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## Introduction

Natalie Porter

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

Svetlana Peshkova

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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# Introduction to Issue 4

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Natalie Porter & Svetlana Peshkova

This is the fourth issue of *Spectrum: An Undergraduate Journal*. Included in this issue are six articles and four book reviews, which showcase the breadth of original research and critical inquiry that students carry out under the direction of our diverse faculty. Together the collection illustrates the inventive ways that our undergraduates both draw on and extend departmental specializations in religion and gender, medical anthropology, and archaeology and historical anthropology.

## **Religion & Gender**

Here in the anthropology department, we are lucky to have several faculty members whose research focuses on gender, sexuality, and religion. In courses like, *Islam and Gender*, *Sex and Sexuality*, and *Gender and HIV/AIDS*, students explore the ways in which sex and gender identities shape human experience – for instance in the uneven distribution of health outcomes, in the choice of sex partners, or in the varied forms of religious, political and social mobilization worldwide. Molly Foye and Samantha Cotellessa tackle these rich topics in their original research articles, which explore how gender designations shift in accordance with social class, and in response to political and economic transformations. Common to all of these papers is a commitment to understanding gender as a fluid *and negotiated* category; one that not only enrolls people in unequal relationships of power, but also serves as a position from which to challenge and redefine the social order.

## Medical Anthropology

In recent years, our department has been building its strength in medical anthropology. Added to our offerings in *Medical Anthropology*, *Global Population Health*, and *HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa* are new courses entitled, *The World of Drugs*, and *Medicine & Culture: Science, Technology, and the Body*. Popular among anthropology and biomedical science majors alike, these courses explore the intersection of various health and healing systems worldwide, interrogate the global circulation of health risks, and cast a critical lens onto the political and ethical issues surrounding new medical technologies. Holly Linseman's research article exemplifies some of the works students carry out in the medical anthropology stream. Integrating an analysis of critical anthropological approaches to drugs and drug use with key ethnographic texts, Linseman argues that the ways in which a society defines, addresses, and experiences the "problem" of drugs depends upon locally specific, and ever-evolving, socioeconomic and political institutions.

The book reviews included in this collection take up similar themes surrounding culturally and historically specific approaches to health issues. These reviews critically evaluate ethnographic accounts of addiction (Christian Kapstad), epilepsy (James Naas), HIV/AIDS (Emily Belanus), as well as post-traumatic stress and other disorders related to military involvement (Samantha Flecchia). In addition to placing these ailments in their material-historical contexts, the reviews situate the ethnographies within the broader field of medical anthropology by outlining their contributions to theoretical and conceptual trends. Together, the reviews paint a portrait of a diverse and growing field of anthropological inquiry.

## **Archaeology & Historical Anthropology**

Archaeological and historical anthropology are keystones of our department. With specializations in Mesoamerica, Europe, and North America, our faculty tackle questions of space and place, landscape, political and symbolic power, and nonhuman agency. In addition to course offerings in *World Archaeological Cultures*, *Human Evolution*, and *Religion and Ritual*, students gain hands-on experience with archaeological topics in courses like *The Lost Campus: The Archaeology of UNH*, Open Archaeology Day, and the ever popular field school in Belize, where students conduct original research in survey and mapping.

Benjamin Rideout's article on the sociosymbolic importance of twins in Mesoamerican archaeology and history is a fine example of the ways in which our students explore and interpret the significance of historical artifacts and other forms of material culture. Integrating an analysis of myth, symbols, and monuments across time and space, Rideout suggests that twins serve as enduring indicators, and mediators, of dualistic principles in Mesoamerican natural-cultural life. Such an emphasis on cultural continuity is echoed in Alecia Bassett's article, which explores the transformation of traditional ecological knowledge as a result of colonial contact in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Eastern United States. Drawing on oral tradition and life histories, Bassett shows how indigenous groups incorporated colonial alterations of the environment into their traditional knowledge of plants and medicines. Her paper challenges any static notions of tradition by pinpointing how environmental changes are reflected in changes in native ecological knowledge.

Taken together, these papers highlight the diversity of sources that can be utilized in anthropological inquiry. Students in our department mobilize everything from myth to material culture, oral history to ecological indicators, primary to secondary sources, firsthand experiences to media accounts, in order to explore the continuities and changes affecting various social and cultural groups worldwide. This holistic approach to academic research that builds on convergences between socio-cultural anthropology and archeology is at the core of our identity as an undergraduate only Department of Anthropology.