

THEODORE L. MICHAELS

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RESEARCH EXPERTISE

My research examines the psychological and structural dimensions of the U.S. trucking industry, with particular attention to migratory politics, occupational health, and surveillance. My broader work explores the social life of the political right, which has included a study of conspiracy theorists in England and another on responses to progressive behavioral healthcare reform in California. Complementing this research on post-liberal politics, I examine the consequences of colonial displacement and violence. This work includes an ongoing collaboration with Sahrawi physicians to document the health and political precarity of Sahrawi refugees in Algeria.

EDUCATION

MD/PhD in Medical Anthropology University of California, San Francisco and Berkeley	June 2023 – Present
MSc in Medical Anthropology University College London (UCL)	Sept. 2021 – Sept. 2022 Distinction
BA in Anthropology; BA in Biology Columbia College (Columbia University)	Sept. 2017 – May 2021 GPA: 3.96

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Research Project on Long-Haul Trucking** Oct. 2022 – Present
- This project investigates the long-haul trucking industry in the United States through themes of migration, surveillance, occupational health, and political economy. The methods include ride-alongs, driving a semi (for which I have a commercial driver’s license), participant observation at truck stops, and volunteering at truck-stop medical clinics.
- Evaluating an alternative behavioral health crisis response program** June 2023 – Present
- Berkeley School of Public Health, PI: Mark Fleming
- This multidisciplinary project quantitatively and qualitatively evaluates a service that offers a tiered response for behavioral health crises in Contra Costa County. The service emerged in response to local and national instances of police violence against

minorities suffering from mental illness. Conducted mixed-methods analysis of a county-wide alternative behavioral crisis response program, examining the relationship between community-based care models and carceral infrastructures.

MSc Dissertation in Medical Anthropology

Sept. 2021 – Sept. 2022

Advisor: David Napier

- At UCL, I researched a movement of vaccine-critical conspiracy theorists in the UK. The project examines motivations to protest; the nature of conspiracy theory, as it departs from academic critique; and the movement's prominent spiritual beliefs.

Senior Thesis in Anthropology

June 2020 – April 2021

Advisors: Zoe Crossland, Audra Simpson

- My senior thesis investigated the culture of digital mourning on Reddit.com during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on how anonymity and large online spaces configure intimacy in the work of mourning.

Undergraduate Research Assistant

Oct. 2017 – Mar.

2020

Neuroscience, Pathology and Cell Biology Laboratory, Columbia University Irving Medical Center. P.I.: Hynek Wichterle

- Investigated the role of Nuclear Factor I in maturing motor neurons via lentiviral vectors. Researched the reprogramming of mouse fibroblasts into motor neurons with transcription factors and microRNAs to investigate markers of maturity.

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-reviewed

1. Pasquini M, Michaels TL, Stonington S. Ethical shunts: an 82-year-old woman in an Italian emergency department. *The Lancet*. 2026.
2. Pattabhiraman T, Fleming M, Michaels T, McDermott A, MacVicar D, Brewster A. Building a behavioral health crisis response program: a qualitative implementation case study. *Health Affairs Scholar*. 2026; qxag106. doi.org/10.1093/haschl/qxag106.
3. Elabd SAM, Salem LM, Michaels TL, Hamadi DB, Mehdi RM-L, Carrión M, Holmes SM. Improvisation in contexts of infrastructural violence: a 46-year-old physician practicing medicine in Sahrawi refugee camps. *The Lancet*. 2026;407(10528):566-567.
4. Patel T, Hammelman J, Aziz S, Jang S, Closser M, Michaels TL, Blum JA, Gifford DK, Wichterle H. Transcriptional dynamics of murine motor neuron maturation in vivo and in vitro. *Nat Commun*. 2022;13(1). doi:10.1038/s41467-022-33022-4.

