

Illness, Culture and Society (SA)

Sociology and Anthropology 218

Section: D100

Term: 2009 Summer

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Discussion Topics: All over the world, people hope for good health and well-being, but must cope with sickness and suffering. In varied times and places, there are differences in the harms people experience, the impact these have in their lives and relationships, and the material and social resources they have available to resolve their situation. This course introduces key frameworks developed in anthropology for understanding health, illness, and healing in its social, cultural, and historical contexts. We will explore how cultural conceptions of the body (including the conceptions embedded in biomedicine) shape experience and medical care. We will study the ways different groups (e.g. families, health care professionals, civic leaders, and so forth) organize action in the face of affliction. We will question the medical forms through which social inequalities are often reinforced. And we will examine the political ecology of disease, that is, the complex interactions of political forms, economic systems, and environmental conditions that produce illness. The first unit of the course looks at the experience of illness and the work of the healer; the second part of the course considers relations between microbes and people. We will use readings, audio documentaries, artefacts, films, and web-based archives to learn about real world situations (past and present) and to work hands-on with the conceptual frameworks we study. The course teaches students to work with richly contextualized, highly specific case studies as a source for broad, comparative insights that can enhance our understanding of multiple, intersecting social processes and be applied to new events. We will visit (through readings) occupational therapists as they chat in their lunch rooms, sit in on genetic counsellors as they advise prospective parents on amniocentesis, join new medical students as they conduct their first autopsy, contemplate how to get back a lost soul or get rid of a possessing spirit, watch colonial officials come up with plans for sewage management, experience the forms of persuasion in the marketing of soap and disinfectants as agents to fight germs, join housewives of the past century as they are tutored in new housework routines, and army troops as they succumb to influenza and yellow fever. These and other examples will enable us to better understand how human interactions with ordinary things (such as toilets, or mosquitoes, or consent forms) are connected to gender, economic, and/or racial difference in life-altering ways through health and illness.

Grading: Grades will be based on short essays and class participation. (weighting and assignments TBA). Regular preparation, participation and attendance is expected and required.

All the assignments in this course must be completed for a final grade to be assigned. The Department of Sociology and Anthropology follows SFU policy in relation to grading practices, grade appeals (Policy T 20.01) and academic dishonesty and misconduct procedures (Policy T 10.03). It is the responsibility of students to inform themselves of the content of these policies (available on the SFU website under Administration, SFU Policies & Procedures).

Required Texts: Fadiman, Anne, *The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, And The Collision Of Two Cultures*. New York : Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, c1997.

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Tomes, Nancy. The Gospel Of Germs: Men, Wome

Recommended Texts: None

Materials/Supplies: None

Prerequisite/Corequisite: SA 101 or 150 or 201. Students with credit SA 460 when offered as Medical Anthropology may not take SA 218 for further credit.

Notes: All students are expected to read and understand SFU's policies with regard to academic dishonesty (T 10.02 and T 10.03). These policies are available at the following web addresses: <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-02.htm> and <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/t10-03.htm>

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