An Ubuntu Perspective on Health & The Plus-Sized Black Body

Curriculum Description:

This module, or series of modules, *An Ubuntu Perspective on Health & The Plus-Sized Black Body,* invites students to participate in a wider exploration of the plus-sized Black female body: what it means to be "plus-sized" from a perspective of Ubuntu and community rather than from a Western medical lens, and the lived experiences of "fat" Black women both on the African continent and throughout the diaspora, particularly in South Africa. This exploration is for students, including but not limited to Black women, plus-sized Black women, and plus-sized feminine Black men, throughout the diaspora, during their undergraduate education. It can also be applied to students in these categories as early as their junior to senior years of high school, to reflect on a variety of experiences housed under the various readings and theories that make plain the relationship between "fatness", "fat phobia", aesthetics and beauty ideals with Black womanhood, Ubuntu philosophy, and the social and health practices of the Zulu peoples of South Africa that these modules utilize.

These exercises will analytically apply Ubuntu philosophy to various perspectives of the plus-sized body, aiding in the comparison of global historical perspectives of "fatness," especially Western and African perceptions and worldviews on plus-sized bodies. This comparison of Western and African theorizations of "fatness" as it applies to the feminine Black body is necessary as both worldviews collectively influence the social and cultural identity of the plus-sized Black woman, and an analysis of both will contribute to a deeper understanding of health, aesthetic, and body image. As a class, we will look at the manifestations of these perspectives on the health and well-being of plus-sized Black women and Black feminine bodies, as well as how these bodies are represented in African culture via language, dance performance, everyday life, art, and academic literature. An Ubuntu perspective is a powerful tool in these exercises as it promotes healing, switching of Western perspectives for African ones for social change, and the empowerment of those who live in plus-sized Black womanhood.
This work is considered living, as it will be utilized in a research-driven Pan-African master's project centered on plus-sized Black female bodies living at the intersection of misogynoir and fatphobia in all settings, including personal and professional relationships and the health/medical field. This course will explore how anti-fat and fatphobic bias intersects with racism, sexism, and colonial legacies to shape the social and emotional well-being, everyday experiences, and especially health outcomes for plus-sized Black women and Black female bodies throughout the African Diaspora. Through the following assignments—including engaging class dialogue, critical analysis of media and academic resources—students will deepen their understanding of

pervasive colonial legacies while challenging harmful and destructive narratives of the body. These activities are intended to shift perspectives of health and beauty towards African frameworks of community and Ubuntu, which affirm and celebrate the plus-sized Black female body.

Course Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of these exercises, participants will be able to...

1. Identify and define key concepts and vocabulary in isiZulu related to African health practices and the plus-sized body.
2. Analyze relevant theories and academic literature regarding conceptualizations, theorizations, perceptions, and experiences of fat within Black women.
3. Examine the historical influence of Western and African perceptions of health, fat, and beauty in the contemporary period, tracing its evolution and impact over time.
4. Improve knowledge of isiZulu vocabulary, African worldviews, and cultural perspectives.
5. Develop global social and cultural awareness skills that will help conversations on body diversity and health be more culturally competent.

Key Frameworks:

- **Fatness/Fat/Plus-Sized/Curvy/Fuller Figures:** interchangeable terms, these words can be used to describe bodies past a U.S. size 14 (according to Size Charts), anything above a size 12 in South Africa (according to Stylish Curves) and a body beyond a European size 46 (according to Size Chart).

US plus size	int. plus size	bust		waist		hips	
		in	cm	in	cm	in	cm
14W	1X	42”-43”	106-109	34”-35”	86-89	44”-46”	111-116
16W	1X	43”-45”	109-114	35”-36”	89-91	45”-47”	114-119
18W	2X	45”-47”	114-119	36”-38”	91-96	47”-49”	119-124
20W	2X	47”-49”	119-124	38”-41”	96-104	49”-51”	124-129
22W	3X	49”-51”	124-129	41”-44”	104-112	51”-53”	129-134
24W	3X	51”-53”	129-134	43”-47”	109-119	53”-56”	134-142
26W	4X	53”-55”	134-140	45”-49”	114-124	55”-58”	139-147

