more you practice. Budget your time carefully and if you feel overwhelmed, let me know. Remember this very
key element to success – there is no problem that cannot be solved, please do come see me if you need any help or need clarification as we move throughout the course.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated on the basis of the following requirements and assignments:

1) Attendance of lectures and participation in discussions (15% of grade) Please make sure that you complete the required readings for the week by the start of the class on Tuesday.

2) A series of short (500 word) reading responses. Beginning week 2 of the course, students will write a response to the readings for each week and post it to the Discussion for the Week on Moodle. The reading response can either take the form of comments or questions that arise from the readings for that week (either Tuesday or Thursday), or a comment on a reading response posted by another student. If you choose to comment on another student’s response you should make clear reference to and engage with the text(s) being discussed as well. You cannot simply state that you agree with someone and leave it at that – this is an important part of your discussion grade and you want to demonstrate your knowledge of the material. It is important that you post prior to 10pm on Monday night so that others may read what you have written in advance of the first class of the week. You may certainly post more than once per week, but must post at least once per week. (15% of grade)

3) A midterm exam. (50% of grade). The exam will occur in class on October 8th.

4) A 3,000 - 4,000 word final paper. All students have the following options for the final project:

   A) An illness narrative based on either 1) an interview with a family member or friend who has experienced illness, 2) an interview with family member or friend who has witnessed or been a caregiver for a relative struggling with illness and undergoing treatment, or 3) a first-person account of mental illness as found in an autobiography or film/documentary.

   B) A research paper addressing either a contemporary disease or the development and use of a new medical technology.

   C) A review of a full-length ethnography — chosen from a list — which links the book to course readings.

   D) An in-depth proposal for a research project, which engages with some of the issues and literatures discussed in the class. The proposal would be appropriate for a BA or Master’s thesis project or a grant proposal.

*Students should prepare a one paragraph abstract proposing their topic by 4pm on 11/24. The paper is due by 4pm on the last day of class. (40% of grade)

Assigned Readings:

All readings can be found on Moodle. There are no texts for purchase for this course. You are expected to complete all of the readings that are assigned and are responsible for knowledge of the reading material, no matter how much or how little of the article we discuss, you must be familiar with it. Your discussion posts each week are your opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge of those articles and their meanings as well as in class discussion.

Course Schedule:
Week 1: Introduction

[8/27]


Week 2: History, Rationality & Belief

[9/1]


[9/3]


Week 3: Understanding Illness: Etiologies, Models & Narratives

[9/8]


[9/10]

TBD

Week 4: Patients

[9/15]


[9/17]

TBD

**Week 5: Therapeutic Trajectories: Medical Pluralism, Hybridity & Movement**

[9/22]


[9/24]

TBD

**Week 6: The Epistemic Cultures of Biomedicine**

[9/29]


[10/1]

Allan Young. 1993. “A description of how ideology shapes knowledge” in S. Lindenbaum & M. Lock, eds. *Knowledge, power, c3 practice*


**Week 7: Interpreting the Body in Medicine**

[10/6]


[10/8]

**MIDTERM EXAM – in class**
Week 8: New Medical Technologies: Remaking Bodies, Lives & Kinship

[10/13]


[10/15]


Week 9:

[10/20 & 10/22] [Fall Break!] 😊

Week 10: Healing, Embodiment and the Placebo Effect

[10/27]


[10/29]

TBD

Week 11: Institutional Lives

[11/3]


[11/5]


Week 12: Structural Violence and Health Care Disparities

[11/10]


[11/12]


Week 15: Care

[11/17]


Janelle Taylor, ‘On Recognition, Caring, and Dementia’, Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 22 (2008), 313–335

NO CLASS 11/19 – Professor Upton at American Anthropological Association meetings

Week 14: Local Biologies

[11/24]


Proposal for Final Paper Due – one paragraph describing your final paper (see options on syllabus) must be sent electronically to rupton@depauw.edu by 4pm 11/24

[11/26]

THANKSGIVING! 🦃

Week 15: Governing Bodies & Populations

[12/1]


[12/5]


**Week 16: Between Global Health & Global Biomedicine**

[12/8]


[12/10]

~ Evaluation and Wrap Up ~

Final Paper Due by 4pm electronically to rupton@depauw.edu

Final Exam Study Guide Released after 4pm

**Final Exam:** Due by 4pm on Friday December 18th electronically (rupton@depauw.edu)