Course Description:

This course will explore the range of complementary, alternative, and indigenous healing traditions that are found in ethnic sub-cultures of the United States, and how social work practitioners may collaborate with these various healing traditions. The underlying premise of the course proposes that various forms of healing are central to an individual’s cultural values. Knowledge of healing traditions can increase the cultural sensitivity of social work practitioners to various client groups and improve the ability to collaborate with alternative healing practitioners. The course will look at practice case examples in which collaboration between Western credentialed professionals and indigenous healers was central to the helping process. This course will also explore recent research on the efficacy of complementary healing practices that is being promoted by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Complementary Medicine.

Course Content:

This course will survey the range of healing traditions found in the US: e.g. energy based systems such as polarity, reiki, acupuncture, acupressure, reflexology, iridology, etc.; spirit based systems such as curanderismo, espiritismo, santeria, voodoo, spiritualism, faith healing, etc.; body based systems such as myo-massage, naprapathy, osteopathy, chiropractic, sacro-cranial massage, homeopathy, etc. Because the Western, allopathic healing system that emerged in the 20th century is often competing with alternative healing systems, the course will also present the political and economic issues that surround these alternative, healing traditions. Most indigenous healing systems, no matter what their underlying cosmology, have also developed a complex system of herbal/pharmacological interventions. These will be briefly explored – i.e. from asfidity to CVS.

Course Design:

The course will involve class presentations, experiential learning, demonstrations by various healers, critical discussions, and student presentation of in vivo experiences with healers in the
surrounding community. The class will be graded on a pass/fail basis, and because of the experiential nature of the course, class attendance will be mandatory.

**Course Objectives: (Instructor’s Goals)**

- Survey the various forms of alternative/indigenous healing that exist in the USA
- Review the major lines of research that are being conducted on complementary healing
- Describe the connection between cultural/religious beliefs and various healing traditions
- Increase social work students’ cultural sensitivity to the alternative healing traditions of clients.
- Consider how one’s own beliefs about healing may impact negatively when working with a client who holds an alternative belief system.
- Review the economic and political hegemonic practices of the existing medical-pharmaceutical-industrial complex in the USA.

**Course Themes:**

*Diversity and multiculturalism* are addressed by examining the range of healing traditions that exist in subcultures of the US.

*Social justice and social change* are examined in the recent utilization of many alternative health technologies that offer a lower cost substitute for the high cost of allopathic care. There is historical evidence that the dominant health paradigm in the US has suppressed the development of lower cost, alternative health remedies.

*Promotion/prevention/treatment and rehabilitation* are expressed in the way many alternative health remedies focus on chronic illnesses and conditions that are not remedied by allopathic medicine. Many of the alternative health systems of vibrational medicine focus on prevention of disease before it appears in the physical body.

*Social science and behavioral research* is reflected in the flurry of recent studies on the effectiveness of alternative remedies, the biological mechanism through which they work, and in the growing number of clinical trials comparing alternative medicine to allopathic remedies.

**Social Work Values and Ethics:**

An underlying theme in the course is that knowledge of indigenous healing systems will enhance the cultural sensitivity of social work practitioners when they are working with clients who come from subcultures with a different healing cosmology than the practitioner. What may be considered “superstitious behavior” on clients part will be understood and accepted as alternative ways of healing, which may in many case situations be incorporated into successful treatment planning.
Course Texts:

There are so many topics and issues to cover in this course, and so many good references, that I have decided to use a course pack for many of the readings. This course pack will be available at Excel above Ulrichs on South University. The Gerber text covers so many different healing systems (all under the rubric of vibrational medicine) that it is the only text I am strongly encouraging you to buy for the course. We will cover all of the systems discussed in this text. There are three other texts that I have listed below that also are germane to this course. The Torrey text is out of print, but you can obtain a used copy for as little as several dollars through Amazon.com. Everyone who plans to be a therapist should read this well written text but an iconoclastic psychiatrist. Torrey has an “emperor has no clothes” perspective of therapy which he develops by looking at the many alternative (non-Western) healers throughout the world. I have put three of his chapters in the course pack that reviews some of the “spiritual” healing systems that we will be covering. Another wonderful text is the one titled: “Honey, Mud, Maggots, etc.” These authors write so well and with a twinkle of humor, that this text will entertain you as well as inform you about the historical evolution of healing in the Western world. This book can also be obtained through Amazon.com as a used book for several dollars. I have selected three chapters from this book to go into the course pack. The final book(s) that I have put in this section under course texts, is (are) the Gale Encyclopedia. This four, volume reference book will give you a comprehensive view of any and all alternative healing systems. The downside of this reference for a course text is that it costs $475.00, which I imagine is way beyond a social work student’s budget. I know it was way beyond my budget as a social work professor. Unfortunately the social work library does not have a copy of this reference (it is probably beyond our library budget too), and you will have to sneak into Taubman Library to peruse this book.


Topical Outline:

I. General Texts on Alternative Healing:


Hammerschlag, Carl (___) *The Dancing Healers*


II. Indigenous Healing and Social Work Practice:


III. The Context of American Medical Practice (A Critical Perspective):


IV. Spiritual Healing:

Gerber (TEXT), Chapters 1, 2, and 3, pp. 5-36, 37-75, 76-113.

Torrey (TEXT), Chapter 7, pp. 115-131.


Young, Alan (1986) *Spiritual Healing: Miracle or Mirage*, Marina del Ray, California, DeVorss and Co.

V. **Shamanic Healing:**

Torrey (TEXT), Chapter 10, pp. 169-183.


Jones, David. ( ) *Sanapia: Comanche Medicine Woman*.


LaBarre, Weston, “Confessions as Cathartic Therapy in American Indian Tribes,” in *Magic, Faith, and Healing*, pp. 36-52.


VI. Curanderismo:

Torrey (TEXT), Chapter 8, pp. 132-154.


VII. Espiritismo:

Torrey (TEXT), Chapter 9, pp. 155-168.


VIII. Voodoo:


IX. **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM):**


**X. Hands-On Healing (Acupressure, Reiki, Do-In, Reflexology, Therapeutic Touch):**

Gerber (TEXT) Chapter 10, pp. 369-402.


Thie, John (1987) *Touch for Health: A Practical Guide to Natural Health Using Acupressure Touch and Massage to Improve Postural Balance and Reduce Physical and Mental Pain*
and Tension, Pasadena, CA., T.H. Enterprises


**XI. Iridology:**


Jenks, Jim (1983) *An Introduction to Iridology: The Eyes Have It!*, Portland, OR., J.D. Jenks H.M.D.

**XII. Herbal and Folk Remedies:**


*The Herbalist* (magazine)


**XIII. Energy Healing:**


**XIV. Spiritualism:**


**XV. Divination:**


**XVI. Self-Help Healing:**


*Prevention* (magazine)


**XVII. Nutrition:**


**XVIII. Etc.:**


