UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Anthropology for Health Education

2627-1-K0103D002-K0103D00204

Aims

- Knowledge of the fundamental concepts of cultural and medical anthropology relevant to health education and healthcare.
- Understanding of the relationship between culture, health, illness, and care.
- Understanding of the role of cultural practices, beliefs, values, and representations in health-related behaviours and experiences.
- Knowledge of the main cultural and social factors influencing relationships with patients, access to healthcare services, and care pathways.
- Recognition of the risks of ethnocentrism, stereotyping, medicalization, and stigmatization in professional relationships.
- Application of an anthropological perspective to professional relationships and health education, with attention to different cultural and social contexts.

Contents

Anthropology, Culture and Health
Definition of culture from an anthropological perspective and main characteristics of cultural systems. Relationships between culture, society, health, illness, and care. Ethnocentrism and the relativist perspective in understanding experiences of health and illness.

Body, Person, Otherness and Illness
The body as a biological, social, and cultural reality. Representations of the person, well-being, suffering, and illness. The cultural construction of otherness and diversity through the example of cannibalism. The relationship between cultural traditions, social practices, health, and illness, with reference to the case of kuru.

Detailed program

Cultural Anthropology and Health Professions Education
• Definition of cultural anthropology and medical anthropology.
• The concept of culture: meanings, practices, values, and systems of interpretation.
• Culture, learning, and socialization.
• Ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and the risk of stereotyping.
• Different ways of understanding health, illness, and care.
• The contribution of anthropology to the education and training of healthcare professionals.
• Analysis of examples concerning relationships between healthcare professionals and patients.

Health, Illness, Care, and Culture
• The different dimensions of health: biological, psychological, social, and cultural.
• The body between individual experience, social norms, and cultural meanings.
• The experience of illness and the construction of meaning.
• Representations of suffering, pain, and healing.
• Cannibalism as an example of the cultural construction of otherness and diversity.
• The relationship between cultural traditions, social practices, health, and illness.
• The possible implications of cultural practices and traditions for health.
• The case of kuru as an example of the relationship between cultural practices, illness, and anthropological interpretation.
• Implications for health education and professional relationships.

Prerequisites

None.

Teaching form

The course is structured into 4 interactive lessons of 4 hours each, in in-person delivery mode

Textbook and teaching resource

• William E. Arens, Il mito del cannibale. Antropologia e antropofagia, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2001
• B. Good, Narrare la malattia. Lo sguardo antropologico sul rapporto medico-paziente, Einaudi, Torino 2006
• Claude Lévi-Strauss, Siamo tutti cannibali, il Mulino, Bologna 2022.
• Riccardo Vedovato, Questi strani esseri umani. Nove storie di antropologia culturale per capire chi siamo, come guardiamo il mondo e perché spesso ci fermiamo alle apparenze, Rizzoli, Milano 2025.

Semester

First year, first semester

Assessment method

Written examination consisting of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions on the course content.

Office hours

By appointment, arranged via email with the teacher.

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES