Course Description and Prerequisites

This is an interdisciplinary course that brings medical anthropology perspectives to bear on recent epidemiological literature, using the theory of syndemics. At the outset of the course, students will be taking a historic look at how notions of risk and “unpreparedness” have been introduced to public health practice. Subsequently, students will critically examine the use of health metrics when determining the existing burden of disease. Furthermore, students will also be understanding the role communication plays in shaping health and disease. This focus on health communication will help students to complexly analyze the importance of biopolitics, social representations, and cultural perceptions (including the noxious effects of accusation and blame) in the spread of disease. Students will then apply understandings of health communication to health systems and aid, thus evaluating the effectiveness of the current curative structures in place. Turning to in-depth ethnography, students will examine how poor communication and faulty health systems can lapse into (sometimes fatal) forms of racialization. Students will then combine perspectives on race inequality with critical approaches to health economics and socioeconomic inequality. In doing so, students will be prepared to apply an intersectional analysis to health inequalities; thus questioning the role of human rights given harsh realities regarding “the social gradient” as a health determinant.

This class throws into critical relief the binary nature of quantitative and qualitative research methods. During the last third of the semester, students will engage in a workshop-style class format, during which students debate the methodological strengths and weaknesses of recent epidemiological studies. Specifically, students will uncover assumptions in the literature, revealing hidden bias. This phase of the class, designed to develop a deep understanding of the syndemics concept, will culminate in a workshop of students’ individual syndemics projects.

There are no prerequisites for this course. This advanced course is appropriate for many different types of students. Among them are advanced students across the social sciences and health sciences, as well as students interested in pursuing graduate and professional degrees in the fields of (medical) anthropology, epidemiology, public health, public policy, nursing, medicine, and other health professions.

Learning Objectives

This course will teach students to think critically, thus positioning them as producers of innovative health interventions. By the end of the semester, students will be able to sample from a broad interdisciplinary tool box. As such, students will be able to intervene on debates occurring across different health-related fields and professions. Furthermore, students will be prepared to evaluate unfolding epidemics and diagnose the social contexts within which they are nested. In so doing, students will be able to use mixed-methods to identify strategies for alleviating the global burden of disease. Importantly, students will learn to concisely express their ideas in both oral and written formats. While assignments in this class are individual, the class uses a “hive mentality” structure to teach students to think collaboratively with others.
Resource Materials

The following books have been ordered to the university bookstore:

*Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader.*
Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

You are not required to purchase *Foundations of Global Health* as PDF scans will be made available through Blackboard. If purchasing *No Alternative* represents a financial burden, please speak with the professor. You will be provided with a loaner copy of this book. All other materials will be provided in PDF format via Blackboard.

Grading Policies

This course is open to both advanced undergraduate students and graduate students. As such, undergraduate students and graduate students play different roles in the classroom environment.

*Undergraduate students* have five areas in which they may earn points. At the end of the semester, their final grade will be calculated by dividing points earned over 430. There are no weighted values for points—that is, “a point is a point is a point.”

Précis—100 possible points
Discussion questions—30 points
Presentation at mock “conference”—100 possible points
Oral Responses/In-class Participation—100 possible points
Syndemics Project and Presentation—100 possible points

*Graduate students* have four areas in which they can earn points. Each area is worth 100 points, for a total of 400 possible points over the course of the semester. The same logic applies for how grades will be calculated: there are no weighted values for points—that is, “a point is a point is a point.”

Discussant at mock “conference”—100 possible points
Discussion leadership—100 possible points
Workshop leadership—100 possible points
Expanded Syndemics Project (no presentation)—100 possible points

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Tardy individual assignments will be graded based on quality, then given half the credit they would have earned had they been turned in on time. All written assignments must be submitted via Blackboard as a PDF attachment.

