



INTERNATIONAL HONORS PROGRAM

comparative study around the world

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Health and Community Program 2 Community Health Research Methods IBPH- 3510 (4 credits) Spring 2009

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Course Description:

Health and illness are complex, multi-dimensional phenomena. Good health – and bad – is the product of the interaction of biological factors (genes, microbes, organ systems), psychological factors (cognitive schema, behaviors, emotions), social and cultural factors (social structures and networks, beliefs, practices, values), economic factors (opportunity structures and life chances, labor practices, access to resources), political factors (state policies and legislation, decision-making, and political conflicts) and environmental factors (pollutions of all sorts, built environments, the availability of water, arable land, space and other resources). Health is also dependent on nutrition which is subject to many of the same factors. To add to this complexity, factors affecting health operate on the individual, household, community, national and global levels as well. For all of these reasons, field research into community health is a highly multi-disciplinary undertaking. Investigating something as complex and multi-factorial as health and illness in a community context requires the methods and concepts of a variety of research traditions, from anthropology and sociology, to policy studies and political science, epidemiology, microbiology, ecology, pharmacology and genetics.

This course focuses on some of the most important and commonly used community health research methods – ethnography, nutritional anthropology and epidemiology. **Ethnography** is the study of human social life in context. It studies how people perceive the world (attitudes, beliefs), what kind of social relationships they create (kinship, social and political networks), how these interact with the physical environment (shelter, resource use, tools, food) and what they do. Both *emic* (inside) and *etic* (outside) points of view are used in ethnography to describe and interpret social life and cultural practices. Ethnography generally requires long-term engaged involvement in the place of study and provides a holistic understanding of the human experience as the product of many intersecting dimensions (much like the description of health above). Ethnographic methods taught in this course include participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, life histories, participatory mapping and visual and archival data collection.

Nutritional Anthropology includes ethnographic information on foodways (food staples, preferences, preparation, modification and cultural beliefs and practices around food and its consumption) as well as assessments of food security (access to foods and the resources that provide food) and nutrition. Food security can be assessed at many levels but household food security can be approached through food basket monitoring (measuring available food), interviews focusing on food frequencies and coping mechanisms and dietary diversity. Nutritional outcomes can be measured through anthropometry or height, weight and body fat measurements.

Epidemiology is the study of the distribution, causes and control of health and illness in a population. It is often called the ‘basic science’ of public health. Epidemiology asks the ‘Who’, ‘What’, ‘When’, ‘Where’ and ‘Why’ of the many determinants of population health and illness. The use of epidemiology to battle dramatic outbreaks of infectious disease is probably the most well-known public fact of epidemiology. However, the discipline ranges much more widely, investigating the causes, distribution and control of chronic diseases, domestic violence, road traffic accidents, traumatic injuries, mental illness and occupational disease. Epidemiological methods can incorporate ethnographic methods and is sometimes called ethnoepidemiology. More traditional methods include surveys and routine surveillance, case-control and cohort studies and randomized controlled trials.

Though the various field research traditions in community health frame research questions, collect and analyze data and present results differently, there are also a number of important issues and challenges common to all these research traditions, including the following:

- What is the relationship between theories, questions, and methods for collecting and analyzing data?
- How can we design research questions that are in fact ‘researchable’? How should we prioritize different research questions?
- How can we integrate the various, sometimes competing research traditions to understand and improve the health of the community in a culturally acceptable way?
- How can communities meaningfully participate in the various stages of community health research?
- What are the ethical principles (and related practical techniques) that should guide community health research?
- How can researchers drive the translation of research into policy and practice?

These traditions won’t, however, be taught in isolation from each other. We want to emphasize the differences and potential intersections between them. Through lectures, readings, exercise, site visits and the case studies, you will learn what is unique about each tradition and how they might work usefully together.

Course Aim and Objectives:

In this course students will gain an understanding of the most important field methods used in community health research. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the basic study designs, research questions and core conceptual and methodological tools in the major research traditions under review.
- Apply a selected subset of these designs, questions and tools to exercises and case study research opportunities in the field in each country.
- Identify key ethical challenges faced in the practice of community health field research of all types.
- Reflect on key challenges faced when applying tools of each research tradition in community settings, e.g. enabling meaningful community participation and translating research into policy and practice.

Course Requirements:

Forms of Assessment:

Case study projects – are the central activity of this course. They are a chance for a group of between 4 to 8 students to apply the methodological concepts and tools we cover in readings,

lectures and class exercises to the investigation of a real health issue in a community. Case study weeks in Tanzania and Vietnam are organized slightly differently but all focus on giving students as much time as possible to get a taste of self-directed community health field research. Given the time constraints, faculty and country coordinators will pre-determine a number of possible research topics and arrange a preliminary list of contacts to facilitate the research process. Faculty will also consult with students before the case study projects begin about how to integrate the specific concepts and tools in this course into their research projects. On the final day of the case study week, each group will make a presentation of their work and answer questions from faculty, fellow students, visiting lecturers or informants and community members when possible.

Remember these case studies are primarily an opportunity to learn about community health research *methods* rather than go into detail about a particular issue. Through these projects you will learn fascinating and hopefully useful information about your case study topic. You should also be able to apply many of the tools and concepts you are learning in your other courses to your analysis of your case study problem. The broader goal is not to simply find out as much as you can about a topic but rather to learn how to approach a topic with a clear research question in mind, a plan for data collection and analysis and interpret that data in a scientific and socially relevant way. This will mean learning how to narrow your field of vision, operationalize a question and apply findings to the communities in question while remaining true to the scientific method.

