

Health, Culture and Inequality Studies
Bachelor of Arts

Sample A

Proposed By:
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Before coming to the University of Maryland, I had gone to Jewish Day School for my entire academic career. While this consistency certainly helped to build a strong foundation of knowledge and pride in my heritage, it failed to provide me with an appreciation for and an understanding of other cultures. I was aware of this void coming out of high school and I knew that when I began selecting which classes to take at Maryland I wanted to fill it in. While browsing through the available classes during my orientation, I found the two most interesting classes that were still open and filled the core requirements I wanted to fill. Both courses happened to be African American Studies courses.

Both classes explored the historical and present-day statuses of the general African American in the United States using a multi-disciplinary approach. They examined the social, political and economic systems of our country and what kind of implications each has. As a student, my intellect was challenged, but more importantly, as a human being, my values were challenged. I was forced to re-evaluate every pre-conceived notion I had of culture, of class, of power, of race etc. In doing so, I realized both how deeply embedded structural discrimination is in our society and how detrimental it can be to anyone who fails to fit into a specific mold. This realization provided me with a lens through which to see the world that focused my vision on oppression and inequality. Since its conception, I have fostered this lens by taking related courses and generally opening my mind to values and understandings very different from my own.

I have wanted to be a pediatric oncologist for quite a while. My reasoning has always been deeply rooted in my interest in science and my desire to shed light on dark

and hopeless situations. This desire has certainly not wavered, however I think my new lens has changed my ideas of how to accomplish my goal. Medical doctors examine individual patients, determine what is causing his or her troubles and based on that determination, prescribe remedies. In the United States, these remedies include prescription medicines, complicated operations, intensive therapy and any other technologically advanced form of treatment to which Western medicine has given credence. I certainly agree that these treatments have unbelievable potential to benefit those who need them, however, I do not believe they are the only forms of treatment that should be considered for every patient.

American culture has a superiority complex. It believes its way is the best and therefore subjugates lifestyles that reflect different values and practices instead of making attempts to compromise. This subjugation, whether deliberate or inadvertent, comes from the intolerance of difference. This subjugation strips members from other cultures of their ability to express conflicting values and it strips our culture of its ability to respond to diverse individuals in the most effective manner.

In terms of healthcare, sick people are far more likely to get better if they are given treatment in which they believe by doctors in whom they trust. As a doctor, I want to understand patients. I want to understand why not every sick person believes that aggressive medication and risky surgery will cure whatever his or her illness. I want to understand why not every culture values technology or the most modern advancements more than traditional methods of treatment. Through learning about various cultures, recognizing their differences and appreciating the reasons behind those differences, I believe I will be a more open and more relatable physician. Then I will not only be

shedding light on dark situations because of my ability to administer medical treatment, but more importantly, I will be doing so because of my ability to understand and work with each individual based on who they are and not based simply on their sickness. Medical treatment cannot only be the result of a scientific approach, it must also be the result of a multi-dimensional approach; one that considers the patient, his or her background, his or her beliefs and his or her values.

I am pursuing the Individual Studies Program because it gives me the opportunity to create this multidimensional approach through creating a curriculum that integrates every discipline I could think of that relates to culture, inequality and health. I believe that venturing beyond science or any single discipline for that matter through IVSP, will assist me on my journey toward becoming the most successful and understanding doctor I can be, as well as the most successful and understanding person I can be.

Health, Culture and Inequality Studies

Health, Culture and Inequality studies can be defined as the study of cultural difference and inequality and their impact on healthcare. Cultural difference often leads to lack of understanding which can develop into hate, discrimination and putting one's own views above any views that differ. These attitudes create hierarchies that subjugate those who do not adhere to societal norms. These hierarchies then give rise to grave inequalities that manifest themselves in public systems such as the healthcare system, decreasing their effectiveness and ability to help the people in this country successfully. With this area of study, I hope to understand these manifestations and find feasible means with which to counter them.

Before I can examine the effects of inequality, I must understand where it comes from. I will therefore need to take courses that study **the origins and nature of inequality** (SOCY241 or SOCY441, SOCY 424, AASP100, HONR278F). Inequalities exist everywhere yet they are often hard to detect because they have become so normalized. By studying the experiences of victims of inequality as well as the causes of such experiences, I will be able to understand how the seeds for the problems our society faces today, were planted.