U.S. Sizes From Size Charts

XL	16	42-1/2	35-1/2	45-1/2
	18	44-1/2	37-1/2	47-1/2

Women’s Plus

Size		Bust/Chest	Waist	Hip
1X	16W	42-1/2	34-1/2	44-1/2
2X	18W	44-1/2	36-1/2	46-1/2
	20W	46-1/2	38-1/2	48-1/2
3X	22W	48-1/2	40-1/2	50-1/2
	24W	50-1/2	42-1/2	52-1/2
4X	26W	52-1/2	44-1/2	54-1/2
	28W	54-1/2	46-1/2	56-1/2
5X	30W	56-1/2	48-1/2	58-1/2
	32W	58-1/2	50-1/2	60-1/2

South African Sizes From African Clothing

EU PLUS SIZE	INTL. PLUS SIZE	BUST	WAIST	HIPS
46W	1X	42"-43"	35"-36"	44"-46"
48W	1X	43"-45"	36"-37"	45"-47"
50W	2X	45"-47"	36"-38"	47"-49"
52W	2X	47"-49"	38"-41"	49"-51"
54W	3X	49"-51"	41"-44"	51"-53"
56W	3X	51"-53"	43"-47"	53"-56"
58W	4X	53"-55"	45"-49"	55"-58"

European Sizes From Size Chart

- **Afrocentricity:** The act and philosophy of centering African perspectives and experiences to meet the unique needs of those in the African Diaspora, being "euro-blivious" intentionally to challenge and change the circumstances African peoples find themselves in and uplift their cultural identities as Black people. This philosophy is based on several tenants: location, phenome, dislocation, agency and reduction. Afrocentricity is central to this curriculum because it enables a shift from Western perspectives of plus-sized bodies to African centered ones that are more reflective, encompassing, honoring and healing to the plus-sized Black woman/femme (Asante, 1970s), (Asante, 2025).

- **Ubuntu:** The African philosophy of Ubuntu has been described in many different ways, in many different community based models. As described by the University of Pretoria (2025), Ubuntu emphasizes this idea that a person is universally connected to others, it is the opposite of individualism. This philosophy promotes teamwork, collectivism, communication, dialogue, collaboration and uplifts human development, collective healing and care. It is grounded in the belief that people must be sensitive to the needs of their community, positively interact with one another in acts of mutual support. It is a harmonious radical dependency on each other/themselves/and their ancestors. It is this ethos of "nothing about us, without us" (Pretoria, 2025) and advocates for minimal natural and communal exploitation. This community-led decision making model creates a trusted space for all in the community to heal through its emphasis on shared responsibility, communal autonomy, kindness, respect, sympathy, empathy, concern for the welfare of others, and moral responsibility. It is utilized in the fight against the erasure and neglect of African identity, and when connected to the experiences of plus-sized Black women, we can understand body perception and anti-fat bias as a collective struggle towards self-acceptance, self-perception, and health. Western ideals of beauty and health often isolate the plus-sized body, reduce its worth, or over-sexualizes it.

Ubuntu helps counter these narratives by allowing plus-sized Black women to see themselves reflected in and supported by others in a collective movement to redefine health and beauty.

"A person is a person through other persons" (University of Pretoria, 2025).

"Umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu" I am because you are, you are because I am (Baba Modela, 2025).

Relevant Zulu/African Termanology:

IsiZulu terminology will be used throughout the module and in class dialogue. However, below are the most used terms in this course/conversations so a full understanding and definition to their meanings is important…

- **Sangoma:** A Sangoma is a traditional medical practitioner in South Africa, whose practice is deeply rooted in ancestral knowledge, community-based wellness and holistic overviews of health that encompass social histories/contexts. These healers go through the *ukutfwasa* process—a rite of passage that transcends Western medical teachings, after being ancestrally called. This gift is inherited and manifests via many symptoms that mirror Western mental illness indicators such as emotional instability, withdrawal from social life, physical ailments, psychic experiences, and life disruptions linked to these destabilizing factors (Katlego Tapala, 2025). With an estimated 80% of the sub-Saharan African population relying on traditional healers like Sangomas and *Inyangas*, these practices remain central to African healthcare and patient well being because they take a wider account of a patient's social and spiritual history, building mutual trust to deliver diagnoses that resonate with communal realities. Sangomas operate through Ubuntu and Umuntu philosophies, and reject isolation and abandonment during the healing process, understanding that "my life and your life are connected; your ill-being is my concern" (Tapala, 2025). However, through their own initiation process, they lean into positive isolation and other grounding practices such as fire and herb rituals, ancestral harmonization, healing song (*ngoma*), drum (*tingomane*) vibrations, dance, and movement therapy. Sangomas offer therapeutic practices to teach stillness, slowness and patience. When put in conversation with the plus-sized body and historical global perspectives of fatness, Sangoma practitioners challenge Western notions of health that stigmatize, degrade and silence larger bodies and immediately reduce patient pain to their size, rather than another cause. Sangomas enrich this curriculum as they highlight African epistemologies of health and offer an alternative understanding of plus-sized bodies/experiences.



