



OSEA Maya Health & Healing Syllabus Undergrad Course Anth 434 / Grad Level Course Anth 534

Course Description

Course Design

The OSEA Maya Health & Healing is a field study abroad program based in experiential, on-site learning with Maya healers in community of Pisté, Yucatán, México. The focus is on traditional healing practices, practitioners, curing, disease, and cultural conceptions of health in contexts of medical pluralism and transcultural interaction based in over 100 years of globalization processes based in tourism development of archaeological heritage and coastal sex-sun-sand recreation. Students work with traditional allopathic doctors based in the Western-European tradition of medicine in addition to Maya healers.

This sociohistorical and cultural context allows participants to gain special knowledge, learning, and experience in a variety of issues relevant to successful career development in anthropology or health fields. The course is designed as an advanced seminar in which the professor is there to guide and mentor each student in their development of research and learning interests.

Students live in Pisté and do workshops, seminars, and ethnographic lab work at OSEA. OSEA and Pisté is the home base for students to do ethnographic participant observation or “shadow work” with healers from both the Maya and allopathic traditions in the surrounding Maya communities of: Pisté, Xcalacoop, Yokdzonot, Yaxuna, San Francisco, Xocempich, Dzitas, Nicté Há, Chendzonot.

- To view the location of these Maya communities in this Pisté cultural region on the map, see: <http://goo.gl/maps/vjcNC>
- You can locate OSEA on this map: <http://goo.gl/maps/SQZEJ>
- For a brief description of the program locations, economic development, tourism infrastructure, schools and medical facilities, please visit: http://www.osea-cite.org/program/osea_locations.php

Prerequisite Experience and Training

There is no minimum requirement of prior course work. Participation in the course does however require a background in any one or more of the following areas of study: medical anthropology, cultural anthropology, pre-Med, clinical based health fields, sociology, religious studies, tourism studies. This requisite background can vary, but it is essential in order for participants to have a high level of self-initiative, discipline, and motivation to learn in a cross-cultural and linguistic immersion field study context. Fluency in Spanish language conversation is essential.

Credits and Hours

OSEA Maya Health and Healing Field Study is a four week, 6 credit course based on 102 to 126 contact hours (classroom & field study). It is accredited by the Facultad de Antropología of the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, based in Mérida, México.

Terminology: Concept of Tradition, Traditional, Modern

Remember: Allopathic medicine is one tradition of health and healing among many other traditions both within the history of Western cultures and across other non-European cultures and civilizations. It is a traditional medical system of “Western” or “modern” society; but it is not a uniquely modern system nor is it uniquely “Western.” Other systems of medicine, health and healing are also traditional to a culture or region, despite **also** being **modern**. Modern is not opposed to Tradition. Modernity is just one kind of tradition and is in fact very traditional not the least because of the way that people adhere to the traditional values, beliefs, assumptions, habits, customs, world view, and biases of this cultural tradition. Modern, thus, is not an appropriate adjective to use to differentiate health and healing systems unless one is differentiating between historically earlier and historically later/contemporary forms within the “same” culture, cultural community, civilization, or society. Maya health and healing is modern tradition. It just so happens to not be allopathic medicine. It is correct to call this modern Maya health and healing.

Please be attentive to the cultural biases, “Eurocentrism,” and assumptions of “Western” superiority that are embedded in the terminology that you use. Even these terms, Eurocentrism and Western are problematic!

Terminology: Correct Use of the words “Maya” and “Mayan”

Participants must read the discussion of the correct usage of the words Maya and Mayan located on the OSEA website: http://www.osea-cite.org/program/maya_or_mayans.php In short, Maya is the proper name of the Indigenous people of Yucatán. Their language is called Maya. Maya is also used as an adjective to refer to the things that belong to this ethnicity, culture, or society; for example, it is correct Maya cuisine, Maya culture, Maya houses, Maya tradition, Maya history, Maya civilization, Maya calendars, etc. Mayan is incorrectly used in any and all of the above.

