

# Medical Anthropology



## WHAT IS MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

- Medical Anthropology is a subfield of anthropology that draws upon social, cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology to better understand those factors which influence health and well being (broadly defined), the experience and distribution of illness, the prevention and treatment of sickness, healing processes, the social relations of therapy management, and the cultural importance and utilization of pluralistic medical systems.
- The discipline of medical anthropology draws upon many different theoretical approaches. It is as attentive to popular health culture as bioscientific epidemiology, and the social construction of knowledge and politics of science as scientific discovery and hypothesis testing. Medical anthropologists examine how the health of individuals, larger social formations, and the environment are affected by interrelationships between humans and other species; cultural norms and social institutions; micro and macro politics; and forces of globalization as each of these affects local worlds.

## MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS STUDY

- Health ramifications of ecological “adaptation and maladaptation”
- Popular health culture and domestic health care practices
- Local interpretations of bodily processes
- Perceptions of risk, vulnerability and

- responsibility for illness and health care
- Risk and protective dimensions of human behavior, cultural norms and social institutions
- Preventative health and harm reduction practices
- The experience of illness and the social relations of sickness
- The range of factors driving health, nutrition and health care transitions
- Medical practices in the context of modernity, colonial, and post-colonial social formations
- The use and interpretation of pharmaceuticals and forms of biotechnology
- Disease distribution and health disparity
- The political ecology of infectious and vector borne diseases, chronic diseases and states of malnutrition, and violence
- The possibilities for a critically engaged yet clinically relevant application of anthropology

## BECOME A MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

- **Get a Bachelor’s Degree:** Aspiring medical anthropologists must begin by earning a bachelor’s degree. A major in anthropology can prepare students for this career field. Coursework in anthropology includes language, culture, research methods and religion. Other useful classes are those in statistics, math, quantitative research and research analysis. Students may also study nursing, public health or other medical fields with coursework focusing on science and health.

# MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- **Complete an Internship:** Many anthropology programs require or recommend an internship. Students who participate in internship programs gain experience working with a variety of organizations that they may encounter as professional medical anthropologists, including museums, libraries, government agencies and cultural institutions. They practice researching, recording and reporting information.
- **Get a Master's Degree or Ph.D.:** Most employers require job candidates to have a master's degree or Ph.D. in Medical Anthropology. Studies at the graduate level include health and life cycles, ethno and alternative medicine, sexuality and gender. Students may also study medical ethics, geriatrics and public health. Complementary degrees include a Master of Public Health or Medical Doctorate.
- **Conduct Research:** Both students and professional medical anthropologists conduct research. Learning to compile and organize collected information requires attention to detail, organization and an open mind. Medical anthropologists must also be willing to travel and live in unusual situations in order to study cultures. They must be patient and willing to work on projects that can span years. Research topics range from the spread and prevalence of illness among designated groups to the morals of medicine and the stigmas of mental illness.
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Urbana, IL)
- Harvard University (Boston, MA)
- University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI)
- Saint Louis University (St. Louis, MO)
- Washington University in St. Louis (St. Louis, MO)
- The Ohio State University Social Sciences and Humanities MD/PhD (Columbus, OH)
- University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA)
- University of Texas Medical Branch (Galveston, TX)
- University of Washington (Seattle, WA)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Anthropological Association: [americananthro.org](http://americananthro.org)
- Society for Medical Anthropology: [medanthro.net](http://medanthro.net)
- Medical Anthropology Students Association: [masa.medanthro.net](http://masa.medanthro.net)
- Medical Anthropology Quarterly: [medanthroquarterly.org](http://medanthroquarterly.org)
- Medicine Anthropology Theory: [medanthrotheory.org](http://medanthrotheory.org)
- Partners in Health: [pih.org](http://pih.org)

## MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY PROGRAMS

- University of California Los Angeles Social Sciences and Humanities MD/PhD (Los Angeles, CA)
- University of California, San Diego (San Diego, CA)
- University of California San Francisco (San Francisco, CA)
- Yale University (New Haven, CT)
- University of Florida Social Sciences and Humanities MD/PhD (Gainesville, FL)
- Emory University (Atlanta, GA)
- University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine (Chicago, IL)

