

we go. we make house calls.
we build health systems. we stay.



Partners in Health

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

...and more

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.

□ **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.

Meet Paul Farmer (1959-)



Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, is an American anthropologist and physician, but also an **avid human rights activist**, fighting to **provide health care for the world's poorest people**. He has become something of a celebrity in medical anthropology, a sub-field of cultural anthropology, which **examines cultural, social and other factors to discover how they influence health**. He has also worked on **fighting**

infectious diseases and **promoting basic human rights** in both Peru and Russia. Being a physician and medical anthropologist, he has a **unique insight into the understanding of native healers**, while being able to offer his own treatments. Farmer has received many awards, including the **Margaret Mead Award** from the American Anthropological Association and a **MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Award**.

[*Learn more...*](#)

Meet Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

Margaret Mead is often regarded as the **original rebel anthropologist of the United States**, her easy-to-follow style of writing, **controversial research regarding sex and outspoken personality** heightened her fame even beyond the world of anthropology. Her research brought her to the South Pacific, specifically Samoa, where **she suggested that culture, not just biology, has an impact on adolescent behavior** (this was published in her first book, “Coming of Age in Samoa”). Through close observation of Samoan children, and the ease with which they entered adulthood, Mead came to the **conclusion that teenage angst and stress had more to do with external factors than anything internal.**

She continued to return to Samoa for research, but also collected information in Papua New Guinea and Bali. This breadth of information led her to **publish more than 30 books and hundreds of other works.** Her openness about **her own methodologies as well as addressing sensitive research topics such as sexuality,** made her one of the **most talked about anthropologists** and read authors in the world.



Meet João Biehl



João Biehl is **Susan Dod Brown Professor of Anthropology and Woodrow Wilson School Faculty Associate at Princeton University**. He is also the **Co-Director of Princeton's Program in Global Health and Health Policy**.

Prof. Biehl's main research and teaching interests center on medical anthropology, the social studies of science and technology, global health, pharmaceuticals, religion and society, subjectivity, and ethnography and critical theory (with a regional focus on Latin America and Brazil).

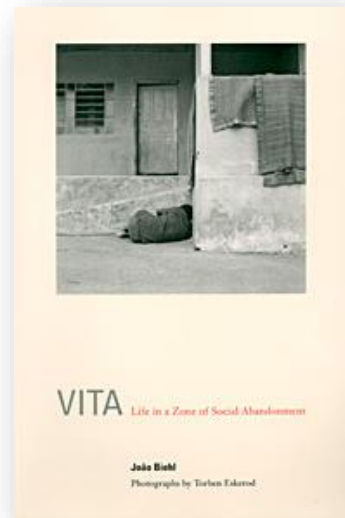
He has **authored award winning books**, *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*, and *Will to Live: AIDS Therapies and the Politics of Survival-ethnographic studies of the experience and treatment of mental illness and AIDS*, respectively. Both **explore new geographies of access and marginalization** that have emerged alongside pharmaceutical globalization.

Prof. Biehl's present ethnographic research explores the **social impact of large-scale treatment programs in resource-poor settings**, the role of the judiciary in administering public health, and the emergence of the category of patient-citizen-consumers in Brazil.

[*full bio*](#)

Sample Publications

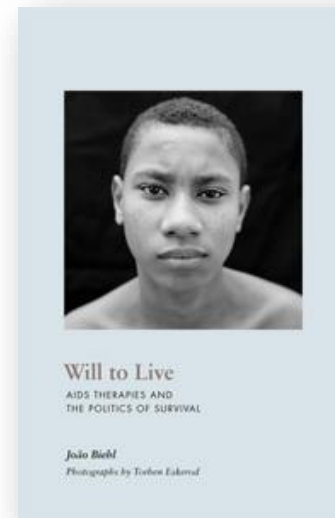
- [Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment](#), João Biehl
- [Will to Live: AIDS Therapies and the Politics of Survival](#), João Biehl
- [The Valley of Lamentation \(manuscript\)](#), João Biehl
- [When the People Come First: Evidence, Actuality, and Theory in Global Health](#) (manuscript), João Biehl
- [To Repair the World: Paul Farmer Speaks to the Next Generation](#), Paul Farmer
- [The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down](#), Anne Fadiman
- [Improvising Medicine: An African Oncology Ward in an Emerging Cancer Epidemic](#), Julie Livingston



Vita is the end-station on the road of poverty. It is the place where living beings go when they are no longer considered people.