In preparation

5. Salem LM, Hamadi DB, Michaels TL, Elabd SAM, Mehdi RM-L, Carrión M, Holmes SM. Statelessness: a fifteen-year-old boy with neck lumps and lethargy in Algeria. Manuscript accepted for publication in *The Lancet*.
6. MacVicar D, Fleming M, Pattabhiraman T, Michaels TL, Hahn-Smith S, Dold A, Pearce C, Brewster AL. Family caregiver experiences with mobile behavioral health crisis services. Manuscript submitted for publication in *Health Serv Res.* (Revise and Resubmit).
7. Michaels TL, Brewster A, MacVicar D, Fleming M. *Grammars of Community: The Ethics of Crisis Care.*
8. Michaels TL. *The Symptom of Freedom: Conspiracy and the Cogito.* Manuscript submitted for publication in *Current Anthropology.*

Non-peer reviewed

9. Michaels TL, Holmes SM. Review of *Landscapes of Care: Immigration and Health in Rural America*, by Thurka Sangaramoorthy. *Bull Hist Med.* 2024;98(2):335-337. doi:10.1353/bhm.2024.a937512
10. Michaels T, Demby S, Vrosgou A. *Care Amid Crisis.* Synapse. <https://synapse.ucsf.edu/articles/2026/05/19/care-amid-crisis>.

PRESENTATIONS

The Lancet Case Series in Global Social Medicine

1. Elabd SAM, Michaels TL, Carrión M. Improvisation in contexts of infrastructural violence: a 46-year-old physician practicing medicine in Sahrawi refugee camps. Oral presentation. *Social Forces/Clinical Cases: Breaking Boundaries with The Lancet's Global Social Medicine Cases and Sir Michael Marmot*; April 13, 2026; Berkeley, CA. **(Dean's Lecture: invited).**
2. Elabd SAM, Michaels TL, Carrión M. Improvisation in contexts of infrastructural violence: a 46-year-old physician practicing medicine in Sahrawi refugee camps. Oral presentation. *Breaking Barriers in Global Health with Fernando Simón: The Lancet Global Social Medicine Case Series Kick-off*; May 5, 2026; Barcelona, Spain. **(Invited).**

Behavioral health crisis response

3. Michaels TL, Fleming M, Brewster A, MacVicar D, Pattabhiraman T, McDermott A. Siting alternative destinations for behavioral health crises: the "community" of community mental health. Oral presentation. *National Conference for Physician-Scholars in the Social Sciences and Humanities*; April 13–14, 2024; Chapel Hill, NC.

4. Michaels TL, Fleming M, Brewster A, MacVicar D, Pattabhiraman T, McDermott A. The politics of place in behavioral healthcare: interrogating “community” in the siting of alternative crisis care facilities. Poster presentation. UCSF Health Services Research Symposium; May 23, 2024; San Francisco, CA.
5. Pattabhiraman T, Fleming M, Brewster A, Michaels TL. Lessons learned from the implementation of a regional behavioral health crisis response system. Oral presentation. AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting; June 29–July 2, 2024; Baltimore, MD.
6. Fleming M, McDermott A, Michaels T, Pattabhiraman T, MacVicar D, Brewster A. Boundary work in mental health crisis response. Oral presentation. AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting; Meeting; June 29–July 2, 2024; Baltimore, MD.

Quality Improvement

7. Chang A, Ezenwugo S, Houston D, Michaels TL, Yin S. Improving hepatocellular carcinoma screening rates among veterans with cirrhosis at SFVAHCS. Poster presentation. UCSF Quality Improvement Symposium; December 2024; San Francisco, CA.
8. Chang A, Ezenwugo S, Houston D, Michaels TL, Yin S. Improving hepatocellular carcinoma screening rates among veterans with cirrhosis at SFVAHCS. Poster presentation. SFVAHCS Systems Improvement Fair; December 2024; San Francisco, CA.

