

## ANTHROPOLOGY 740: BIOCULTURAL SYNTHESIS

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**Lecture:** Tuesdays, 11:30 to 1:30,  
LRW 5001 (first week on zoom)

**Office:** CNH 527  
**Office Hours:** By appointment

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## **Course Description**

In 1998, with their book entitled "Building a New Biocultural Synthesis", Alan Goodman and Thomas Leatherman challenged Biological Anthropology to broaden its theoretical scope to include political economy and political ecology – in short to become a more critical sub-discipline within Anthropology – reflexively analyzing the historical and cultural influences on our theory and methodology.

In this seminar, we begin by critically examining the roots of the biocultural approach by exploring various theoretical frameworks from biological and medical anthropology that address the interplay between biology, culture, and health. We will then continue to explore emerging themes and the uses of biocultural frameworks in health studies/ medical and biological anthropology. We cover a wide variety of the following theoretical approaches and topics: critical perspectives in medical anthropology, the environment, bodies and embodiment, race and racism, life history and life course theory, and the developmental origins of health and disease.

## **Course Objectives**

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Understand the fundamentals of the biocultural approach with a critical appreciation of its assets, deficits, and trajectory
- Identify and appreciate a variety of theoretical frameworks that are related to or are subsumed under the biocultural approach and apply them to their own areas of research
- Clearly articulate the theoretical frameworks most appropriate and useful for their research using both verbal and written formats

## **Required Readings**

Most articles and book chapters are available online from Mills library. The few readings that are not available online will be sent to you as pdfs by email in advance of the class. **Please note that this is a provisional list - some readings and seminar topics may change depending on class interest.**

## **Class Format**

The course is organized as a seminar. There will be no formal lecture; participants will be expected to have done the appropriate readings, set the agenda and contribute to the discussion. On the final day of class we will hold a mini-research symposium.

## **Course Evaluation – Overview**

1. class participation (15%)
2. facilitation of one seminar (10%), date to be negotiated on first day of class

3. course readings reflection paper (10%), due Feb. 15th
4. paper proposal (5%), due March 1
5. presentation (25%), in class on April 5
6. final paper (35%), due date to be negotiated in class

## **Course Evaluation – Details**

### **Class participation (15%)**

You are expected to come prepared to class having completed all assigned readings with notes, questions, and comments ready to share with the rest of the class. The level of your participation (contribution to the discussion and degree of preparedness) will be taken into account in assigning the final grade.

### **Facilitation of one seminar (10%), to be negotiated in first class**

You will lead one seminar/class discussion, chosen on the first day of class. You will be expected to provide the class with some background information about the authors of the chapters/articles, explain and fundamental terms, pose questions to the class that provoke consideration and discussion of the readings, and listen and engage fellow students in a discussion about the readings.

### **Course readings reflection paper (10%), due October 7, 2019**

You will write a short reflection paper (3 pages, double-spaced maximum) based on any 3 of the course readings (your choice) that we have read to date. The aim of this assignment is to help you to synthesize and reflect on the course readings and to give me a sample of your writing on which I can give you some critical feedback.

### **Paper proposal (5%), due October 21, 2019**

The paper proposal is to be a formal proposal (2 pages, double-space max.) that will give me an opportunity to give you feedback on your proposed paper/research proposal including both a research question and an outline of the paper. Please include a minimum of 5 references (beyond course readings).

### **Presentation (25%), in class December 2, 2019**

The final presentation will be based on your final research paper. The symposium will be held on the last class. It will be presented in conference style (total length 20 minutes with 15 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for questions) using PowerPoint or Prezi.

### **Final paper (35%) submitted through email December 16, 2019**

Participants are to develop a research term paper around one or more of the themes and theoretical frameworks addressed in the course. This can be related to your own research interests and may even take the form of a research proposal if that is useful to you. Papers will be 20 pages (double-spaced) in length, not including references and appendices.

## **Weekly Course Schedule and Required Readings**

### **Week 1 (January 11)**

#### **What is biocultural anthropology and how does it fit into Anthropology?**

Readings:

Zuckerman, Molly K. and Martin, Debra L. 2016. Introduction: the development of biocultural perspectives in anthropology. In *New Directions in Biocultural Anthropology*. M.K. Zuckerman and D.L. Martin (eds.). Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Introduction, pp. 7-28. Book Available as an ebook in McMaster Library.

Leatherman, Thomas and Goodman, Alan. 2020. Building on the biocultural syntheses: 20 years and still expanding. *American Journal of Human Biology* 32: e23360.

Wiley, Andrea S and Cullin, Jennifer M. 2016. What do anthropologists mean when they use the term biocultural? *American Anthropologist* 118(3): 554-569.

**Notes: Please come to the first day of class prepared to discuss these articles.**

### **Week 2 (January 18)**

#### **Political economy, power, and health inequities**

Readings:

Farmer, Paul, 2004. "An Anthropology of Structural Violence." *Current Anthropology* 45(3): 305-325.

Singer, M. 2004. Critical Medical Anthropology. In *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology: Health and Illness in the World's Cultures*. Vol. 1:23-30. Carol Ember and Melvin Ember (eds). New York: Kluwer.

Hicks, Kathryn and Leonard, William R. 2014. Developmental Systems and Inequality. Linking Evolutionary and Political-Economic Theory in Biological Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 55(5): 523-550.

Brewis, Alexandra and Wutich, Amber. 2019. "Stigma: A biocultural proposal for integrating evolutionary and political-economic approaches." *American Journal of Human Biology* DOI: 10.1002/ajhb.23290

### **Week 3 (January 25)**

#### **The Body and Embodiment and Local Biologies**

Readings:

Krieger, Nancy 2004. Embodiment: A conceptual glossary for epidemiology. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59: 350-355.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Lock, Margaret 1987. The mindful body: A prolegomenon to future work. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1): 6-41.

Niewohner, J. and Lock, Margaret. 2018. Situating local biologies: Anthropological perspectives on environment/human entanglements. *BioSocieties* 13: 681-697.

### **Week 4 (February 1)**

#### **Resource Insecurities**

Reading:

Brewis, Alexandra, A., Piperata, Barbara, Thompson, Amanda L., and Wutich, Amber. 2020. Localizing resource insecurities: A biocultural perspective on water and wellbeing. *WIREs Water* 7(4): e1440.

Nisbett, Nicholas. 2019. Understanding the nourishment of bodies at the centre of food and health systems – systemic, bodily and new materialist perspectives on nutritional inequity. *Social Sciences and Medicine* 228, 9-16.

McKerracher, L., Oresnik, S., Moffat, T., Murray-Davis, B., Vickers-Manzin, J., Zalot, L., ... & Barker, M. E. (2020). Addressing embodied inequities in health: how do we enable improvement in women's diet in pregnancy? *Public Health Nutrition*, 23(16), 2994-3004.

### **Week 5 (February 8)**

#### **Sex and Gender**

Readings:

Mascia-Lees, Frances E. 2016. The Body and Embodiment in the History of Feminist Anthropology: An Idiosyncratic Excursion through Binaries. In *Mapping Feminist Anthropology in the Twenty-First Century*. edited by Ellen Lewin and Leni M. Silverstein. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Stone, PK. 2016. Biocultural perspectives on maternal mortality and obstetrical death from past to present. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 159: S150–S171.

Zuckerman, M. K., & Crandall, J. (2019). Reconsidering sex and gender in relation to health and disease in bioarchaeology. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 54(Complete), 161–171.

### **Week 6 (February 15)**

#### **Risk, Resilience, and Syndemics**

Readings:

Creary, M.S. 2018. Biocultural citizenship and embodying exceptionalism: Biopolitics for sickle cell disease in Brazil. *Social Science and Medicine* 199: 123-131.

Panter-Brick, Catherine. 2014. Health, Risk, and Resilience: Interdisciplinary Concepts and Applications. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43: 431-448.

Singer, Merrill, Bulled, Nicola, Ostrach, Bayla, and Ginzburg, Shir Lerman. 2021. Syndemics: A cross-disciplinary approach to complex epidemic events like COVID-19. *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 50: 41-58.

**Notes: Reading reflection paper due**

### **Week 7 (February 22)**

Break week. NO CLASS!!

### **Week 8 (March 1)**

#### **Food Insecurity and Nutrition**

Readings:

Pieperata, Barbara A. and Dufour, Darna L. Food insecurity, nutritional inequality, and maternal-child health: A role for biocultural scholarship in filling knowledge gaps. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50: 75-92.

Himmelgreen, David, Romero-Daza, Nancy, Heuer, J., Lucas, W., Salinas-Miranda, A. A., & Stoddard, T. (2020). Using syndemic theory to understand food insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases. *Social Science & Medicine*, 113124.