The use of the word “Maya” as an identity for the indigenous, Maya speaking people native to Yucatán is correct — for the most part. Yet there are some sociohistorical complications that are discussed at length once on-site in Pisté.

Program Structure

The program consists of two major components, experiential learning based in ethnographic participant observation with healers and coursework based in an array of classroom learning. The scheduling of the activities that comprise each of these units is structured on several factors that can change at any point in time. Thus, we can provide an idealized schedule with the understanding that this schedule is always tentative and provisional.

Ethnographic Participant Observation with Healers

Not all healers are open to allowing foreigners to do shadow work or participant observation. Further, the availability of healers can vary due to a variety of factors, such as whether they work full or part time as healers and whether they reside in Pisté or another nearby community.

Participants are placed with different kinds of healers according to their learning and research objectives. Not all participants will work with the same type of healers nor the same persons. Healers and health workers include: herbalists, midwives, bone-setters/masseuses, allopathic doctors (who work in private practice or government social security clinics). In special circumstances participants will be able to work with or have limited special interactions with spiritual healers, diviners, and curers.

In most situations, participants will shadow or do participant observation with local Pisté healers for two or three of the four weeks in order to minimize transportation expenses and loss of travel time. Not all types of healers are local. In no instance will there be more than one participant placed with the same healer at the same time period.

Specific monolingual Maya healers may require an interpreter. Participants normally conduct 3 to 4 hours a day of ethnographic participant observation or shadow work for twenty days during the four week period. **This totals 70-90 hours total of ethnographic shadow work with the variety of traditional Maya and allopathic healers.** This number of research hours can be rated between 3-5 college credits. **OSEA assigns a 4 credit value.**

Learning Project

Students conduct ethnographic participant observation with healers. This work is research in some senses of the word. However, given the amount of time in the program, we are defining this activity as a Learning Project, that is a project of experiential learning that is not structured or designed as a fully coherent research project in anthropology. Nonetheless, participants are guided in seminar to design their projects by specifying learning objectives, research issues, and questions. These then guide the conduct of the work with healers and during the cultural immersion in Maya communities.

This ethnographic participant observation is a type of work that includes writing up field notes and, within certain restrictions defined by healers, limited audiovisual documentation. This ethnographic note-taking is structured by the Learning Project of each participant and culminates in two final products, the Student Conference Presentation and the Project Portfolio.

The Learning Project is an individually designed project based on the learning objectives of each participant. The Conference Presentation is statement of learning (or research) objectives, achievements, and the results. This includes a discussion of the experiential learning/research process as part of what was learned. The Project Portfolio is an extended written version of this presentation and also includes all research materials that were collected during the process (e.g., field notes, analytical notes, images, video, audio recordings, drawings, and samples).

Participants in the OSEA program are provided instructed in the methods to do this work in the context of the classroom based coursework, specifically the seminars.

Classroom-Based Coursework: Seminar, Workshop, and Forum

Classroom-based coursework consists of four types of learning activities. The Seminar are typically three hours, Workshops are 2 hours, and the Ethnographic Forum sessions are 2-3 hours. The Student Research Conference (discussed separately below) is based on 15 minute presentations by each participant. There is a discussion period estimated at about 20-25 minutes presentation. The total hours varies from 2 to 4 hours. **The classroom based contact hours is between 30 and 36 hours, equivalent to 2-3 college credit hours. OSEA assigns this value at 2 credits.**

Seminar

The seminars are more formally organized classroom settings in which specific readings and topics are addressed in an graduate seminar style dynamic. Participants are provided an introduction to Medical Anthropology and read extensively on Maya culture specifically focused on health, healing, spiritualism, religion, and identity.

The core issues that are treated in seminar are Maya culture and identity, cultural contexts of Maya health and healing, cultural relativism and understanding of culturally different systems of health and healing, ethnography, research methods, and health focused research ethics, anthropological ethics, ethics in ethnography. It is fundamentally important at the onset of the course that participants are trained in culturally appropriate and ethically correct ways of doing research or shadow work with healers in the allopathic tradition and in Maya culture.

