Introduction to the Anthropology of Medicine

Or, a user’s guide to a world of:
doctors, diseases & dilemmas
sorcerers, goddesses & pharmaceutical giants
questionable experiments
erratic pulses
unknown futures
overpriced pills
wars at home & abroad
fleeting memories
and brains-in-vats
When: Mondays & Wednesdays, 4–5:20PM
Where: Lillis 282

Instructor: Prof. Bharat Venkat, bvenkat@uoregon.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 1–3PM in 357 Condon Hall
Make appointments at bvenkat.youcanbook.me

Graduate Teaching Fellow: Beau DiNapoli, rdinapol@uoregon.edu
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What Is This Course About?

We live in a moment of chemotherapy, stem cell treatment and 3-D printed organs. Numerous fatal diseases have become curable or chronic. Vaccines provide protection against a variety of epidemic diseases. Smallpox has been eradicated. On one hand, things look good.

Yet, we also live in a moment rife with uncertainty, as witnessed by the emergence of new conditions (such as H5N1) and the return of old ones (for example, Ebola). Microbes mutate, rendering existing treatment regimens ineffective. Expensive healthcare bills continue to drive people all over the world – including in the United States – into poverty. Pharmaceutical companies continue to raise prices for old drugs. Patients continue to die from hospital-derived infections.

Unless we’re sick, most of us tend to leave questions of health, illness, healing and therapy to the professionals: doctors, nurses, geneticists, biochemists, hospital administrators, pharmaceutical and insurance executives and the politicians who craft health policy. As medicine becomes increasingly specialized, we are often told that such questions are beyond our understanding. Yet, it is our very lives and deaths that are under the scalpel.

In this course, we will work together to develop both an appreciation and a critical attitude toward the many ways in which medicine shapes the conditions of our collective and separate existences, not only in the clinic, but across a variety of settings: battlefields and refugee camps, laboratories and industries, de-addiction clinics, in the body, in the mind and in the soul, in the United States and in the rest of the world. We will draw upon the work of anthropologists, historians, philosophers, journalists, writers, graphic novelists and physicians who grapple with the logic and practice of medicine to consider what it means to be ill and to be healthy, to endure a chronic condition and to be cured, to live and to die, as well as how the lines between these binaries are drawn. We will also consider the ways in which access to health
care, research priorities and treatment outcomes are shaped along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class and bodily ability. Our overarching goal in this course is to rethink many of the concepts, categories and narratives related to medicine that are all too often taken for granted.

What Will You Learn?

• To identify those broad structural inequalities that frequently shape who is most vulnerable to illness as well as who is most likely to have access to treatment
• To compare how people in different places and times have conceived of and responded to health and illness
• To analyze complex ethical questions in medicine related to, for example, biological research, randomized trials, access to medicine and new technologies, caregiving, medicalization, violence and diagnosis
• To evaluate how medicine shapes your life
• To think critically and creatively about medicine in its various manifestations

Things You Should Know

This is a lecture course with weekly sections. Lectures will draw from assigned readings but will also introduce material that will not come from the readings. Although the course will operate primarily through lecture, the professor will frequently call on students to respond to questions that arise in relation to the readings. The Friday sections will be more heavily oriented toward conversation. A good conversation sharpens your thinking and exposes you to new ideas. If you fear speaking in class, challenge yourself to make a comment or ask a question a certain number of times each week. Your active engagement in discussions will count toward your attendance & participation grade.
We will take a 5-minute break in the middle of class. Stretch, breathe, use the bathroom.

Laptops and other electronic devices are discouraged. These can be a distraction, and we want to create an environment that encourages engaged learning. Feel free to text/email/etc. during the break, but please refrain from doing so during lectures and sections.

Office Hours. If you have any questions or concerns about your performance in the course, please contact the GTF via email or come to office hours as early as possible. The longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to get back on track. You may also attend office hours with either the professor or the GTF to address any difficulties with the course or to further discuss any of the topics covered in class. If you do not make an appointment, there is no guarantee that you will be able to meet with the GTF or professor. If you have irreconcilable scheduling conflicts, please contact the GTP or professor via email to set up an alternative time to meet.

Official course communication will occur in lectures & sections, through email and via Canvas. Any changes to the syllabus will be sent in an email and/or announced via Canvas. Students are responsible to keep up-to-date on any changes to the syllabus. Final grades will also be posted to Canvas.

This course counts towards general education requirements in the social sciences (SS) and international cultures (IC).
How to Do Well in this Course

Read before you come to lecture. Readings provide a shared foundation upon which the lectures are built. The materials for this course include scholarly articles by anthropologists and historians, documentary film and short clips, podcasts, journalistic essays, creative non-fiction and a graphic novel. Please bring the readings to both lecture and section so that we can refer to specific passages in the texts. You will have about 30 pages of reading per lecture, and generally no more than about 60 pages for the week. On average, readings should take you about 3-4 hours per week to complete, although some weeks will require more reading and others less. It is highly recommended that you start reading early for lectures with heavy reading loads. If you have any concerns about the reading, please do not hesitate to come to office hours.

