

MI 514: Health and Human Adaptation in Micronesia

Course Description and Student Syllabus • Spring 2009 Micronesian Studies Program, University of Guam

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Course Description (from 2008–2009 Graduate Bulletin):

“Primarily rooted in medical anthropology, this course uses a multidisciplinary approach to look at the status of health and human adaptation in Micronesia. By using specific examples of disease patterns, adaptation is looked at as an evolutionary process as well as synchronically. Strong emphasis is placed on the changing map of health and disease, generally in the Pacific and specifically in the Micronesian Islands. Along with medical anthropology, ideas and methods from related fields such as medical geography and epidemiology have also been incorporated into course materials. Following a broad overview of medical anthropology with introductions to its related fields, ideas and concepts central to health and adaptation will be presented, followed by case studies from Micronesia and the Pacific.”

Course Overview

This course seeks to answer a fundamental question: “*Why does culture matter for understanding health?*” Specifically, how do Micronesian cultures and histories relate to the health of people in Micronesia? What kind of cultural knowledge is important for a better understanding of health problems in Micronesia, and for more effectively addressing these problems?

Although this course was first developed when the Micronesian Studies Program was being established almost 20 years ago, and it’s remained in the Graduate Bulletin since then, evidently it has never been taught (for a variety of reasons, mainly the lack of an instructor willing to offer the course). The original syllabus developed for this course is quite out-of-date. For this semester’s offering, I am using the same general approach as described in Course Description in the Graduate Bulletin, but with more emphasis on specific disease problems in Micronesia and the Pacific, and less emphasis on the general topic of medical anthropology and human adaptation.

This course is listed in the Graduate Bulletin with no prerequisite courses. However, students who have not had prior courses in Health and Nutrition, Cultural Anthropology, Peoples of the Pacific, and Epidemiology, may need to do some additional background reading to become familiar with concepts and terms found in the course readings .

Because we don’t have enough students enrolled in the course this semester to meet as a seminar, the course will be offered as a “Readings” format (MI 599), which “provides students an initial opportunity to explore, via a schedule of in-depth readings, a range of topics and issues...” [from Grad Bulletin]. Rather than meeting weekly as a seminar to discuss the assigned readings, students will complete a variety of short writing assignments based on the readings, and will communicate individually with the instructor via office hours, email, or telephone.

Student Requirements and Evaluations

1. Short writing assignments

There will be a total of nine short writing assignments based on the assigned readings. These assignments are scheduled during the first part of the course. Each should be completed and given to the instructor (preferably electronically) by 5:00 p.m. on the Tuesday that the topic is scheduled . I will return them to you with comments, questions, and suggested corrections by 5:00 p.m. on Friday of the same week.

The short writing assignments each count for 5% of your grade (45% altogether).

2. Research paper

Students will write an original research paper on a topic of their choice. The paper should be 15-20 pages in length (approx. 4,000 words), and include appropriate citations to scholarly articles, books, and online materials, etc. In addition, the paper should include some additional information that you have acquired through interviews, observations, or personal experience. That is, the paper should be well-referenced to the existing literature, and should also include your own original contribution to the existing knowledge in this area.

Your topic should be relevant to a particular health issue in Micronesia. It may deal with a topic within the readings, but you may also choose a topic outside the course readings. You should choose your topic early in the semester, and get the instructor's approval when you have your topic. Let me know your topic by 5:00 p.m. Feb. 27 at the latest.

A preliminary summary outline of your paper (1-2 pages) should be given to me by 5:00 p.m. Friday, April 3. The outline should include a list of the articles or other written sources you have collected or intend to use for your paper, whom you intend to interview, the sorts of interview questions you will use, or personal observation or personal experience that you will include in your paper.

The final paper is due by 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 5. The paper should be submitted electronically (email it or bring it to me on a flash drive or other medium).

The research paper counts for 35% of your grade.

3. Final Exam

There will be a final exam based on the assigned readings. The exam will include identification of terms, and short essay-type questions. The exam questions will be sent to you via email and it will be an "open-book, open-note" format, meaning that you can utilize any available materials in answering the exam questions. You will have one week to complete the questions. The exam will be sent out via email on Friday, May 8, and the completed exam should be submitted electronically to the instructor before 5:00 p.m. on May 15.

The final exam counts for 20% of your grade.

Student Learning Objectives

1. Gain a greater comprehension of terms and concepts in medical anthropology, such as health, health transition, health disparities, critical medical anthropology, 'thrifty gene' hypothesis, and diseases of modernization.
2. Gain an awareness of the contemporary health problems facing people in Micronesia, and acquire a better understanding of the cultural, historical, and political-economic contexts of these problems.
3. Improve the ability to read and understand scholarly articles in the field of medical anthropology.
4. Improve the ability to write clearly and succinctly, using acceptable academic style.
5. Improve the ability to conceptualize, organize, conduct, and write up a research project.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Writing Assignments

January 27 Course Overview, Requirements

Feb. 3 Case Studies of Health in Micronesia: The Marshall Islands and Kosrae

Read: McMurray, C., & Smith, R. (2001).
Chapter 7. Uneven Progress in Health in the Pacific Region;
Chapter 8. A Portrait of Life at the Periphery;
Chapter 9. Economic and Social Supports for Unhealthy Lifestyles; and
Chapter 10. Conclusion. In *Diseases of globalization : socioeconomic transitions and health* (pp. 98-174). London ; Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications.

Write: Short essay question (three-to-five pages): how have changes in Marshallese lifestyle affected their health? What are the differences between Majuro/Ebeye and the outer islands in regard to health and social change? What does the author mean by “modernization” and “globalization”? Are they the same thing?

Read: Shell, E. R. (2002).
Chapter 8. Spammed. In *The Hungry Gene: The Science of Fat and the Future of Thin* (pp. 151-172). New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Harrison, J. (2005).
Spam. In D. Kulick & A. Meneley (Eds.), *Fat : the anthropology of an obsession* (pp. 185-198). New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin.

Write: Two-page reaction paper to these two articles (Shell 2002, Harrison 2005). What are the authors trying to say and what do you think about that message?

Feb. 10 Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Health in Micronesia

Read: Gesler, W. M. (1991).
Chapter 1. Introduction. And Chapter 2. Culture Systems. In *The cultural geography of health care* (pp. 3-35). Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Write: one-page answer: what does the author mean by “systems context” and why is this idea useful for understanding health?

Read: Curtis, S. (2004).
Chapter 1. Introducing Geographical Perspectives on Health and Inequality. In *Health and inequality : geographical perspectives* (pp. 1-25). London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications.

Write: One-to-two-page discussion of what Curtis calls “the urban penalty” in relation to Micronesian health. Is this idea supported by what you read in McMurray’s article (2001) on the Marshall Islands and Shell’s article (2002) on Kosrae?

Skim: McElroy, A., & Townsend, P. K. (2003).
Chapter 1. The Ecology of Health and Disease; and
Chapter 2. Interdisciplinary Research in Health Problems. In *Medical anthropology in ecological perspective* (4th ed.) (pp. 2-77). Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Write: On Chapter 1. What do the authors mean by the book title “Medical Anthropology in Ecological Perspective”? How do they define “medical ecology”? What are the theoretical emphases of this approach? Write one-to-two pages.

On Chapter 2. What is an “interdisciplinary” approach and why is it important for understanding health? What sorts of data need to be collected? Write one-to-two pages.

Feb. 17 More Theoretical Approaches (deeper, heavier, and thicker theory)

Read: Baer, H. A., Singer, M., & Susser, I. (2003).
Chapter 1. Medical Anthropology: Central Concepts and Development; and
Chapter 2. Theoretical Perspectives in Medical Anthropology. In *Medical Anthropology and the World System* (pp. 3-54). Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Write: Take notes summarizing the “main concepts and concerns” discussed in Chap. 1. Type up your notes in written form, but don’t worry about complete sentences or grammar, and don’t worry about how long or short your notes are. Just take notes as you would normally do so when reading something for a course or assignment.

Also, write a two-page description of “Critical Medical Anthropology” (CMA) as a theoretical perspective, that is, as an approach to understanding health in its broad context.

Feb. 24 Health in Early Times in Micronesia and the Pacific Islands

Skim: Hanson, D. B., & Butler, B. M. (1997).
A Biocultural Perspective on Marianas Prehistory: Recent Trends in Bioarchaeological Research. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 104, 271-290.

Pietrusewsky, M., Douglas, M. T., & Ikehara-Quebral, R. M. (1997).
An Assessment of Health and Disease in the Prehistoric Inhabitants of the Mariana Islands. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 104, 315-342.

Houghton, P. (1996)
Chapter 6. Health. In *People of the Great Ocean: Aspects of Human Biology in the Early Pacific* (pp. 182-234). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Write: What kinds of evidence do the authors use to make conclusions about health among ancient Micronesians and other Pacific Islanders? Describe and discuss the reliability and value of these kinds of evidence in two-to-three pages.

March 3 Traditional Medicine in Micronesia

Skim: Taafaki, I. J., Fowler, M. K., & Thaman, R. R. (2006).
Traditional medicine of the Marshall Islands : the women, the plants, the treatments. Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.

Workman, A. M., Cruz-Ortiz, L., & Kaminga-Quinata, D. (1994)
Use of Traditional Medicine and Healers on Guam. In J. Morrison, P. Geraghty & L. Crowl (Eds.), *Fauna, Flora, Food and Medicine, Science of Pacific Peoples*, Vol. III (pp. 210-233). Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Read: Schwartz, L. R. (1969).
The Hierarchy of Resort in Curative Practices: The Admiralty Islands, Melanesia. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 10(3), 201-209.

Write: After reading these three articles, write a three-to-four-page description of aspects of traditional medicine in your own community. What aspects do you think are most effective? Why? Following Schwartz' paper, comment on how people in your community utilize traditional medicine in combination with Western medicine. How are the two systems integrated, if at all?

March 10 The Health Transition in Micronesia

Read: Lewis, N. D., & Rapaport, M. (1995).