At a minimum, each case study group will develop a research question(s), employ several forms of data collection, describe how data was analyzed, present main findings to the faculty and students as well as the community, discuss issues and challenges around data collection and analysis, logistics, ethics and possibilities for further research. The work you do for your case study will be guided by your case study question. You are free to use and integrate as appropriate any of the tools and concepts we cover in this program's four courses. The goal is not to train you to think or collect data 'like an anthropologist' or 'like an epidemiologist' but to see these research traditions as possible tools for understanding and tackling health problems in a community.

After each case study presentation students will also prepare individual reflection papers (1-2 pages) that:

- Outlines their role and contributions to the group
- Discusses how they reacted to the challenges and opportunities of group work
- Discusses in more detail particular ethical or methodological issues they confronted during the project.

Each person's final grade for the case study will reflect the preparation the group did before the case study week, the carrying out and presentation/analysis of the case study research and the individual reflection paper. Also note that the weight of the case study project grade in each country (relative to the overall course grade) gradually increases. This is because although the format of the case studies is largely the same in each country, your learning about research methods (and thus expectations about progress and performance) will develop over the course of the semester.

Weekly exercises – There will also be a series of short quantitative and qualitative exercises that will be done either in class or in the field after hours. These exercises are your chance to practice methods of data collection and analysis in a more contained and structured manner.

* A note about workload – The case study projects take up to a week of the program in each country and are thus major commitments of time and energy. There are also 9 smaller exercises

schedule for the rest of the semester. In order to balance the workload there will be fewer readings, in comparison to other courses in the program. Most readings will be discussed in class and there is no final exam. Most of the work for the quantitative exercises will be covered during class time while qualitative exercises will involve field-based components to be completed after hours. This would be time otherwise spent reading.

Grading

Exercises

Quantitative methods class exercise (4)	20% of course grade (5% each)
Quantitative methods exercise	10% of course grade
Qualitative methods exercise	20% of course grade (5% each)

Case Study Project

Case study project	50% of course grade
Tanzania	(10%)
North Vietnam	(15%)
South Vietnam	(25%)

All students are responsible for having read the IHP statement on plagiarism that is available in the Student Handbook. Students are advised that the penalty against students on an IHP program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be "...expulsion from the program or such other penalty as may be recommended by the program director, subject to approval by the Executive Director."

Please refer to the IHP Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, harassment protocols, and the academic appeals process. The International Honors Program is offered in affiliation with the School for International Training, the accredited higher education institution of World Learning.

Readings:

Doing Cultural Anthropology: Project for Ethnographic Data Collection Michael V. Angrosino 2002 Waveland Press. Illinois

Additional readings will be supplied in the course reader. Optional supplemental readings can be supplied upon request.

Following is a weekly schedule with reading assignments. This schedule is subject to change without advance notice, due in large part to the vagaries of travel.

Washington, DC

Week 1: Introduction and Overview of Methods/ Research Design

- Overview of Methods to be presented and case study expectations

Week 2: Case studies

- Visits to NGOs headquartered in DC

Angrosino – Chapter 9

Tanzania / Dar Es Salaam

Week 3: Ethics of Health Research

- Review of ethics in human subjects research

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research

1979 The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

Idanpaan-Heikkila, Juhana

2001 Ethical principles for the guidance of physicians in medical research – the Declaration of Helsinki. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 70:4

Week 4: Life History Theory and Methods

- The life history interview

Angrosino – Chapter 3

Tanzania / Ifakara

Week 5: Market surveys / Observation

- Observation techniques accompanied by a semi-structured interview

Angrosino – Chapter 10

Week 6: Case studies

- Holistic approaches to healthcare (focus HIV/AIDS)
- Rural/Urban comparisons and migration
- Access to ARVs (urban vs. rural)
- Traditional medicine in Tanzania
- International NGOs and health & development

Tanzania / Dar Es Salaam

Week 7: Transect walk and how to analyze qualitative data

- The transect walk focusing on livelihoods
- Coding of qualitative data

Royer, Ronald A., Jane E. Austin, and Wesley E. Newton

1998 Checklist and "Pollard Walk" Butterfly Survey Methods on Public Lands. *American Midland Naturalist* 140(2):358-71.

Vacation Week

Vietnam / Hanoi

Week 8: Public health approaches to measuring disease: Epidemiology as methodology

- Quantitative methods

Trostle, James A. , and Johannes Sommerfeld

1996 Medical Anthropology and Epidemiology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:253-74.

Week 9: Nutrition and Health surveys

- Quantitative methods used in medical anthropology

Prudhon, Claudine

2002 Assessment and Treatment of Malnutrition in Emergency Situations. *Action Contra la Faime*, Paris. Chapter 1.

Vietnam / Chihhn

Week 10: Case studies

- demographic health surveillance case study in Chiling Lab

Vietnam / Hanoi

Week 11: Livelihoods assessment

- Considering 5 types of 'capital'

Angrosino – Chapter 4

Vietnam / Mekong Delta

Week 12: Environmental health assessment / transect walk

- Agriculture, landscape change and health

Angrosino – Chapter 11

Vietnam / Ho Chi Minh City

Week 13: Focus groups / group interviews

- Interviewing groups rather than individuals

Kitzinger, Jenny

1995 Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups British Medical Journal 311:299-302.

Week 14: Case studies

- HIV/AIDS
- Environmental Health
- Health risks of agricultural labor

Vietnam / Hue

Week 15: Capstone presentations / synthesis of multi-country, multi-method, multi-theory semester.