Take notes (in the margins or in a separate notebook) while you read, as well as in class, as this will help you process the materials. Some questions to consider while reading:

• What are the author’s central argument or main points?
• What evidence does the author use to support their argument?
• What ideas are being argued against?
• What assumptions does the author rely on to make their argument?
• Do you find the author’s argument convincing? Why or why not?
• What surprised you about the reading? What did you learn?
• What experiences in your life resonate with the reading?

Bring your i>Clicker 2 remote to lecture. If you forget your clicker you will be unable to participate in certain activities and you will not receive credit if there is a quiz that day. If you do forget your i>Clicker 2 remote, please inform the GTF immediately after class. You must register your i>Clicker 2 remote on Canvas by the end of the first week of classes.

Turn assignments in, on time. Late work is not accepted in this course and will receive a failing grade. Please notify the GTF as soon as possible if a serious issue arises that hinders
the completion of an assignment, the taking of an exam or your attendance in class. Rather than waiting until the term is over or nearly over, please speak with the GTF as soon as possible. Make-up exams and extensions on assignments will not be granted without a documented or previously-established reason, such as a written note from your doctor or the observation of a religious holiday. There is no extra credit offered in this course.

**Proofread your work.** Ask a friend to proofread it again, or take it to a Writing Tutor at Knight Library. Spelling and grammar errors, as well as typos, will negatively affect your grade. All work must be fully referenced using the simplified model of author’s last name followed by page number (for example, Venkat 146).
Grading

There will be six pop quizzes (20% total, 4% each, lowest grade dropped) throughout the term, asking you to identify key concepts from the readings or apply ideas from the readings to new contexts. Questions will be in the form of matching or multiple choice, and will be administered via the i>Clicker 2 remote. **If you do not bring your remote to lecture, you will not receive credit if there is a pop quiz that day.** Carefully reading assigned texts prior to lecture should adequately prepare you for these quizzes. If you miss a pop quiz, you will not be allowed to retake it unless you had previously provided an acceptable reason to the GTF for your absence (see attendance policy below). Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

The in-class midterm (25%) will follow the model of the pop quizzes, but will focus on material drawn from both the texts and the lectures over the first half of the course. The midterm will also include short-answer questions.

The take-home final exam (25%) will require you to draw on materials from both lectures and texts from over the course of the entire term in order to write your own “user’s guide,” organized around a specific question. The final exam must be submitted on Canvas by Tuesday, December 6 at 11:59PM.

Attendance (10%) will be taken in both lecture and in section. Excused absences are permitted with an appropriate letter (e.g. note from doctor or dean). If you will be absent for an extended period for a documented reason, notify the GTF in advance. In case of emergency, update the GTF as soon as possible. Unexcused absences will affect your grade.

There will be two methods assignments (20% total, 10% each) over the course of the term that will require you to think creatively while drawing on the ideas and forms of engagement discussed in class and in our readings. You will receive more information about these assignments in class and via Canvas.
NOTE: If the class is taken P/NP, a C- or higher is required to pass the course. Incompletes will not be granted except for in extreme circumstances, at the discretion of the professor.

**Academic Integrity**

The University of Oregon’s policies on academic honesty and plagiarism can be found at conduct.uoregon.edu. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct. By way of example, students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on assignments or examinations without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document all sources of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. Students should not turn in assignments or exam questions written by anyone else, nor should they include text written by someone else without citing the source. Paraphrased material must also be cited. This includes material from the Internet, as well as material from class lectures. **Plagiarized work will receive a failing grade.** If there is any question about whether an act constitutes academic misconduct, it is the students’ obligation to clarify the question with the GTF before committing or attempting to commit the act. Additional information about a common form of academic misconduct, plagiarism, is available at researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism.
Required Texts & Technologies

The majority of the required readings will be posted online to Canvas. Students are required to print these readings, read them carefully prior to coming to lecture, and to bring texts to both lecture and section.

Texts not posted to Canvas are available for purchase at the Duck Store, the University of Oregon’s Bookstore at 895 East 13th Street, as well as on reserve at the Knight Library.

Required texts and technologies for purchase:
• i>Clicker 2 remote (available at Duck Store, used and new)

Recommended:
• Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago*, University of Chicago Press.
• Sharon Kaufman, *... And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life*, Simon & Schuster.
Accommodations

Please notify the professor and the GTF if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your learning or participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall, either by phone (541-346-1155), by e-mail (oruoaec@uoregon.edu) or on the web (aec.uoregon.edu).

Open Learning Environment

The intention and structure of university-level courses are to provide open, thoughtful forums for a wide variety of topics and ideas. The University of Oregon affirms and actively promotes the right of all individuals to equal opportunity in education and employment at this institution without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion, marital status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other extraneous consideration not directly and substantively related to effective performance. We will value each class member’s experiences and contributions and communicate disagreements respectfully. Please notify the professor or GTF if you feel aspects of the course undermine these principles in any way.
WHY AM I TAKING THIS CLASS?

MON, SEPT 26
No Readings

CAN I TRUST THE MEN IN THE WHITE GOATS?