Précis

*Designed to develop: Critical Thinking Skills, Written Communication Skills, Empirical Skills & Social Responsibility*

Précis demonstrate students’ close reading of texts. Each précis is worth up to 10 points. You are expected to complete one précis *every week for the first ten weeks of the semester*. Précis should be written in the following format:

- One paragraph with a word length of 250-350 words for each author/reading (about a half page per author/reading). The name of the author and reading should be explicitly named in each paragraph. Each paragraph should including a maximum of 50 words of direct quotations since the primary purpose of this assignment is to synthesize key arguments (not simply reiterating them).
- A concluding paragraph relating the different argument’s to each other (comparing, contrasting, evaluating) and including the students’ own critical perspectives.
- Single space, Times New Roman, 12 pt. font, and 1” margins.
- Since you are naming the reading and author in the body of your writing, no works cited is necessary.

Please label each précis (e.g., Week 1 Précis). Your précis are due as one collated PDF via Blackboard on **Monday, March 25, at 11:59pm**. I will grade your précis by the end of the business day on **April 1**. Examples of successful précis are posted on Blackboard.

**Discussion Questions**

Undergraduate students must submit a written discussion question for weeks 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10 via Blackboard. Each weekly discussion question is worth 5 points. Unless otherwise indicated, discussion questions are due each week by **Monday at 11:59pm**. Written questions demonstrate students’ active engagement with texts and are intended to stimulate discussion. Questions should be 50-150 words. Students are encouraged to make direct references to the text, providing direct quotations and page numbers. However, direct quotations may account for no more than half of the entire question. The professor will compile discussion questions prior to discussion.

**Mock “Conference” Presentations**

*Undergraduates*: Each Tuesday class period will be conducted as a mock “conference” panel, with different authors contributing complementary but distinct research perspectives. Throughout the semester, each undergraduate student will present one assigned reading to the class as if he/she is the author of the work. At the beginning of the semester, students will sign up for the reading that they would like to present to their peers. This presentation should underscore the author’s key arguments (thus demonstrating the depth of the student’s understanding). “Authors” are expected to give a ~20 minute presentation in PowerPoint format.

*Graduates*: While undergraduate students are the “authors” in our mock conference panels, graduate students serve as “discussants.” There will be one discussant per panel. The
“discussant” should prepare comments that draw out and explicate the commonalities as well as unique contributions of the different works presented during the panel. They may furthermore explain the importance of the panel’s contributions to the field of global health.

**Oral Responses/In-Class Participation**

*Designed to develop: Critical Thinking Skills, Verbal Communication Skills, Empirical Skills & Social Responsibility*

Undergraduate students are required to participate ten times throughout the semester—either by responding to their peers’ discussion questions, engaging presenters as “audience members” during mock “conferences,” or speaking up in class during the workshop portion of the semester. Each participation is worth 10 points. Students are expected to participate during a minimum of ten discussion sessions during the semester. When students participate, the professor will ask students to elaborate on their perspectives by providing examples, thus engaging students in a dialogical examination of their assertions and underlying assumptions. Students are encouraged to take a position within social justice debates and examine their own roles in achieving health equity. These verbal responses will help develop students’ critical thinking and verbal communication skills, while also prompting students to empirically examine their own social contexts in relation to the reading. These oral responses require no further preparation apart from completing the reading and attending discussion sections.

It is the student’s responsibility to say their name aloud each time they participate so that the professor can note down their participation. Failure to say your name may result in not receiving the participation points you deserve. Furthermore, your participation score will not be inputted into Blackboard until the end of Week 14/Module 14 of the class. It is your responsibility to check your score during the final week of classes. If you disagree with your participation score, you will be asked to provide a brief description of all of your comments during class throughout the semester. For this reason, you may want to keep a cursory log during the semester for potential use at the end of the semester.

**Discussion Leadership**

Graduate students are expected to serve as “discussion leaders.” One graduate student will be assigned as “discussion leader” for each session. This will be decided at the beginning of the semester.

During the first ten weeks, the instructor will compile a list of discussion questions for weeks 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10. Graduate students should review these questions before class and decide which questions to present to the class and in what order. They should then facilitate discussion by offering these questions to the entire class and deciding when to move from one question to the next. The professor will play a supervisory role, making sure that both undergraduate students and graduate students are challenging their assumptions and thinking critically.

During weeks 2, 3, 5, and 9, graduate students are responsible for picking specific items from the “Section Cases for Teaching and Learning.” They should review these tools prior to discussion and come prepared to facilitate discussion by offering these cases to the entire class and deciding when to move from one activity to the next. The professor will play a supervisory role, making
sure that both undergraduate students and graduate students are challenging their assumptions and thinking critically.