Senior Thesis

9. Michaels TL. Weaving loss: the mourning of pandemic-related losses on Reddit. Oral presentation. CUNY ASA Spring Anthropological Conference; April 2024; New York, NY.

EXTRACURRICULARS

The Case of the Human

Sept. 2023 – Present

- This project seeks to foster interdisciplinary scholarship by organizing several conferences wherein medical professionals and social scientists co-analyze real clinical cases. The resulting social medicine cases will teach actionable social theory concepts and will collectively be published in *The Lancet* in the series “Case Studies in Global Social Medicine.”
- As an editorial assistant, I participated in the case screening process, co-authored several grant applications to receive over \$350,000 for working conferences, and organized the first working conference, held at the Neubauer Collegium at the University of Chicago in September 2024.
- Website: <https://neubauercollegium.uchicago.edu/research/case-of-the-human>

- https://matrix.berkeley.edu/?matrix_seminars=the-case-of-the-human-a-transdisciplinary-research-team

**The National Conference for Physician-Scholars
in the Social Sciences and Humanities**

June 2024 – Present

- I am an organizing team member for the 11th Biennial SHSSM conference, co-sponsored by UCSF, UC Berkeley, and UC Davis. This has entailed booking a venue, organizing catering, selecting abstracts, and organizing keynotes.

**Editor, Intertwine Medical Humanities Journal
2026**

Sept. 2025 – Jan.

- I served as a prose editor for this UCSF student-led medical humanities journal at UCSF.

**Consultant for HRSA Rural Health
Vaccine Confidence Program**

July 2021 – Oct. 2021

- Volunteered as a consultant in a Health Resources and Services Administration project to address vaccine hesitancy in my home county, Berkshire County, MA. Performed literature reviews, analyzed data, and provided recommendations on methods to increase vaccine uptake at three local clinics.

**MM Alumni Tutors
2021**

Aug. 2020 – June

- Founded a nonprofit organization to address educational hardship brought on by the pandemic.
- Organized an alumni lecture series to expose high school students to post-graduate paths.
- Website: <https://mmalumnitutors.weebly.com/>
- Newspaper article: https://www.berkshireeagle.com/news/local/more-pandemic-innovation-monument-alums-launch-free-tutoring-program-for-current-students/article_52ba6f80-2447-11eb-ac00-87f251fbd21e.html

Medical Reserve Corps

Jan. 2021 – Mar. 2021

- Volunteer family-patient liaison at Berkshire Medical Center, communicating between healthcare providers and family members who could not visit their loved ones in the hospital.
- Volunteer scribe for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

**Columbia Daily Spectator
2020**

Feb. 2020 – April

- Authored a column on mindfulness for Columbia’s most read newspaper.
- Example: <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2020/02/13/how-to-pass-a-smoker/>

Certified Emergency Medical Technician

Feb. 2019 – March

2020

- Volunteer for Columbia University Emergency Medical Services; drove an ambulance in NYC and cared for residents of Morningside Heights.

Systems Biology Initiative

Jan. 2018 – March

- 2020 Lectured in weekly workshops to high school students on synthetic biology, covering material from basic biology to the frontiers of genetic engineering.
- Created a workshop on bioethics, imbricating my interests in synthetic biology and philosophy.

AWARDS

Travel Bursary

April 2022

- Received £250 award from the UCL anthropology department to conduct MSc dissertation fieldwork.

Departmental Honors

April 2021

- Awarded honors in Anthropology for the thesis “Weaving Loss: The Mourning of Pandemic-Related Losses on Reddit,” by the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University

Ella Deloria Undergraduate Research Fellowship

April 2020

- Received a \$1,000 fellowship from the Anthropology Department at Columbia for senior thesis research.

**Columbia Summer Undergraduate
Research Fellowship (SURF)**

June 2018 – Aug. 2018

- Received a \$5,000 stipend to research the role of Nuclear Factor I in maturing motor neurons in the Wichterle Lab.
- Created a poster and presented at the SURF Symposium.