Workshops

Workshops are centered around the presentation by a community member. These persons are invited by special invitation because of their own knowledge and abilities to communicate to osea participants in a formal setting (versus in a one-one field work or ethnographic situation). These persons and topics of discussion are defined on site in the course of the program according to specific interests of participants. Thus for example, Possible speakers and topics include:

- INAH personnel who have special knowledge of archaeological sites, plants, Maya culture of previous generations. [INAH = Instituto Nacional Antropología e Historia; the federal agency in charge of heritage protection and research]
- Tour guides who have knowledge of pre-Columbian culture and heritage sites.
- Community members who have worked in herbal medicine, government clinics, cultural revitalization programs focused on health and healing
- Health providers from private or government clinics
- School teachers who can discuss cultural attitudes in more rural communities

In addition, OSEA is always on the lookout to invite any anthropologist (or other scholar) that might be passing by Pisté and Chichén Itzá during the summer. These may be more impromptu and may be less directly related to or focused on the specific learning and research interests of participants in any given program.

Ethnography Forum

Ethnography forums are conceptualized as open discussions in which the participants discuss in an informal or free manner their experience and learning with the healers. These debriefings are conceived to allow participants to share their achievements, successes, frustrations, troubles, and any other issues regarding the learning and educational process. These open forums allow students to learn from each other as well as attain guidance and mentoring from the OSEA teaching staff. As well, one on one sessions maybe required or requested by participants.

The Student Research Conference

OSEA holds a Student Research Conference at the end of each program. All participants in each program are required to fully participate as presenters and as audience. Of course, the content, structure and nature of the presentation varies according to the program. Friends of OSEA from the community, such as homestay members, can be invited as audience.

The Research Conference helps students to develop their ethnographic analysis and understandings that they are writing up and submitting at the end of the program as part of the final project or final portfolio. Thus, this assignment helps students to begin analyzing and interpreting the data and results of their fieldwork in terms of the conceptual issues, analytical frameworks, and theoretical approaches developed in the course of the program in which they are participating. This presentation is conceptualized and modeled on professional academic paper presentation of 15 minutes.

As audience, students are expected to develop questions and constructive comments and feedback to presenters. Every participant is required to make at least one constructive commentary/question of each presenter. Note that this is definitely not the way professional academic conferences work! Thus, although you may “hate” this in the moment, it is something to treasure in the future as a rare opportunity to learn. This participation requirement therefore can often make the Q&A for each presentation last at least 15 minutes if not significantly longer than the actual presentation. Presenters are expected to incorporate the feedback from the Q&A in their final written work. Thus, it is all the more important for audience to take seriously their role in the discussion period.

These presentations are videotaped as part of the ongoing documentation archive and placed on YouTube at the OSEA video channel or on the OSEA Facebook pages/groups.

Professional Development Opportunity. The Student Research Conference is an activity that helps students learn about the expectations of a professional anthropologist or other academic scholar. To enhance this training, all student are invited to participate on an OSEA organized panel at the annual professional meetings of the Society for Applied Anthropology, usually held in late March or early April. Participation is completely voluntary and outside the scope of the class evaluation. OSEA provides this opportunity for those students who are strongly thinking about pursuing graduate degree programs and would like to be able to increase their professional experience and network professors and practicing anthropologists.

Schedule of Activities

Week 1.

- Seminar 1. Ethnographic Methods. Participant Observation, Medical Shadowing
Seminar 2. Ethics, Cultural Sensitivity, Culturally Appropriate Research
Seminar 3. Reading & Discussion on Health and Healing in Maya Culture
Workshop: Guest presentation on select topic by community member.

Week 2.