During the syndemics units, graduate students should come to class with a clear understanding of the following items:
- What are the hidden assumptions embedded in each study?
- What are the methodological strengths and weaknesses in each study?
- What are the similarities and differences between the different studies?

In class, we will go through each study page by page, analyzing the work as a group. The professor will play a supervisory role during the workshop, and at times will explain concepts from both anthropology and epidemiology. Similarly to the discussions in the prior ten weeks, graduate students will facilitate the workshop by identifying key passages that may reveal hidden assumptions or methodological strengths/weaknesses and asking undergraduates to reflect on those passages. During the last fifteen minutes of each workshop session, graduate students will go to the front of the class and, with feedback from undergraduates, record on the white board 1) hidden assumptions, 2) strengths/weaknesses, 3) similarities/differences.

**Syndemics Project**

*Designed to develop: Critical Thinking Skills, Written Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills & Social Responsibility*

*All students* should be working on your Syndemics Project during Modules 11-14. Précis are not required for these modules. Instead, the class will take a workshop format—together we will look at articles that will help you develop a critical perspective that you can apply to your individual Syndemics Projects. The written portion of the Syndemics Project is due on **Monday, April 29th, at 11:59pm**. Students will present their Syndemics Projects in class on **Tuesday, April 30th**. Students will receive their grade by **May 6th** at the end of the business day.

*For undergraduate students*, please include the following elements:

**PART ONE** (10 points):
For this assignment, identify and describe your syndemic. What are the co-existing diseases in your syndemic and how do they interact to produce an extra burden of disease in a particular social context? Provide a brief overview of your syndemic, citing existing literature from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/

**PART TWO** (10 points):
Explain your thought process, and defend your assertions by citing existing literature. Did you start with a disease, identify existing comorbidities, and then uncover the social context in which they are nested? Or did you start with a social context and then identify multiple, overlapping diseases that tend to unfold in that context? Why?

**PART THREE** (10 points):
Produce an equation that describes how your syndemic operates. You will need to refer to Tsai, et al. when producing your equation. You may either write this by hand or use special typographic symbols.
PART FOUR (10 points):
Create a diagram of your syndemic. Use diagrams from the readings to inspire your work. You may adapt and improve what some of the authors have done so that it adequately describes your syndemic. You may either draw this by hand or use computer graphics.

PART FIVE (10 points):
You must include a Works Cited section. Use APA citation style.

PART SIX (50 points):
Present your syndemic to the class in a 5-10 minute presentation.

For graduate students, your syndemics project must include the same Parts 1-5 as undergraduate students; therefore, half of your project grade (50 points) is earned via meeting the same expectations. However, the other half is earned via expectations unique to graduate students:

PART SIX (25 points):
Graduate students must conduct ethnographic research by interviewing at least one patient or health care provider who can refer to first-hand experience when commenting on the syndemic. The graduate student should explain their syndemic to their interviewee and explore how the interviewee’s experience may provide a “human face” and greater tangibility to some (not necessarily all) of the elements that they have included. Furthermore, the graduate student should be ready to be wrong. It may turn out that the interviewee’s experience actually provides evidence that contradicts the proposed syndemic. If so, the graduate student should brainstorm with the interviewee (interviewees can be “organic intellectuals!”) how to adjust/edit/revise their syndemic so that it is more true to lived experiences. Graduate students must include a typed write-up of your ethnographic field notes. These should provide a “fleshy,” rich, and “thick” description of what transpired during the interview.

PART SEVEN (25 points):
Finally, based on the results of their research, graduate students will write up a critical analysis that includes suggestions for reaching health care equity and social justice. During this analysis, graduate students should refer directly to readings and concepts in the class.

Extra Credit
Designed to develop: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills & Social Responsibility

There are two extra credit précis assignments offered to both undergraduates and graduates during Week 15. These extra credit opportunities are worth up to 25 points. It is due on Monday, April 29th, at 11:59pm.
Calendar of Activities
The UTRGV academic calendar can be found at https://my.utrgv.edu/home at the bottom of the screen, prior to login. Some important dates for Spring 2019 include:

Jan 14 (Mon)       Spring classes begin
Jan 17 (Thurs)     Last day to add a class or register for Spring classes
Mar 11-Mar 16 (Mon-Sat)      Spring Break! No classes.
April 10 (Wed)     Last day to drop a class or withdraw
May 2 (Thurs)      Study Day. No classes.