Of love there is nothing
Only emptiness
What will become of the world?

“I am part of the origins,
not just of language,
but of people...”



Beyond the technical fix.
Persistent inequalities.
The fragmentation of efforts.
The unfinished.

To think of life in terms of limits
and crossroads.
The right to a future.

Health policies need to be
directed at *people*, not simply
disease.

Medical Anthropology Track @ Princeton

The Department of Anthropology's Medical Anthropology Track (MedAnth) is for students interested in all aspects of medicine, from biology to therapeutic systems to cultural ideas and practices of health and wellbeing. Choosing this track allows students who are interested in the sciences, policy, the humanities and the sub-field of medical anthropology to focus their undergraduate training around these topics. This track requires nine courses total; four are required and five are electives that include departmental courses focused on the mind, body or health systems/structures (see examples from the list below). Students in this track are allowed to substitute one of the five elective courses with a class taught within the Department of Anthropology but outside MedAnth. Students are also allowed to take two cognates as part of their nine departmental courses.

[Read more...](#)

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)
- [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)

Applying MD/PhD in Anthropology

at the University of Pennsylvania

**Never believe
that a few
caring people
can't change
the world. For,
indeed, that's
all who ever
have..**

..Margaret Mead

- The admissions process for the MD-PhD program in Anthropology is coordinated through the MD-PhD office. Admissions decisions are made jointly in an integrated process by the Anthropology Graduate Group, the MD-PhD Program, and the Medical School.
- Applicants submit their application via AMCAS. In addition to all materials in the AMCAS and Penn MD-PhD supplemental application, there is one additional essay that addresses the factors that have encouraged you to seek an education from Penn GSAS, including any significant personal or professional experiences related to your program of study.
- Candidates who are selected for interview will then be asked to complete additional application materials by the Anthropology Graduate Group.

Sample MD/PhD Curriculum

at the University of Pennsylvania

Years 1-2: Primarily MD

Summer	Some students matriculate in June for an early lab rotation
MS1	Medical school courses one graduate school course per term
Summer	Lab rotation
MS2	Medical school course work and a graduate seminar or independent study. Clinical work, Board exams and scholarly activity.

Years 3-6: Primarily PhD

GS 1	Students take full time graduate school course work (usually 3 classes per term), and two more lab rotations. (MD-PhD students receive substantial transfer credit from the graduate groups which allows them to complete course requirements in one year). Thesis mentor is selected.
GS 2-4	Students are working on their thesis research, and participating in Clinical Connections .

Years 7-8: Primarily MD

MS3	Students defend their dissertation, typically sometime in the fall semester. After that they take a clinical warm up course, and then resume clinical clerkships and electives.
MS4	More clinical course work, Boards part 2, applying and interviewing for residency (usually), and sometimes conducting additional research.

Sample MS Curriculum

at Boston University School of Medicine

Fall	Spring	Summer
<p>History & Theory of Medical Anthropology I Medical Anthropology & Qualitative Research Methods and Design Service-Learning Internship I Two Elective Courses ePortfolio Professional Development Workshop</p>	<p>History & Theory of Medical Anthropology II IRB Proposal Development and Writing Service-Learning Internship II Two Elective Courses ePortfolio Professional Development Workshop</p>	<p>Summer Fieldwork Seminar I & II Thesis-Related Fieldwork Professional Development Workshop</p>
<p>Reading Ethnography in Medical Anthropology Medical Anthropological and Qualitative Data Analysis Medical Anthropology Thesis Writing I One Elective Course ePortfolio Professional Development Workshop</p>	<p>Writing Ethnography in Medical Anthropology Medical Anthropology Thesis Writing II Two Elective Courses Thesis: Completion of Thesis and approval through thesis defense ePortfolio Professional Development Workshop Presentation of Thesis Findings</p>	

For More Information...

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