Via Chantel Heard, PheZulu Safari Park, 07/25

“A practice of practice” (Tapala, 2025).

“My pain and mental illness is my ancestors pain and mental illness” (Tapala, 2025).

“Ukuvula ikhanda nesifuba: to open the head (mind) and the chest (heart)” (Tapala, 2025).

- **Inyanga:** An Inyanga, like the Sangoma, is a traditional medical practitioner in South Africa, whose practice is deeply rooted in ancestral knowledge, community-based wellness and holistic overviews of health that encompass social histories/contexts. They are also ancestrally called, and go through similar initiation processes. They are a large part of the Indigenous African healthcare system, and provide care to the 80% of the sub saharan population that depend on traditional practices. However, unlike the Sangoma,

the inyanga handle the physical ailments of the body and of health, prescribing various herb mixes and remedies. When put in conversation with the plus-sized body and historical global perspectives of fatness, Inyangas challenge Western notions of health that stigmatize, degrade and silence larger bodies and immediately reduce patient pain to their size, rather than another cause. They enrich this curriculum as they highlight African epistemologies of health and offer an alternative and culturally relevant understanding of plus-sized bodies/experiences.

"Discovery is listening to what's already known" ("From Muthi to Modern Medicine: Bridging Traditional Knowledge and Biomedical Science Lecture, Luke Invernizzi, 2025).

- **Ingulo-** illness
- **Khulu:** conversational term for plus-sized (Kwenza Montareng, 2025). Google translate translates it directly to "grandmother" but this is not correct.
- **Ukhuluphela**: a neutral term used to describe fatness, the state of being fat, gaining weight (Baba Modela, Montareng, 2025).
- **Isidudla/Usdudla:** a term to describe someone who is fat, "the fat one", can also be used to describe yourself if you are fat. (Montareng, 2025).
  "I met a fat person, I met isidudla." (Baba Modela, 2025).
- **Unshebela:** Xhosa word for "fat" (Montareng, 2025).
- **Indigenous Knowledge:** information collected and known by members of a given community, based on experience, environment, and cultural adaption (lecture, 2025).

The multiple terms to describe being fat in isiZulu is significant because they reveal a nuanced understanding of body size, experience and social perception from the indigenous community. None of these words have a negative connotation but simply describe a way of existing/being perceived that contrasts with Western ways of viewing (and often pathologizing) fatness. Each term suggests that Zulu speakers recognize the multiple dimensions of fatness which is in alignment to the plurality of Ubuntu philosophy. It implies this non-judgemental awareness that bodies change over time naturally and perceptions of plus-sizedness varies depending on context. In the context of this curriculum, recognizing these differences pushes students to see how language shapes perceptions of health and body images while also conveying their nuance within African societies.

Just as there are multiple contextual terms to describe fatness in isiZulu, African Americans and diasporic slang–including Jamaican expressions- also have a diverse vocabulary to describe plus-size Black women. In the United States, there are terms such as "big mama", "thicc",

“chunky,” “phat”, “BBW” and “thickazz” in Jamaican slang. Like their isiZulu counterparts *khulu*, *ukhuluphela*, or *isidudla*, these terms reflect the development of layered, culturally reflective and appropriate ways of talking about body size that transcend an individual, stigmatized and Western meaning that Black communities throughout the diaspora have developed.

Assignments:

-Class Participation (15% of final grade)
-3 Journal Entries/Discussion Board Posts (40% of final grade)
-Projects: Oral History Project, Media Analysis Project (45% of final grade)

Week 1 (Isonto Owokuqala): Construction of Fatness

Readings:

1. ***Fearing the Black Body by Sabrina Strings, chapters 3-6 & Chapter 8***
   Chapter 3: The Rise of the Big Black Woman, p.67.
   Chapter 4: Birth of the Ascetic Aesthetic, p.99.
   Chapter 5: American Beauty: The Reign of the Slender Aesthetic, p.122.
   Chapter 6: Thinness as American Exceptionalism, p.147.
   Chapter 8: Fat, Revisited, p.187.

2. ***Perceptions Relating to Body Size, Weight Loss and Weight-Loss Interventions in Black South African Women: A Qualitative Study by Catherine E Draper et al.***

3. ***Representing Fat Female Bodies: A Fat Studies Analysis of Selected Literary Texts by Jessica Murray***

These readings ground this curriculum in theory, as they argue that understandings of body size, type and beauty aesthetic are culturally constructed, especially for Black women throughout South Africa and the diaspora. When put in conversation with each other, they lay historic bricks to a sociocultural perspective/framework that will allow students to dissect the theorization of fatness and unpack its relationship to Western domination, imperialism, colonialism especially as it pertains to plus-size Black women.

Fearing the Black Body by Sabrina Strings traces the roots of fatphobia and establishment of “fatness” in Western society back to colonialism and imperialism, demonstrating how thinness became a marker of white superiority, class standing, attraction, and fatness became further justification to brutalize the Black body, specifically the fat Black female body. This reading is important to week one because it decenters Western/European views of fatness and

plus-sizedness, as well as it demonstrates that fatphobia and anti-fat bias is not rooted in concerns for health but rather concerns for domination and power establishment. It prepares students to approach fatness from an Afrocentric perspective, and to heal perspectives of the body from its harmful constructions through Ubuntu.

Perceptions Relating to Body Size, Weight Loss and Weight-Loss Interventions in Black South African Women: A Qualitative Study by Catherine E. Draper, et. al centers the perspectives of South African women who identify as plus-sized in a conversation about body-size, health, wellness, well-being, and weight-loss. This study reveals that a racial construction of fatness and white superiority by deeming plus-sized bodies as unhealthy ones also gives rise to problems with and associations of wealth, happiness, and attraction. It is important because it establishes the lived experience and perspectives of plus-sized South African as legitimate sources of indigenous knowledge about the subject, and invites a reconstruction of fatness "for the self, by the self" reflecting the Ubuntu idea of "nothing for us/about us, without us." It also illustrates how attempts at "health intervention" by Western medical practicing doctors often ignore local indigenous perspectives, values and lived experiences when it comes to plus-sized health and illuminate the need for a return to Indigenous African healing practices like the utilization of the sangoma and inyanga that would factor in more than weight when scanning the total health of plus-sized Black women. It furthers the argument by Strings that health/fatness is contextual and socially made/upheld.

Finally, *Representing Fat Female Bodies: A Fat Studies Analysis of Selected Literary Texts by Jessica Murray,* examines the portrayal of fat female bodies in various literary texts, furthering the idea that fatness is constructed by the different cultures that write different narratives, i.e. Western worldviews will deposit fatness in a certain way and African worldviews will posit it in another. This reading is key in week one as it pushes students to analyze the social construction of fat bodies through their literary representations (as art is a mirror for the current state of society) and further demonstrates how literature (and media/art, holistically) has a large role in shaping public perceptions and acceptance of fatness and womanhood. This will enable students to see the intersection between race, gender, and the physical shape of the body and offers literature as a tool of either resistance or reinforcement, thus contributing to student learning outcomes.

In Class Discussion:

After coming to class having read the assigned literature, students in the class will discuss Sangomas, in connection to the assigned readings. The readings discussed the construction of fatness, used as justification for Black exploitation and brutality, particularly underscoring the health aspect of the plus-sized body. Connecting this construction to the role of Sangomas in indigenous healthcare is important as it will allow students to separate health from fat, mull over

what it means to be “physically healthy” and “heal your body” versus what it means to just exist as a plus-sized Black body. Sangomas practice slowing down, and being present to help heal their patients. So, the class will start off with the instructor leading them in a breathing exercise.

With the lights temporarily turned off, students will be asked to:

1. Stand or sit in a way that is comfortable for them
2. Breathe in through their nose for 4 counts, filling their lungs completely (or to what is comfortable)
3. Hold that breath for a count of 4
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth to the count of 4
5. Pause again for 4 counts
6. This will be repeated 4 times, to demonstrate and allow for stillness, mental clarity, presence and to allow students to breathe together in harmony and community, in reference to Ubuntu. This exercise reflects the therapeutic teachings and practices of the Sangomas in the emphasis of stillness, connectedness, and presence for the healing of their patients.

The class conversation will be steered by various questions, offered to the class to pick from for discussion. This section invites students to reframe and reconstruct health, healing and plus-sized bodies for themselves, through an Afrocentric and culturally rooted understanding. Some of the questions will look like:

1. The Sangoma practice, though it may bring temporary discomfort/negative symptoms and sometimes social imbalance, is a spiritual and ancestral calling. Can fatness be reinterpreted as a form of ancestral/genealogical inheritance? What would be the benefit of reconstructing it in this way?
2. How do Sangomas make space for plus-sized bodies, and bodies that don’t fit Western norms in their holistic and balanced approach to health?
3. What can Western educational and medical systems learn about health from indigenous healthcare systems?
4. How can we legitimize fatness as a valid way of knowing in a way that validates African womanhood, beauty, and health?
5. In what ways can an Ubuntu approach liberate fat Black women from narratives that frame their bodies as unhealthy, unattractive, and justification for “othering”?

Each student is expected to participate in class conversation, in some way that is meaningful for them. This dialogue helps further the learning objectives of this curriculum as together, we will be able to analyze theories and constructions of fat within Black women, allowing for an examination of the historical influence of Western perceptions of health, fat and beauty on Black women, as well as it will help them develop global social and cultural awareness skills that will

help conversations on body diversity and health be more culturally competent.

Homework:

1. Journal entry/Discussion Board Post #1

Prompt: For this journal entry, you are asked to critically analyze the 3 readings of this week, exploring the social construction of fat in conversation with Black womanhood in a journal entry/discussion board post of at least 700 words. Please be sure to summarize the readings as you write your thoughts. Give page numbers and cite your sources. Consider the following questions as you write:

- What are the sources saying about the establishment of "fat"?
- In what ways does the Western establishment of fatness and health oppose indigenous African understandings of wellness and wellbeing?
- What would it mean to decolonize health, wellness and fat, and what would it mean to Africanize it and see it through a lens of Ubuntu?
- How can Sangomas teach us about understanding the experiences, pain, and health of fat Black women, especially with a holistic emotional and spiritual view?
- What are the real life/everyday consequences of invisibility, hypervisibility, and stereotypes in literature and media for plus-sized Black women? How does this connect to health and wellbeing?

This journal prompt will help students reach the learning objectives of the module/curriculum as it will help them disrupt dominant Western narratives of health, fatness that teach them to associate health with thinness, ultimately creating a more global understanding of the plus sized Black female body. Its promotion of critical analysis, engagement with indigenous models of health and Ubuntu philosophy encourages intersectional and worldly thinking and consciousness. It also allows students to make connections with their own, individual beliefs of health and body image, and allows them to support each other with unlearning anti-fat bias and reconstructing the body for themselves.

2. Oral history project

Students will be asked to engage in an oral history project. They will be instructed to interview someone in their lives that identify as plus-sized. This interviewee can be a relative, an older relative, a community member, or a friend. They will be asked to take copious notes about what their participant says, making note of body language, etc. The students will come up with 10 questions to ask their participants, to be turned in alongside their responses. The questions need

to be about their intervewee's perceptions of body size, beauty and health. They will need to ask what those ideas are, where they might have come from, how they manifest in their lives now, if they have changed over time. The students are encouraged to make connections between the participants' responses and class themes of colonialism, media, and gender. Once done, they need to turn in a 700 word reflection sharing these connections and expanding them to indigenous African health, healing practices, Ubuntu, Sangomas and embodied ancestral knowledge.

This assignment allows students to connect with their community members in a dialogue grounded in memory, culture, healing, and communication. It helps further student learning outcomes as it encourages connection between class concepts to everyday, personal experiences and relationships. This interview allows students to trace, in real time, how colonialism via fatphobia has shaped modern health systems, experiences, and beauty standards for those around the student, creating a personal connection with the module of the week. Through an honest dialogue about how perceptions of body size and Western constructions of fatphobia impact the lives of those the student is close to, space is created for potential community healing, shared experiences and connection.

Week 2 (Isonto Kubili): Global Perceptions of the Plus-Sized Black Body

Readings:

1. **Decolonising Desire: The Politics of Love by Dalia Gebrial**

2. **Perceptions of overweight in US and global cultures by William G. Johnson, Bess B. Bluestein, Fernanda Dasilva, Nataliya I. Moubray, Maggie L. Orton, Herieth Balagaye, Karina Franco Paredes, Mirihae Kim**

3. **From a "Chubby" Goddess to the Virgin Mary – Encountering Religious Placemaking in Rome by Asuman Lätzer-Lasar.**

4. ***The Reification of Desire; Toward a Queer Marxism by Kevin Floyd***
   Introduction: On Capital, Sexuality and The Situations of Knowledge
   Chapter 1: Disciplined Bodies, Lukás, Foucault, and the Reification of Desire

The readings of Week two will help guide students through a comparative analysis of how fat bodies have been perceived across different global and cultural landscapes, tracing the similarities and differences between cultures. Collectively, the readings build on fatness as a

socially constructed concept as well as when paired with indigenous African health paradigms, these readings allow students to further decenter Western ideology of the body and replace it with an Afrocentric/Ubuntu informed perspective that situate plus-sized Black female bodies as sources of knowledge and valid, healthy ways of being.

Decolonising Desire: The Politics of Love by Dalia Gebrial offers a critique of Western health systems, views of fatness and plus-sizedness, as well as thin beauty aesthetics, positioning this colonialist system as one of not just race but of desire, attraction, sexuality, intimacy and inherent bodily value. She encourages a deconstructing, and decentering of Eurocentricity when it comes to fat bodies, making space for a replacement of the mind with one that is more Afrocentric, inclusive and desiring of the fat Black female body. This reading, in conjunction with the others, encourages students to redefine love, attraction, value and desire for themselves through an Ubuntu and Afrocentric lens that would place a stronger value on community, spirituality, emotion and genuine human connection rather than on physical appearance and fat. It encourages students to explore what liberated, culturally grounded and informed ideas of desire could be.

From a "Chubby" Goddess to the Virgin Mary – Encountering Religious Placemaking in Rome by Asuman Lätzer-Lasar explores the historical representations of fat bodies, particularly in a religious context, depicting how female iconography has historically shifted from ancient depictions of curvy, "fat" fertility goddesses to thin and petite depictions of femininity and holiness. It argues how religion, alongside and supported by Western colonialism, has been used to regulate, control, restrict, and dominate the female body. This goes two-fold for the plus-sized Black female body, in connection with String's work from Module One. This upliftment of thin whiteness erases fuller bodies, Black depictions of spiritual, religious, ancient power in an attempt to equate thin whiteness with ideation and refinement. This reading will help students connect Indigenous epistemologies of the plus-sized body and spirituality as they will be encouraged to see the contrast between colonial religious restrictions of the plus sized body and indigenous African religious practice and veneration that has always allowed space for the plus-sized body, aligning fatness with power, abundance, sacrality, etc. These readings invite students to critically analyze the regulation of plus-sized bodies globally, making connections between fatphobia, religion and race, recognizing that indigenous African health, and spirituality systems see the plus-sized body as legitimate and valid.

The Reification of Desire by Kevin Floyd argues that capitalism, specifically the "logic of capital" intersects with the formation of several important social categories, especially sexuality. His method and ideas can be applied to the social configuration of plus-sized bodies and fatness. He states that the concept of sexuality as we know it in modernity is inseparable from the development of capitalism, a belief that goes double for plus-sized Black women— as their commodification, brutality, exploitation, etc. is justified through an imperialist, capitalistic Western lens that doesn't see the personhood in their plus-sized bodies. He analyzes how knowledge, specifically queer knowledge, is housed in political economics and shaped by capitalist desire. His analysis can be applied to a concern with objectification for plus-sized

Black women, especially in terms of control, power, regulation, censoring, and dominion over the plus-sized Black femme body. The reading helps the students connect another important intersectional lens to plus-sized Black women, especially as we speak as a class of the commodification, historical conceptualization and social perceptions of fat Blackness.

In Class Discussion:

After coming to class having read the assigned literature, students in the class will start with another breathing exercise. This is to help ground the class as the headings of the last two weeks have been very heavy, helping provide them with some level of care and healing as the module progresses. This is also in illusion to the Sangomas, that practice slowness, stillness, and patience, presence and grounding. So, the class will start off with the instructor leading them in a breathing exercise.

With the lights temporarily turned off, students will be asked to:

1. Stand or sit in a way that is comfortable for them
2. Breathe in through their nose for 4 counts, filling their lungs completely (or to what is comfortable)
3. Hold that breath for a count of 4
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth to the count of 4
5. Pause again for 4 counts
6. This will be repeated 4 times, to demonstrate and allow for stillness, mental clarity, presence and to allow students to breathe together in harmony and community, in reference to Ubuntu. This exercise reflects the therapeutic teachings and practices of the Sangomas in the emphasis of stillness, connectedness, and presence for the healing of their patients.

The class conversation will be steered by various questions, offered to the class to pick from for discussion. This section invites students to reframe and reconstruct health, healing and plus-sized bodies for themselves, through an Afrocentric and culturally rooted understanding with a new understanding of Western religious constriction of the plus-sized Black body. Some of the questions will look like:

1. Why is it important to decolonize desire, and challenge dominant narratives about attraction, beauty and love?
2. What role does religion, specifically Christianity and Catholicism play in shaping the perspectives and perception of the fat Black female body? How does this relate to indigenous African practices of healing and spiritual systems? In what ways can these systems help heal the plus sized Black woman?

3. How can we reshape current conversations about body positivity or body neutrality to reflect the historical and cultural backgrounds of fat Blackness? Why is it important to know there are differences in depictions of fatness to thinness in religious iconography?
4. How do indigenous healing and health models, as well as spiritual models, challenge disdain for plus-sized bodies?
5. Why is it important to know about the historical fluidity of global body ideals? What does this say about the cultivation of beauty norms, especially for plus-sized Black women? How is this switch reflected in their everyday lives and in the health field?

Each student is expected to participate in class conversation, in some way that is meaningful for them. This dialogue helps further the learning objectives of this curriculum as together, we will be able to analyze theories and constructions of fat within Black women, allowing for an examination of the historical influence of Western perceptions of health, fat and beauty on Black women, as well as it will help them develop global social and cultural awareness skills that will help conversations on body diversity and health be more culturally competent. Additionally, this in class dialogue encourages critical thinking about how religious and cultural factors shape ideas about body size that helps support a richer, more inclusive understanding of the plus-sized Black female body. This also sets the class up nicely to discuss African and Black cultural perspectives on their own plus-sized bodies in the next module.

Homework:

1. Journal entry/Discussion board post #2:

Prompt: For this journal entry, you are asked to critically analyze the 3 readings of this week, exploring the global perceptions of the fatness, especially as it expands to the plus sized Black woman in a journal entry/discussion board post of at least 700 words. Please be sure to summarize the readings as you write your thoughts. Give page numbers and cite your sources. Consider the following questions as you write:

- Do you personally relate to the ideas that have been shared in this module (or others?) If so, how? Where do these ideas show up in your everyday life?
- Can a return to indigenous ways of healing, perceptions of body size and health, help restore positive images of the plus-sized Black woman? Do we need positive images or can body neutrality be enough?
- If Sangomas focus on the ancestral and spiritual aspect of physical pain and the body, could they be of assistance in healing the perception of fat Black female bodies? What would a question to them about this topic look like?
- In what ways does Western thinking occupy your mind, and how might you begin to decolonize your body to fully embody Ubuntu?
- What would bodily perception based on Ubuntu look like?

- Whose minds are occupied by western ways of living? How do we address the occupation of our minds to fully be in alignment with Ubuntu and our bodies?

Additional Guidance:

- Be as honest as possible with your answers. Introspectiveness and radical honesty, truth in your reflections are valuable and highly encouraged in this class.
- Ground your writing with specific examples from the readings, or lived experience. Remember your experience within your own body is also a valid form of knowledge.

This journal prompt will help students reach the learning objectives of the module/curriculum as it will help them disrupt dominant Western narratives of health, fatness that teach them to associate health with thinness, ultimately creating a more global understanding of the plus sized Black female body. Its promotion of critical analysis, engagement with indigenous models of health and Ubuntu philosophy encourages intersectional and worldly thinking and consciousness. It also allows students to make connections with their own, individual beliefs of health and body image, and allows them to support each other with unlearning anti-fat bias and reconstructing and redefining the body for themselves.

2. Media Analysis Project

For this project, students are instructed to choose 3 sources in the form of music videos, TV shows, films, social media presence, (etc.) One source must be African American, one must be white American or white European and one source must be from a South African outlet. Your source MUST include representation of the plus-sized Black woman/femme body. Please make sure your media is accessible (meaning it doesn't require payment to view it necessarily) and relevant to the conversation. Consider the use of language if it is a media piece with sound/dialogue, narrative and counter-narratives.

This representation can be positive, neutral or negative but you must give justification why you chose it in your write up. This is so students can compare and contrast them to each other. Students will then be asked to analyze how the plus-sized Black female body is portrayed. What situation does the model find themselves in? What is the purpose of the piece of media? What is it trying to say to the audience? Is it representative of a lived experience, a piece of anti-fat bias/propaganda? Is it reflective of the health system and wider cultural beliefs of the community? Is Ubuntu present in the image? Is there space for it to be? Is the plus sized Black body celebrated, stigmatized, under/over sexualized or ignored? What role does gender play in the portrayal? Contextualize it in history, religion, culture and health. What does it say? Write a reflection essay of at least 700 words connecting your observations to course material and topics

including the social construction of fatness, Western/Indigenous African health and spirituality, beauty standards of these societies and Ubuntu. Make sure you cite your sources properly.