Semester Schedule for this Class

Module 1
Introduction to the class.

Lakoff, Andrew
Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency
Introduction, Ch. 3, and Ch. 5

***This week only, your discussion questions are due Wednesday night at 11:59pm.***

Module 2
Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader, Part 1, Section 3
“Metrics and the Burden of Disease”

Module 3
Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader, Part 4, Section 12
“Health Communication”

Module 4
Nichter, Mark.
Farmer, Paul

Module 5
Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader, Part 4, Section 11
“Health Systems and Aid”

Module 6
Vega, Rosalynn
No Alternative: Childbirth, Citizenship, and Indigenous Culture in Mexico.
Chapters 1, 5, 6
Module 7
Robinson, James C.
Waitzkin, Howard
Exportation of Managed Care

Module 8
Scott Jerome, Jessica
A Right to Health: Medicine, Marginality, and Health Care Reform in Northeastern Brazil. (PDF pages 1-14.)
Keshavjee, Salmaan.

Module 9
Foundations of Global Health: An Interdisciplinary Reader, Part 3, Section 7
“Health Inequalities and the Social Gradient”

Module 10
Ragin, Charles
The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies. (PDF pages 1-5.)
Cooper, Melinda
Life as Surplus: Biotechnology & Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era. (PDF pages 15-22.)

***CLASS TRANSITIONS TO WORKSHOP-STYLE FORMAT***

Module 11
Tuesday:
Syndemics Unit 1

Singer, Merrill et al.
Syndemics and the biosocial conception of health.
The Lancet
Syndemics: health in context
Singer, Merrill and Scott Clair
Syndemics and Public Health: Reconceptualizing Disease in Bio-Social Context
Millstein, Bobby
Seeing Syndemics: Thoughts on Improving Public Health in Communities Challenged by Multiple Afflictions.
Mendenhall, Emily
Sindemia: una nueva categoría que reúne lo social y lo biológico
Thursday:
* Syndemics Unit 2 *

Mendenhall, Emily
---
Beyond Co-Morbidity: A Critical Anthropological Perspective on Syndemic Depression and Diabetes in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Tsai, Alexander, and Atheendar S. Venkataramani
---
Syndemics and health disparities: a methodological note

Tsai, Alexander C, Emily Mendenhall, James A. Trostle, and Ichiro Kawachi
---
Co-occurring epidemics, syndemics, and population health

Novotny, Thomas, et al.
---
HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and tobacco in Brazil: a syndemic that calls for integrated interventions.

**Module 12**

Tuesday:
* Syndemics Unit 3 *

Codeco, Cláudia Torres and Flávio Codeco Coelho
---
Networks: epidemiology of transmissible diseases from a systemic perspective.

Mendenhall, et al.
---
Non-communicable disease syndemics: poverty, depression, and diabetes among low-income populations.

Thursday:
* Syndemics Unit 4 *

González-Guarda, Rosa Maria et al.
---
Substance Abuse, Violence, HIV, and Depression: An Underlying Syndemic Factor Among Latinas.

González-Guarda, Rosa Maria et al.
---
Cultural Phenomena and the Syndemic Factor: Substance Abuse, Violence, HIV, and Depression Among Hispanic Women

González-Guarda, Rosa Maria et al.
---
The contribution of stress, cultural factors and sexual identity on the substance abuse, violence, HIV and depression syndemic among Hispanic men
Module 13
Tuesday:
Syndemics Unit 5

Tulloch, Tyler G. et al.
Retrospective Reports on Developmental Stressors, Syndemics, and Their Association with Sexual Risk Outcomes Among Gay Men

Pachankis, John E.
A Transdiagnostic Minority Stress Treatment Approach for Gay and Bisexual Men’s Syndemic Health Conditions.

Parsons, Jeffrey T. et al.
Syndemic Production and Sexual Compulsivity/Hypersexuality in Highly Sexually Active Gay and Bisexual Men: Further Evidence for a Three Group Conceptualization

Thursday:
Syndemics Unit 6
Pipitan, Eileen V. et al.
Buffering Syndemic Effects in a Sexual Risk-Reduction Intervention for Male Clients of Female Sex Workers: Results From a Randomized Controlled Trial

Peasant, Courtney
Beyond the Syndemic: Condom Negotiation and Use among Women Experiencing Partner Violence

Module 14
Both Tuesday and Thursday:
Syndemics Unit 7
Willen, Sarah S.
Syndemic vulnerability and the right to health

Hart, Laura and Richard Horton
Syndemics: committing to a healthier future

Mendenhall, Emily
Syndemics: a new path for global health research

Module 15
Tuesday:
Presentation of individual syndemics projects.

Thursday:
Study day. No class.
Module 15 Extra Credit Précis (two available):

Précis A
Castro, Arachu and Merrill Singer
Davis, Joseph E. and Ana Marta González
To Fix or to Heal: Patient Care, Public Health, and the Limits of Biomedicine. (Pp. 307-318)
Metzl, Jonathan M.
Against Health: How Health Became the New Morality. (Pp. 195-203)
Mulligan, Jessica and Heide Castañeda

Précis B
Little, Peter. C.
Toxic Town: IBM, Pollution, and Industrial Risks. (Pp. 1-5)
Schmidt, Jeremy J.
Moore, Lisa Jean
Catch and Release: The Enduring Yet Vulnerable Horseshoe Crab (Pp. 1-8)
Sze, Julie

***For an additional 5 extra credit points on Précis B, watch El Cacao and include a 250-500 word reflection on how it relates to the readings in this précis. ***
Urgv Policy Statements

Students with a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects academic performance) who would like to receive academic accommodations should contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as soon as possible to schedule an appointment to initiate services. Accommodations can be arranged through SAS at any time, but are not retroactive. Students who suffer a broken bone, severe injury or undergo surgery during the semester are eligible for temporary services.

Pregnancy, Pregnancy-related, and Parenting Accommodations
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination, which includes discrimination based on pregnancy, marital status, or parental status. Students seeking accommodations related to pregnancy, pregnancy-related condition, or parenting (reasonably immediate postpartum period) are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services for additional information and to request accommodations.

Student Accessibility Services:
Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at ability@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at ability@utrgv.edu.

Mandatory Course Evaluation Period:
Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades. Online evaluations will be available on or about:

Module 1 February 13 – 19
Module 2 April 10 – 16
Full Spring Semester April 10 – May 1

Attendance:
Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

Scholastic Integrity:
As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism (including self-plagiarism), and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on
scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, and VIOLENCE:
In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “Responsible Employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect that is free from sexual misconduct and discrimination. If students, faculty, or staff would like confidential assistance, or have questions, they can contact OVAVP (Office for Victim Advocacy & Violence Prevention) at 665-8287, 882-8282, or OVAVP@utrgv.edu.

COURSE DROPS:
According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

STUDENT SERVICES:
Students who demonstrate financial need have a variety of options when it comes to paying for college costs, such as scholarships, grants, loans and work-study. Students should visit the Students Services Center (U Central) for additional information. U Central is located in BMAIN 1.100 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 1.145 (Edinburg) or can be reached by email (ucentral@utrgv.edu) or telephone: (888) 882-4026. In addition to financial aid, U Central can assist students with registration and admissions.

Students seeking academic help in their studies can use university resources in addition to an instructor’s office hours. University Resources include the Learning Center, Writing Center, Advising Center and Career Center. The centers provide services such as tutoring, writing help, critical thinking, study skills, degree planning, and student employment. Locations are:

- Learning center: BSTUN 2.10 (Brownsville) or ELCTR 100 (Edinburg)
- Writing center: BLIBR 3.206 (Brownsville) or ESTAC 3.119 (Edinburg)
- Advising center: BMAIN 1.400 (Brownsville) or ESWKH 101 (Edinburg)
- Career center: BCRTZ 129 (Brownsville) or ESSBL 2.101 (Edinburg)