WED, SEPT 28

  Recommended:
  • Ruth Benedict, “Anthropology and the Abnormal.”

MON, OCT 3
• Hannah Landecker, “Immortality, In Vitro.”
• Listen to *RadioLab* interview with Rebecca Skloot, author of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*: https://www.wnyc.org/radio/#/ondemand/91716
• In-class screening of *The Deadly Deception* (selections)

  Recommended:
  • Rebecca Skloot, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*
WHAT’S WRONG WITH ME?

WED, OCT 5
• Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body.”
• Oliver Sacks, “The Disembodied Lady.”

Recommended
• Oliver Sacks, “Witty Ticky Ray.”
• Aihwa Ong, “The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia.”

MON, OCT 10
• Shigehisa Kuriyama, “Pulse Diagnosis in the Greek and Chinese Traditions.”
• Leslie Jameson, “The Devil’s Bait.”

Recommended:
• Byron Good, “How Does Medicine Construct Its Objects?”
• Charles Rosenberg, “The Tyranny of Diagnosis: Specific Entities and Individual Experience.”
• Margaret Lock & Patricia Kaufert, “Menopause, Local Biologies, and Cultures of Aging.”

WHY ME?
— OR —
WHOSE FAULT IS THIS?

WED, OCT 12

Recommended:
• Benjamin Paul, “The Role of Beliefs and Customs in Sanitation Programs.”
• George Foster, “Medical Anthropology and International Health Planning.”
• Byron Good, “Medical Anthropology and the Problem of Belief.”

FRI, OCT 14
*TECHNIQUES OF THE BODY GROUP ASSIGNMENT DUE IN SECTION*

MON, OCT 17
• Jeanne Favret-Saada, “Unbewitching as Therapy.”
• Jeanne Favret-Saada, “About Participation.”

WHAT IF I NEED A BREAK?

WED, OCT 19
NO LECTURE

Note: Friday Sections Will Continue As Usual
WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

**MON, OCT 24**
- Hugh Shapiro, “The Puzzle of Spermatorrhea in Republican China.”
- In-Class: Guest Lecture by Dr. Lan Li, Presidential Scholar in Society and Neuroscience (Columbia University)

Recommended:
- Roberta Bivens, *Alternative Medicine?: A History*, introduction

**WED, OCT 26**

*STUDY FOR MIDTERM*

From *Shenbo*, 22 June 1934, 17, in Shapiro 1998: 568
WHAT HAVE I LEARNED?

MON, OCT 31
*IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM*

WILL I EVER GET BETTER?

WED, NOV 2
• Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Effectiveness of Symbols.”

Recommended:
• Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Sorcerer and his Magic.”

MON, NOV 7
• S. Lochlann Jain. “Living in Prognosis: Toward an Elegiac Politics.”
• In-Class: Guest Lecture by Dr. Betsey Brada, Assistant Professor of Anthropology (Reed College)

Recommended:
• Angela Garcia, “The Elegiac Addict: History, Chronicity, and the Melancholic Subject.”
• Carolyn Rouse, “‘If She’s a Vegetable, We’ll Be Her Garden’: Embodiment, Transcendence, and Citations of Competing Cultural Metaphors in the Case of a Dying Child.”
AM I LOSING MY MIND?

**WED, NOV 9**
- Frantz Fanon, “Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders.”

  Recommended:
- Frantz Fanon, “On Violence.”

**MON, NOV 14**
- In-Class: View Facebook Live video clip of Philando Castile shooting

  Recommended:
- Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago.*

WHO CARES?

WED, NOV 16
• Arthur Kleinman, “Catastrophe and Caregiving: The Failure of Medicine as an Art.”
• Arthur Kleinman, “Caregiving: The Odyssey of Becoming More Human.”
• Janelle Taylor, “On Recognition, Caring and Dementia.”
• In-class screening of The Sessions (2012)

Recommended:
• Miriam Ticktin, “Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France.”

MON, NOV 21
• David B., Epileptic, entire graphic novel (start reading early!)

WED, NOV 23
NO CLASS – Enjoy the holiday! (reminder: no section this week)
WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED LIFE?
— AND —
WHAT IS A GOOD DEATH?

MON, NOV 28
Caretaking Assignment Due at Beginning of Lecture

- Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles.”
- Sallie Tisdale, “We Do Abortions Here.”

WED, NOV 30

- Margaret Lock, “Death in Technological Time: Locating the End of Meaningful Life.”
- Larissa MacFarquhar, “A Tender Hand in the Presence of Death.”

Recommended:
- Sharon Kaufman, ... And a Time to Die: How American Hospitals Shape the End of Life.
Click on the final exam prompt under “Assignments” in order to view the final exam questions. Draft your answers in a separate program, check them for spelling and grammar, and then copy & paste them into Canvas. Do not type your answers directly into Canvas, or you might lose your data and have to start over. Retain a copy of your answers for your records. Please give yourself adequate time to submit your final exam answers. Problems with the internet or software/hardware malfunctions will not result in the granting of an extension unless there is a systematic connectivity issue on campus.