In a sea of change: health transitions in the Pacific. *Health & Place*, 1(4), 211-226.

Taylor, Richard (2008)

History of public health in Pacific Islands Countries. In M. J. Lewis and K. L. MacPherson (Eds.), *Public Health in Asia and the Pacific: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (pp. 276-307). London: Routledge.

Write: What do the authors conclude about how urbanization, geography, and social inequality affect Pacific Islanders' health? What are the main reasons for the decline in infectious diseases in the Pacific Islands? Give examples in this three-to-four-page paper).

Read: Finau, S. A., Wainiqolo, I. L., Cuboni, G. G. (2002).

Health transition and globalization in the Pacific : vestiges of colonialism? Suva, Fiji: School of Public Health and Primary Care, Fiji School of Medicine.

Write: Finau et al. discuss nine different "transitions" in addition to the "health transition". What are their conclusions? Do you agree?

Read: Rubinstein, H. J., Zimmet, P. (1993).

Phosphate, wealth & health in Nauru : a study of lifestyle change. Caulfield, Vic.: Brolga Press for International Diabetes Institute.

Write: Until recently, Nauruans had one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. The authors examine the relationship between wealth and health in Nauru. Summarize their report in a short (one-to-two pages) paper.

March 17 AIDS and Sexually-Transmitted Diseases in Micronesia

Read: Brewis, A. A. (1992).

Sexually-transmitted disease risk in a Micronesian atoll population. *Health Transition Review*, 2(2), 195-212.

Lepani, K. (2008).

Chapter 13. Fitting Condoms on Culture: Rethinking Approaches to HIV Prevention in the Trobriand Islands, Papua New Guinea. In L. Butt & R. Eves (Eds.), *Making Sense of AIDS: Culture, Sexuality, and Power in Melanesia* (pp. 246-266). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Eves, R., & Butt, L. (2008).

Introduction. In L. Butt & R. Eves (Eds.), *Making Sense of AIDS: Culture, Sexuality, and Power in Melanesia* (pp. 1-23). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Brewis (1992) discusses sexual behavior and the risk for STDs in a Micronesian community. This article was written prior to the advent of AIDS in Micronesia. The two more recent chapters by Lepani (2008), and by Eves and Butt (2008), address the epidemic of AIDS in Melanesia, where the rates of infection are enormously higher than in Micronesia.

Write: From your observations of your own community, how has the advent of AIDS changed the patterns of sexual behavior, the cultural attitudes towards sex, and the way people talk about sex? Write a two-to-three page answer to this question. In writing your answer, think about some of the problematic aspects of using “culture” in HIV prevention campaigns, as discussed by Lepani (2008).

March 24 Obesity and Diabetes in Micronesia

Read: Pollock, N. J. (1995).

Introduction: An Overview of Obesity Issues Across Several Cultures. In I. de Garine & N. J. Pollock (Eds.), *Social Aspects of Obesity* (pp. xiii-xxxiii). Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Bindon, J. R. (1995).

Chapter 13. Polynesian Responses to Modernization: Overweight and Obesity in the South Pacific. In I. de Garine & N. J. Pollock (Eds.), *Social Aspects of Obesity* (pp. 227-251). Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Pollock, N. J. (1995).

Chapter 5: Social Fattening Patterns in the Pacific--the Positive Side of Obesity. A Nauru Case Study. In I. de Garine & N. J. Pollock (Eds.), *Social Aspects of Obesity* (pp. 87-109). Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Greksa, L. P. (1995).

Chapter 14. Activity Level and Obesity among Samoans. In I. de Garine & N. J. Pollock (Eds.), *Social Aspects of Obesity* (pp. 253-266). Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Smith, E. O. (2002).

Chapter 1. Intersection of Biology and Culture; and

Chapter 2. Fat, Diet, and Evolution. In *When Culture and Biology Collide: Why We Are Stressed, Depressed, and Self-Obsessed* (pp. 1-17 and pp. 97-123). New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Write: Based on your readings, write a four-to-five page paper that discusses how culture (specifically, Micronesian cultures) affects contemporary patterns of obesity and diabetes in Micronesia.

March 31 Suicide in Micronesia

Read: Hezel, F. X. (1984)

Cultural Patterns in Trukese Suicide. *Ethnology* 23(3), 193-206.

Hezel, F. X. (1989)

Suicide and the Micronesian Family. *The Contemporary Pacific* 1(1, 2), 43-74.

Rubinstein, D. H. (1992)

Suicide in Micronesia and Samoa: A Critical Review of Explanations. *Pacific Studies* 15(1), 51-75.

Rubinstein, D. H. (1995)

Love and Suffering: Adolescent Socialization and Suicide in Micronesia. *The Contemporary Pacific* 7(1), 21-55

Write: In a four-to-five page paper, summarize the main cultural patterns that the authors describe for suicide in Micronesia. With these cultural patterns in mind, suggest how a culturally appropriate suicide prevention program might be developed for Micronesia.

Students should use the remainder of the semester to work on their research paper. The preliminary outline is due on Friday, April 3 (just before Spring Break), and the final paper is due on Tuesday, May 5.