- Seminar 4. Ethnographic Methods. Ethnographic Interviewing
Seminar 5. Reading & Discussion on Health and Healing in Maya Culture, Part II.
Ethnography Forum: Participant Report on Ongoing Work, Success, Failures,
Frustrations, Questions of Understanding, Open Discussion & Mentoring
Workshop: Guest presentation on select topic by community member.

Week 3.

- Seminar 6. Reading & Discussion on Health and Healing in Maya Culture, Part III.
Workshop: Guest presentation on select topic by community member.
Ethnography Forum: Participant Report on Ongoing Work, Success, Failures,
Frustrations, Questions of Understanding, Open Discussion & Mentoring

Week 4.

- Workshop: Guest presentation on select topic by community member.
Research Lab. Individualized writing up, archiving research materials, finalize project
Student Research Conference. Formal Conference Presentations on Learning Project

Assignments and Grading

Participants are expected to complete the conduct of their ethnographic shadowing with healers, the final portfolio (which includes a final written analysis), and a presentation in the student conference. The course is an experiential learning program. Grading is based on full completion of work — this points to the portfolio! — according to the specific and detailed instructions for portfolio and presentation. The portfolio is a highly significant component of the learning. It is labor intensive and detailed. Time during every day must be set aside to the this work. Your final grade is otherwise put in jeopardy by failure to devote disciplined attention to the work of writing field notes and archiving materials.

Learning through Immersion and Ethnography

Participation in this program requires students to maximize their time with local community members. During the “off-time” from program activities, you are expected to be spending your time engaging locals, making friends, and *living in* the community. This specifically means not hanging out with other OSEA students. For every hour you spend hanging out with OSEA students you lose 3-4 hours of time in Pisté. You not only are wasting your time, but your money. Evaluate the reasons why you are in the program and make the most of your decision. This is a unique and rare opportunity. Maximize it!

OSEA Maya Health & Healing Readings

There are a few sources that can be bought from Amazon that are worthwhile. OSEA provides you with the majority of texts in pdf form. If you have special interests in specific topics then the following can be very helpful for you. These purchases are out of pocket. These are not covered in your tuition and fees. However, with a few exceptions, most are fairly inexpensive especially when purchasing as a used book.

“Required” / Strongly Encouraged Books for purchase

Maya Medicine: Traditional Healing in Yucatán. [Marianna Appel Kunow](#) . This is an ethnography of healers conducted in Pisté during the 1990s. (chaps. 3,4,5 are in pdf on dvd)

Rainforest Home Remedies: The Maya Way To Heal Your Body and Replenish Your Soul [Rosita Arvigo](#) , [Nadine Epstein](#) . Robust descriptions of disease and treatments based on medical research with healers among Belizean Maya.

Recommended (depending on your focus & interest)

Birth in Four Cultures : A Cross-cultural Investigation of Childbirth in Yucatan, Holland, Sweden, & US [Brigitte Jordan](#) , [Robbie Davis-Floyd](#) (chaps on Yucatán in pdf on dvd)

Wind in the Blood: Mayan Healing & Chinese Medicine. [Hernan Garcia](#) et. al. cultural anthropological comparative approach is used to provide an overarching conceptual framework of Maya health and healing. Brief but extensive descriptions of cultural notions. Based on work by Mexican medical anthropologists/public health researchers. Warning: Oversized coffee table like book! It is not a travel-friendly item. Hard copy in OSEA.

Maya Shamanism Today: Connecting with the Cosmos in Rural Yucatan (Revised 2nd) [Bruce Love](#) -- Too expensive! Look for used copy. General introduction to ritual

Rainforest Remedies: 100 Healing Herbs of Belize. [Rosita Arvigo](#) , [Michael Balick](#) , Intro is basic reading in pdf on dvd. Good catalog of plants useful resource for herbalist folks. Essential companion to the other Arvigo book. The Sastun book below is new age story.

Foundational Studies of Maya Health and Healing in full text pdf

Morris Steggerda. Nearly complete pdf archive. Steggerda conducted a wide range of studies in physical and biological anthropology of the Maya based on Pisté, Yucatán.
Robert and Margaret Redfield. Near full text of Chan Kom and related publications; key to the ethnography of Yucatán, including cultural anthropology of health & healing.
John Sosa. Maya Sky, Maya World. Dissertation. Important study of community rituals; great, thorough transcriptions & analysis of prayers
Ralph Roys, Ritual of the Bacabs. Colonial period Maya text filled descriptions and discussions of diseases, treatments, prayers. (find it in “Library: Yucatán” folder)
Ralph Roys, Ethno-botany of the Maya. THE “bible.” If you see it drop under \$500 used on Amazon, buy it! If you locate a pdf of it, I will buy you shrimp tacos in Mérida.

New Age Maya “White Shamanism” Literature. Short List

1. Sastun: My Apprenticeship with a Maya Healer [Rosita Arvigo](#) , [Nadine Epstein](#) (Contributor), [Marilyn Yaquinto](#) (Contributor)
2. Ix Chel Wisdom: 7 Teachings from the Mayan Sacred Feminine . [Shonagh Home](#) , [Sherry Folb](#) (Editor), [Magrit Baurecht](#) (Illustrator)
3. My Journey To Becoming A Mayan Shaman. [Zack Jezek](#)
4. [Hunbatz Men](#). Secrets of Mayan Science/Religion
5. [Hunbatz Men](#). The 8 Calendars of the Maya: Pleiadian Cycle and Key to Destiny.

Pre-departure Reading

There are a few fundamental texts in the medical anthropology of traditional Maya medicine, health and healing. The primary reading for this OSEA program focuses on the ethnographic methods and cultural content. There will be a few texts to read and discuss on-site in the course of the program, but these will be limited in number and motivated by the research interests of the program participants. Thus, we avoid burdening you with excess materials in order to focus on the experiential learning through ethnographic participant observation with various types of healers. Independent fieldwork is interspersed with seminars and workshops during each week and mentoring to discuss readings and learning issues that emerge in context. Readings may be added later as additional resource.

To best prepare for this type of immersion course, we ask you to structure your pre-departure time with your own schedule of reading of the following items. Unless otherwise indicated, these are located in pdf on the DVD. Of course, read according to your interests!!!

Basic Background, Ideally read As Much as Possible before Arrival

- M. Redfield, Disease and Its Treatment in Dzitas. Crucial text on “traditional” healing.
- Robert Redfield and Villa Rojas, Chan Kom. Ch 10, 11; Appendix D (midwifery); and select pps. on Hméen required. Ch. 7 & 9 on religious-spiritual beliefs is read on-site.
- Kunow, Maya Medicine. Read Ch 1,2 and 5 before arrival (short 8-12 pps chapters)
- Arvigo, Rainforest Remedies, pp. 1-27. Basic background & core framework

Focused Studies of various types in Yucatan

- Kunow, Maya Medicine. Ch 1,2,3,4,5,6,8. Plant catalog used as on-site resource
- Steggerda, Maya Remedies. Skim thru for familiarity. Will be resource to re-read on-site
- Steggerda, Food of Maya & Maize and Maya. For those interested in food & nutrition.
- McCollough, Hot-Cold Syndrome in Yucatán.
- Hinojosa, Bone-Setting in Highland Guatemala
- Jordan, Birth in Four Cultures. Yucatán chapter and ethnographic method
- Victoria Beltran, undergrad thesis on Diabetes in Yaxuna (in Spanish).
- Ethnobotany of Chaya (a spinach like plant identified as super healthy/ “medicina”)

Cultural-Political Analyses of Maya Health, Ethnobotany, Medicine in Chiapas

1. Igor Ayora-Diaz, Imagining Authenticity in Maya Medicine in Chiapas
2. Pedro Pitarch, Political Uses of Maya Medicine
3. Robert Nigh, Maya Medicine in the Bio-Gaze