Turner, Katherine L. (2019) Biocultural Diversity, Campesino Kitchens, and Globalization: Ethnobiological Perspectives on Dietary Change in Southern Bolivia. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39(1): 110-130.

**Notes: Paper proposal due**

## **Week 9 (March 8)**

### **Life History, and Life Course Approaches**

#### Readings:

Reiches, Meredith W. 2019. A life history approach to prenatal supplementation: Building a bridge from biological anthropology to public health and nutrition. *American Journal of Human Biology* 31(6): e233818.

Yoav, B, and Kuh, D. 2002. A life course approach to chronic disease epidemiology: conceptual models, empirical challenges and interdisciplinary perspectives. *International journal of epidemiology* 31: 285-293.

Neely, Abigail H. 2015. Internal Ecologies and the Limits of Local Biologies: A Political Ecology of Tuberculosis in the Time of AIDS *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(4): 791-805.

## **Week 10 (March 15)**

### **Developmental Origins of Health and Disease and Epigenetics**

#### Readings:

Gowland, Rebecca L. 2015. Entangled Lives: Implications of the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease Hypothesis for Bioarchaeology and the Life Course. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 158:530–540.

Lock, Margaret. 2015. Comprehending the Body in the Era of the Epigenome. *Current Anthropology* Volume 56(2): 151-176.

McKerracher, Luseadra, Moffat, Tina, Barker, Mary, Williams, Dianna and Sloboda, Deborah M. 2018 Translating the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease concept to improve the nutritional environment for our next generations: a call for a reflexive, positive, multi-level approach. *Journal of Developmental Origins of Health and Disease* 10(4): 420–428.

## **Week 11 (March 22)**

### **Race, racism, and health**

#### Readings:

Kuzawa. CW and Gravlee, CC (2016) Chapter 5. Beyond genetic race: biocultural insights into the causes of racial health disparities, pp. 89-105. In *New Directions in Biocultural Anthropology*. Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. Book Available as an ebook in Mills Library.

Rosa, Jonathan and Díaz, Vanessa (2020) Raciontologies: Rethinking anthropological accounts of institutional racism and enactments of White



supremacy in the United States. *American Anthropologist*, 122(1), 120-132.

Slocum, Rachel. 2016. Race in the study of food. In *Geographies of Race and Food Fields, Bodies, Markets*. Rachel Slocum, Arun Saldanha (eds). London: Routledge.

### **Week 12 (March 29)**

Topic and Readings for this week to be negotiated by class members.

### **Week 13 (April 5)**

**Mini-symposium**

No Readings

**Notes: Papers presented in class**

## **Course Policies**

### **Submission of Assignments**

Please submit all of your assignments by email to the instructor by 11:59 pm on the assignment due date.

### **Grades**

Grades will be based on the McMaster University grading scale:

<b>MARK</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
90-100	A+
85-90	A
80-84	A-
77-79	B+
73-76	B
70-72	B-
67-69	C+
63-66	C
60-62	C-
57-59	D+
53-56	D
50-52	D-
0-49	F

### **Late Assignments**

[Insert policy on late assignments]

## **Absences, Missed Work, Illness**

[Insert policy on absences, missed work and illness]

## **Avenue to Learn**

**In this course we will NOT be using Avenue to Learn.** All communication in this course will be done through email.

## **University Policies**

### **Academic Integrity Statement**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

### **Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca). For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#).

### **Religious, Indigenous and Spiritual Observances (RISO)**

The University recognizes that, on occasion, the timing of a student's religious, Indigenous, or spiritual observances and that of their academic obligations may conflict. In such cases, the University will provide reasonable academic accommodation for students that is consistent with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Please review the [RISO information for students in the Faculty of Social Sciences](#) about how to request accommodation.

### **Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

### **Privacy Protection**

In accordance with regulations set out by the Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act, the University will not allow return of graded materials by placing them in boxes in departmental offices or classrooms so that students may retrieve their papers themselves; tests and assignments must be returned directly to the student. Similarly, grades for assignments for courses may only be posted using the last 5 digits of the student number as the identifying data. The following possibilities exist for return of graded materials:

1. Direct return of materials to students in class;
2. Return of materials to students during office hours;
3. Students attach a stamped, self-addressed envelope with assignments for return by mail;
4. Submit/grade/return papers electronically.

Arrangements for the return of assignments from the options above will be finalized during the first class.

### **Course Modification**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.