

# Social anthropology

**Why do people get passionate about sport? Why can terrible atrocities be committed by people defending their religious beliefs?**

Social anthropology is the study of human societies and cultures, social customs and beliefs.

## Why study social anthropology?

Anthropology is a broad discipline, linking many subjects including sociology, psychology, archaeology and biology. It covers the entire time-span of human history from its origins to today and aims to understand social diversity and ideas. Social anthropology focuses in particular on the study of how contemporary human beings behave in social groups. Social anthropology can offer insight into the key political and social issues affecting the world today.

## What will I study at university?

There are over 120 different social anthropology courses available. The subject can be studied as a combined degree with a range of other subjects:

- Politics
- Sociology
- Archaeology
- International relations
- Media and cultural studies
- History
- Philosophy
- Languages

Many social anthropology students have the opportunity to undertake fieldwork abroad as part of their degree. Topics can include:

- How different societies organise themselves politically and economically
- Material culture, which is the study of people's relationships through the objects that they have created
- Differences in religious practices
- Relationships between family members

**“I think anthropology is important because it makes us more aware and sensitive. It opens our eyes to other people's lives in a way that few other disciplines do.”**  
Anthropology student

## What skills will I gain?

Many organisations and businesses depend on insights about human diversity that social anthropology offers. By the time you have finished your undergraduate degree, you will have acquired a wide range of skills including:

- Interpreting human diversity
- Comparative analysis of data
- Research and report writing
- Communication skills



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### After my degree... what next?

Once you've finished your undergraduate degree you may want to continue studying and researching anthropology. Today there are postgraduate opportunities in new fields such as the anthropology of childhood or digital anthropology. PhD students can go on to be lecturers at universities, curators in museums or work as consultants in public and private organisations.

With an undergraduate degree in social anthropology you will have acquired a range of skills that are increasingly sought after by local and international organisations.

From market research to museums, from aid organisations to social policy, social anthropology gives a breadth of experience for your future. Social anthropologists enter a wide range of jobs and career options, including:

- Journalism
- Race relations
- Social work
- Politics
- Museums
- International organisations
- Business, including market research, advertising, product design



### Learning on the job

If you are interested in pursuing a career in anthropology, volunteering or doing an internship in a relevant area is a great way to gain first-hand experience of what anthropologists do, as well as knowledge of specialist areas within the discipline.

[www.discoveranthropology.org.uk](http://www.discoveranthropology.org.uk)

Anthropologists can even work in disaster areas, including Ground Zero in New York and the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina.

Social anthropology plays a central role in an era when global understanding and recognition of diverse ways of seeing the world are of critical social, political and economic importance.

Social anthropology uses practical methods to investigate philosophical problems about the nature of human life in society. It grapples with issues of global impact on local society, the politics of nationalism and ethnicity, the world religions, conflict and violence and the powerful communication media.

### What do students say?

“One day I would be learning about the cultural significance of Dr Marten boots and the next day I would be studying witchcraft! There seems to be a little bit of anthropology in everything and a little bit of everything in anthropology.”

Alex Skinner, anthropology graduate

# SOCIAL SCIENCE FOR SCHOOLS

## Further resources

- **The Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI)** is a scholarly association dedicated to anthropology in all its fields and applications. It has a rich collection of unpublished archival and manuscript materials as well as film, video and photographic collections and its manuscript and archive holdings. Its educational programme is Discover Anthropology.  
[www.therai.org.uk](http://www.therai.org.uk)
- **Discover Anthropology** is designed to inform teachers and young people about anthropology. It provides good information for students wanting to study anthropology at university. It also provides information about the anthropology A level, which was accredited for the first time in 2010. It has regular events and activities for young people and teachers, as well as useful resources for teachers that draw upon the insights of anthropology.  
[www.discoveranthropology.org.uk](http://www.discoveranthropology.org.uk)
- **Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA)** was founded in 1946 to promote the study and teaching of social anthropology. It has a blog, with invited guests discussing current issues such as Immigration, Counter-insurgency, Exotic Film and the Financial Crisis. The ASA also hosts a film-site with a biannual short film competition. It supports several networks of anthropologists (see below for Apply and Anthropology Matters).  
[www.theasa.org](http://www.theasa.org)
- **University of Oxford Institute for Social and Cultural Change** was originally established as the only centre in the UK specialising in postgraduate teaching and research within the discipline. It continues to supervise large numbers of graduate and research students.  
[www.isca.ox.ac.uk](http://www.isca.ox.ac.uk)
- **Apply** is the website of the ASA Network of Applied Anthropologists which serves practitioners of applied anthropology working in and outside academia, students seeking a career as an applied anthropologist, teachers and trainers in applied anthropology, and employers and clients of applied anthropologists.  
[www.theasa.org/networks/apply.shtml](http://www.theasa.org/networks/apply.shtml)
- **Anthropology Matters** is an initiative developed by postgraduates that aims to stimulate discussion on the production of anthropological knowledge through a focus on training, teaching, research and writing. It features various anthropology resources and an email list that distributes relevant information about jobs.  
[www.anthropologymatters.com](http://www.anthropologymatters.com)
- **Anthropologist About Town blog** is a monthly blog of events and useful information for students thinking about studying anthropology or wanting to pursue a career using anthropology. It includes online activities, a diary of upcoming events and useful resources.  
<http://anthropologistabouttown.blogspot.co.uk/>
- **American Anthropological Association** is the American equivalent of the RAI. Founded in 1902, it is the largest organisation for anthropologists in the world. It has a useful section on careers, with tips on many relevant issues such as becoming an international consultant and using anthropology in the tourist industry.  
[www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org)