Similarly, before I can examine the effects of cultural difference, I will need to understand **the nature and significance of cultural difference** (COMM482, PSYC354, ANTH260, HONR299F). In the past few decades, the majority of the population growth in the United States has come from immigrants and their families. Such growth has given rise to many different cultures making this country more diverse than most can imagine. By studying how different cultures function and the reasoning behind their differences, I

will be able to understand and appreciate cultures different from my own, instead of simply assuming they are primitive and in need of development.

I will then look at **the role of inequality and cultural difference in societal institutions** (SOCY305, SOCY424, ECON375, AASP101, AASP301, HONR299F, HONR278F, HONR348J) . Lack of understanding leads to feelings of superiority and the unwillingness to accept what strays from the norms we, along with our societies have set. Unfortunately sometimes, American culture struggles to understand the concept of cultural relativity and it assumes that its way is the best way. Consequently it does not equip itself with the tools it needs to accommodate different values or different ways of life causing grave inequalities wherever societal influence is prevalent. By studying the consequences of this superior, intolerant approach, I will be able to understand the extent to which it damages the individuals and communities being rejected as well as the societies doing the rejecting.

My final area of coursework will focus the previous topic more narrowly in order to study **the role of inequality and cultural difference in healthcare systems** (HLTH140, HLTH230, HLTH 391, EPIB610, EPIB622, ANTH410). The healthcare system is a dangerous place for lack of cultural understanding. When it comes to medical care, if a patient and doctor are not on the same page, successful treatment may be impossible to administer leading to disaster. Western medicine, when presented with a medical condition, “would rather medicate it, scan it, suture it, splint it, excise it, anesthetize it, or autopsy it than communicate with it” (Fadiman 273). It often seems to be more concerned with treating the disease than treating the person who has the disease. However with many patients, especially in a society as diverse as the United States, the

proper treatment may differ from patient to patient, even if they are suffering from the same medical condition. Each patient has a history, a socio-economic status, a culture and a set of values that affects what treatment will suit their needs, and those components cannot be ignored. In addition to explaining how the United States healthcare systems operate, these courses will demonstrate this multidimensionality on both micro and macro scales.

Sample A

Learning Objectives and Future Goals

I am constructing this area of study in an attempt to broaden my definition and understanding of healthcare. I hope to attend medical school after graduating from the University of Maryland and therefore I am currently fulfilling the basic science requirements I will need for that application process. In addition to those courses however, I know it will be greatly beneficial for me to establish an in depth understanding of how culture and inequality influence (or should influence) medical treatment. If I am able to approach every patient as an individual with individual needs and values, then I know my ability to help him or her will be greatly strengthened.

As of now, I am very interested in The Medical School for International Health at Ben Gurion University in Israel. Its unique curriculum and programming strives to provide its students with a diverse set of medical skills in primary care, community, preventive, and population-based medicine. When I first heard about this program, I did not understand the value of having such a skill set. Now however, after having been introduced to the topic of culture difference and how it affects society, I know I want to be a part of an institution that integrates culture into its educational agenda. Health, Culture and Inequality Studies will provide me with both a strong foundation of cultural understanding and the ability to apply that understanding to the medical field. Furthermore, I think this area of study could lead me to either this medical school program or another one like it.

For my senior paper, I would like to focus on a specific public health issue, most likely a particular disease, which affects members of different cultures in different ways. My current plan is to examine how culture impacts cancer at each stage (preventative

treatment, diagnosis, post-diagnosis treatment, mortality etc.). After reading various studies conducted on the social determinants of several diseases, I have realized that there has been a significant amount of research already performed in regard to how certain lifestyles affect the susceptibility and mortality of certain diseases. There has also been a great deal of research conducted on the topic of patient/doctor relationships and how they influence the effectiveness of treatment. I would like to use my senior paper as an opportunity to blend these two approaches together.

I hope to ask the question “can doctors treat patients effectively and successfully if the two parties come from and believe in two conflicting value systems?” This question is too often ignored because employees of Western healthcare systems often assume their treatments are the most advanced, effective and successful. I hope to answer this question through comparing and contrasting how United States healthcare systems approach cancer with how a culture with a completely different value system approaches that same issue. I realize I have almost two years before I will be writing this report and during that time, I will be exposed to a large amount of information. Taking that into consideration, I am not fully committed to this topic and I will keep my options open.