By completing this project, students will be able to apply their critical thinking skills regarding this topic to the global media, developing both cross cultural and media literacy skills. Their critical analysis of the ways visual culture reflects social attitudes towards plus-sized Black bodies, and Black women holistically. This analysis helps with the understanding of larger histories of race, colonialism, imperialism, and western dominance and their role in shaping perceptions of fat.

Week 3 (Isonto Iwestithathu): African Perspectives of the Plus-Sized Black Body

Readings:

1. **Body Styles by Ted Polhemus**
   Chapter 2: Social Bodies
   Chapter 5: The Pursuit of the Perfect Body
   Section 3: Modesty, that encompasses Chapters 12-15: Naked Savages, The Pursuit of an Innocent Eden, The Naked and the Nude and the Politics of Modesty

2. **Encounters with the Eland by Google Arts & Culture**

Supplemental Resource:
Watch YouTube Video: The Plight of Being A Chubby Black Woman In South Africa

Body Styles by Ted Polhemus discusses the human body as a vessel and canvas for cultural, personal and communal expression through piercing, adornment, modesty, fetishism, and fashion, all of which is meant to communicate identity, power, messages of resistance and empowerment. These methods of expression reflect the holistic values, impressions, and norms of a society and position the body as a site for political meaning. This work will help students understand how the plus-sized Black female body can be styled and identified differently depending on contexts, aiding the conversation from the first and second modules. When applied to fat Black women and female bodies, fatness and the act of occupying a bigger body becomes a visual marker, a symbol and representation of a specific message whether the individual is trying to align or resist dominant norms or not. It aids in representation of how plus-sized Black women see themselves, and how they are seen by their own communities rather than by those looking at them from a Western lens.

Encounters With the Eland archive and exhibit by Google Arts & Culture explores the sacred role of the Eland animal in the lives of the San peoples of South Africa, captured in San rock art and folklore. The Eland is considered a sacred animal in San cosmology, its largeness and fatness considered a sign of abundance, survival, power, intimidation, holding great spiritual significance. The San makes sure to use every bit of the Eland in their communities, making special notice and use of the animals' fat and large muscle mass for the community's survival. The Eland reflects a different perspective and value of size and appreciation for round, muscular and fat bodily forms than Western standards allow. Through the lens of the San, admiring and appreciating the Eland's large body, students are encouraged to make connections between this community value and plus-sized Black women, in the sense that it is a reflection of the celebration of bigness by indigenous African cultural, spiritual and healing systems. This work offers an Afrocentric worldview that challenges Eurocentricity, offering an ancient perspective of fat.

Homework:

1. Journal entry/Discussion board post #3:

Prompt: For this journal entry, you are asked to critically analyze the week's readings, exploring the perspective of fatness through an African cultural lens and perspective in a journal entry/discussion board post of at least 700 words. Please be sure to summarize the readings as you write your thoughts. Give page numbers and cite your sources. Consider the following questions as you write:

- In what ways can the styling, adornment and fashion of plus-sized Black women communicate a message of resistance about their existence?
- Tell me about a time you styled yourself (clothing, hair, etc.) to communicate a message of empowerment or identity? How does the Black community engage in this practice?
- How might plus-sized Black women view's of their own stylings be interpreted differently through the lens of Western modesty? What about through a indigenous African lens?
- How can personal adornment serve as a method of healing?
- What does it mean for fatness to be a marker of identity? Is it always? When is it a sign of intentional resistance and politics versus just plain existence?
- How does the San people's relationship with the Eland's body reflect indigenous African perspectives of largeness/body size?

Additional Resources for Students:

- **"I AM" Indigenous African Music:** transcription website by music archive project officer Nandipha Mnyani and team, focused on the capturing, transcribing, sharing,

promoting and archiving of indigenous instruments and traditional music for rites of passage, weddings, funerals, and everyday life. Though there are several limitations to this living and evolving archive, it is possible that one day there will be a transcription of a song regarding plus-sized bodies, womanhood, body diversity, and physical difference that will aid in this conversation.

- **National Archives of South Africa:** various South African databases, repositories and records. This could be a great resource because it holds vast collections that enable a comparative study of the lives of Black women in South Africa and their experiences (potentially as plus-sized) across time and geographic locations in the country.