

UNIVERSITY FELLOWS

The University of Texas at Austin

Traditional and Non-Traditional Medicine

"I propose to examine similarities and differences between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' medicine as well as the potential integration of the two. I hope to do this by studying the history of medicine, different medical practices used around the world, ways science has affected these practices, and the sociocultural aspects surrounding them..."

Rebecca Nekolaichuk

Natural Sciences

Human Biology

Describe your proposed field of study. Which academic disciplines does it cross over?

In my topic “Traditional and Non-Traditional Medicine,” I propose to examine similarities and differences between “traditional” and “non-traditional” medicine as well as the potential integration of the two. I hope to do this by studying the history of medicine, different medical practices used around the world, ways science has affected these practices, and the sociocultural aspects surrounding them.

The term “traditional medicine” for my purposes refers to Western medicine we in the United States are more familiar with. The term “non-traditional” medicine for my studies may be better known as complementary and alternative medicine which includes “traditional” Chinese medicine, naturopathic medicine, mind-body medicine, osteopathy, ayurvedic medicine, etc. Scientific evidence has demonstrated the efficacy of many alternative practices including acupuncture for pain treatment, nutritional therapy for many chronic diseases, meditation for cancer treatment, Chinese herbs for inflammation, and massage therapy for improving the immune system and decreasing blood pressure. Despite research supporting many “non-traditional” practices, many people familiar only with Western medicine believe that most if not all alternative methods are useless and ineffective in a technologically and scientifically advanced society.

I believe there is not necessarily one right way to practice medicine: a medical system employing both “traditional” and “non-traditional” medicine could potentially be better than practicing just one of the two. I want to broaden my knowledge about both “traditional” and “non-traditional” medicine to gain understanding of their methodology, history, and sociocultural background. I want to understand why and how the different medical systems in the world have developed into what they have become today. Then I want to examine weaknesses in each medical system that could be potentially improved upon by the incorporation of some aspect from the other. I have particular interest in the question of whether or not various aspects from different styles of medicine could be integrated to create better treatment and preventative options. To address all parts of this question, I feel it is necessary to understand both “traditional” and “non-traditional” medicine from cultural and scientific perspectives. Therefore my curriculum will draw on different departments including Sociology, History, Asian Studies, Biology, Pharmacy, and Chemistry.

Why are you interested in studying this topic?

I have always had an interest in health. From the desire to improve my own health, I have researched various aspects of health and disease since the age of twelve; it has always been a fascination of mine. After reading about health to the extent that I did, I grew to wonder why different cultures and different countries seemed to have such drastically different ways of staying healthy and treating their ailments. There seemed to be some cultures that focused on preventative and mind-body medicine. I thought the level of importance placed on preventative medicine in the United States should be much higher.

When I came to the University of Texas I wanted to become a naturopathic doctor and

have a focus on preventative medicine. As everyone knows, most students change their mind at least once before they graduate, and my goal changed: now I would like to attend medical school and become an M.D. This change came because I realized the invaluable benefits of research-based medicine and recent medical advancement. It is quite naïve to disregard the benefits society has gained from vaccinations, anesthesia, antibiotics, medical technology and other relatively recent medical advancements. In my opinion, many “non-traditional” practices do not utilize these recent medical advancements to their fullest potential. Despite my change in career aspirations, I still believe preventative medicine and mind-body medicine in particular need much greater emphasis in our society. It is imprudent to disregard thousands of years of medical practices and treat them as useless to our society, yet many people do. The information that could be collected from the vast variety of medical practices in the world must, too, be invaluable.

I have created my proposal in hopes of finding some sense of wholeness between the medical practices around the world, instead of unnecessarily separating them. Or, perhaps I shall find that after gaining more knowledge of “traditional” and “non-traditional” medicine that I, too, would like to disregard certain practices due to their lack of efficacy or significant reason to do further investigation. I would like to gain enough knowledge to see if there is reasonable support for my ideas of there being a potential middle ground, and perhaps share what I have found with others so they, too, can see all sides and decide for themselves.

- Name two faculty with research interests in your area. Include their home departments and relevant research interests. If a research interest isn't obviously related to your topic, explain its relevance.***

Rosa Schnyer

Pharmacy

Acupuncture and Chinese medicine, in particular for depression, anxiety, and stress disorders; integrative models of health care consisting of biomedicine and Chinese medicine

Martha Selby

Asian Studies

Indian culture and medicine; South Asian texts; Death, dying, and the afterlife in South and East Asia; Sanskrit medical literature

- Explain how each course is relevant to this field. What do you hope to learn from each?***

- Primary Courses**

PHR 310K

Drugs in Our Society

This course examines the history, development, regulation, and use of pharmaceuticals. It

also explores benefits and problems of the use and overuse of prescription drugs in the United States. Because of the strong reliance on pharmaceuticals in the United States' health care system, I think this course will help me more thoroughly understand the research and development in the United States' "traditional" medical system.

**PHR 261C/PHR
161D**

Complementary and Alternative Medicine

This is an introductory course on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices including mind-body medicine, naturopathy, nutritional therapy, botanicals, Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, homeopathy and osteopathy. It gives an overview of what CAM, from the perspective of our society, really is. I think this course can give insight into "non-traditional" medical systems and various medical practices used throughout the world.

SOC 308

Conquest of Disease

This course examines sociocultural and historical aspects of health care including social structure, knowledge, medicine, urbanization, and paths different cultures around the world have taken through the long evolution of health care. I think this course can increase the variety of perspectives I use to look at "traditional" and "non-traditional" medicine by including cultural, social and historical perspectives of health care.

Alternate Courses

N 309

Global Health

This course looks into public health around the world including social aspects of health, what being healthy means, research and technology-based improvements to health care, institutions' impacts on health, environmental and cultural impacts of health, and how sociocultural and economic differences determine health. This could give me insight into the way the many different medical systems in the world work and why they work that way.

CC 348

Ancient Greek Medicine

This course examines the medical system of Ancient Greece through the history, theories, and practices of that time. It relates aspects of this medical system to Western medicine; this allows students to see the great impact of ancient cultures on current medicine and how different theories or practices can change as science changes. This course would improve my understanding of the history of medicine, where our current ideas come from and why they have changed over time.

SOC 354K

Sociology of Health and Illness

As an introduction to sociocultural aspects of health and disease, with a focus on the American medical system, this course examines the experience of people when they are ill, the hierarchy of medical workers, how social standing relates to health, alternative medicine, and the economic and ethical issues of health. This could give me a different perspective on why the health care experience is different for different people even within the same medical system and the way social and cultural aspects of a society impact medical systems.