Creating this major is my attempt to get as much out of my college education as possible. In my first three semesters at the University of Maryland, I have found a few areas of study that I really care about. This major will combine those areas and hone the lens that has already begun to transform the way I see the world and more specifically, the field of medicine, with a more open and understanding point of view.

Coursework by Concentration

**Courses already taken*

The Origins and nature of inequality

- SOCY 241 3** **Inequality in American Society:** The dynamics of inequality: its social production, politics, future, and ideological bases. Utopian communities, efforts to eliminate inequality
- SOCY 441 3** **Social Stratification and Inequality:** The sociological study of social class, status, and power. Topics include theories of stratification, correlates of social position, functions and dysfunctions of social inequality, status inconsistency, and social mobility.
- SOCY 424 3** **Sociology of Race Relations:** Analysis of race-related issues, with a primary focus on American society. The historical emergence, development, and Institutionalization of racism; the impact of racism on its victims; and racially based conflict.
- AASP 100* 3** **Introduction to African American Studies:** Significant aspects of the history of African Americans with particular emphasis on the evolution and development of black communities from slavery to the present. Interdisciplinary introduction to social, political, legal and economic roots of contemporary problems faced by blacks in the United States with applications to the lives of other racial and ethnic minorities in the Americas and in other societies.

The Nature and Significance of Cultural Difference

- COMM 482 3** **Intercultural Communication:** The major variables of communication in an intercultural context: cultural, racial and national differences; stereotypes; values; cultural assumptions; and verbal and nonverbal channels.
- PSYC 354 3** **Cross-Cultural Psychology:** Cultural components in theory and research in personality, social, and community psychology. Interplay of individual, ethnic, and cultural factors in psychosocial growth and well-being, cross-cultural and cross-ethnic communication, and counseling and psychotherapeutic interactions.
- ANTH 260 3** **Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology and Linguistics:** Culture and social relationships in a wide variety of settings from

small-scale to complex societies. An overview of how anthropology analyzes human behavior. Particular attention to the relationship between language and culture.

HONR 299F* 3 **Gender and Globalization:** What is the relationship between gender and globalization? How are Examines how women and men affected by the political, economic, cultural, and geographic processes brought along by globalization.

The Role of Inequality and Cultural Difference in Societal Institutions

SOCY 305 3 **Scarcity and Modern Society:** Resource depletion and the deterioration of the environment. Relationship to lifestyles, individual consumer choices, cultural values, and institutional failures. Projection of the future course of American society on the basis of the analysis of scarcity, theories of social change, current trends, social movements, government actions, and the futurist literature.

SOCY 424 3 **Sociology of Race Relations:** Analysis of race-related issues, with a primary focus on American society. The historical emergence, development, and institutionalization of racism; the impact of racism on its victims; and racially based conflict.

ECON 375 3 **Economics of Poverty and Discrimination:** The causes of the persistence of low income groups; the relationship of poverty to technological change, to economic growth, and to education and training; economic results of discrimination; proposed remedies for poverty and discrimination.

AASP 101* 3 **Public Policy and the Black Community:** The impact of public policies on the black community and the role of the policy process in affecting the social, economic and political well-being of minorities. Particular attention given to the post-1960 to present era.

AASP 301* 3 **Applied Policy Analysis and the Black Community:** Development and application of the tools needed for examining the effectiveness of alternative policy options confronting minority communities. Review policy research methods used in forming and evaluating policies. Examination of the policy process

HONR 278F 3 **Honors Seminar: Housing, Social Welfare, Affordability, and Design:** This course will highlight benchmarks of European and American housing forms and reforms over the last 150 years, from the standpoint of policy (advocacy, legislation, funding and

implementation); race, gender and class; community planning; urban and architectural design .

HONR 299F* 3 **Gender and Globalization:** What is the relationship between gender and globalization? This class examines how women and men affected by the political, economic, cultural, and geographic processes brought along by globalization.

HONR 348J 3 **Contemporary Social Issues:** This class examines the origins, purpose, and nature of social institutions (i.e. affirmative action) in hopes of assessing their effectiveness. In this same light, we will look at the origins and purposes of multiculturalism. Are diversity and multiculturalism simply an acknowledgment of new social realities? Or are they the result of out-of-control left-wing political correctness?

The Role of Inequality and Cultural Difference in Healthcare Systems

HLTH 140* 3 **Personal and Community Health:** Meaning and significance of mental and social health as related to the individual and to society; important phases of national health problems; constructive methods of promoting health of the individual and the community.

HLTH 230 3 **Introduction to Health Behavior:** Psychological, social psychological, and sociological approaches to the following health areas: development of health attitudes and behavior, patient-provider interaction and the organization of health care.

HLTH 391 3 **Principles of Community Health I:** Broad overview of community health. Health promotion, consumer health, public health, school health, environmental health, preventive medicine, human biology and the health care system are examined. Each area's contribution to community health is discussed.

EPIB 610 3 **Foundations of Epidemiology:** Introduction to the discipline of epidemiology and its applications to health issues and practices. Basic epidemiologic concepts and methods will be covered.

EPIB 622 3 **Social Determinants of Health:** Overview of the major social variables that affect public health, including socioeconomic status, poverty, income distribution, race, social networks/support, community cohesion, psychological stress, gender, and work and neighborhood environment.

OR

- EPIB623 3** **Epidemiology of Health Disparities:** Determinants that influence health outcomes of the most disadvantaged populations in the United States. Focus on social factors contributing to health disparities and inequities in the US.
- ANTH 410 3** **Theory and Practice of Health and Community Development;** Introduction to the relationships between culture, health status and practices, and the design of community-based initiatives. The focus is on the use of anthropological knowledge and skills in the analysis of such relationships and in the design of community-based initiatives.

Sample A

Individual Studies

IVSP 317	1	Progress Report
IVSP 318	3-9	Independent Learning Activities
IVSP 420	3	Senior Paper
Writing Craft Course	3	TBD (choose from list on website)

Credits from 300+ level courses (excluding IVSP courses):

30 / 27 required credits, in 10 courses.

Total Credits: 86-92

Current Status:

15 / 60 credits completed, 45 credits remaining.

Sample A

CORE Coursework

Fundamental Studies			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
FE	ENGL 101	Introduction to Writing	Fall 2006
FM	SAT		
JE	?????		

DISTRIBUTIVE STUDIES			
Humanities and the Arts			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
HL	HONR278Y	Poems that Matter: How Reading and Writing them can Transform Our Lives	Fall 2007
HA	HONR278F	Housing, Social Welfare, Affordability, and Design	Spring 2008
HO	PHIL100	Introduction to Philosophy	Fall 2006
Science and Mathematics			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
PL/LL	CHEM131	General Chemistry	Spring 2006
PS,PL,LS,LL	BSCI105	Principles of Biology I	Fall 2006
MS	MATH221	Elementary Calculus II	Fall 2007
Social Sciences and History			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
SH	AASP100	Intro to African American History	Fall 2006
SB	AASP101	Public Policy in the Black Community	Fall 2006
SB	HONR299F	Gender and Globalization	Spring 2007

ADVANCED STUDIES			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
	TBD		

DIVERSITY			
Category	Course	Title	Semester Taken
D	AASP100	Intro to African American History	Fall 2006

Coursework by Semester

Spring 2008

COMM482: Intercultural Communication	(3)
HONR278F: Housing, Social Welfare, Affordability, and Design	(3)
HLTH230: Introduction to Health Behavior	(3)
HONR348J Honors Seminar: Contemporary Social Issues	(3)
PHYS121: Fundamentals of Physics I	(4)
CHEM271: General Chemistry II	<u>(4)</u>
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Fall 2008

HLTH391: Principles of Community Health I	(3)
SOCY305: Scarcity and Modern Society	(3)
ANTH260: Introduction to Socio-cultural Anthropology and Linguistics	(3)
HONR 288W Economics, Markets, and Social Policy	(3)
PHYS122: Fundamentals of Physics II	<u>(4)</u>
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Spring 2009

EPIB 610: Foundations of Epidemiology	(3)	
SOCY441: Social Stratification and Inequality	(3)	(3)
PSYC354 : Cross-Cultural Psychology	(3)	
Writing Craft Course: TBD	(3)	
BSCI230: Cell Biology	(4)	
IVSP317: Progress Report	<u>(1)</u>	
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Fall 2009

ANTH410: Theory/ Practice of Health and Community Development	(3)
ECON375 : Economics of Poverty and Discrimination	(3)
SOCY424 : Sociology of Race Relations	(3)
EPIB622: Social Determinants of Health	(3)
IVSP 420: Senior Paper/Project	<u>(3)</u>
	15