



Social Anthropology

Making the familiar strange, and the exotic familiar

"An Otago Anthropology degree gave me knowledge, skills and a more holistic perspective to analyse complex social issues. This is invaluable for my work with community and government organisations evaluating social programmes."

Sue Carswell BA,(Hons), PhD
Research and Evaluation Consultant
(Specialising in Criminal Justice)

Social Anthropology explores the cultural grounding of social life. By studying people who are 'not like us' – from whichever group of people it is that 'we' as researchers might belong – anthropologists learn about the surprising differences in everyday living around the world.

Otago offers a range of interesting and challenging study options within Social Anthropology. Visit our webpage to see our courses in Pacific cultures, friendship, reproduction and kinship, the anthropology of money, rites of passage, death studies, health studies, sex, cultural politics, religion and the supernatural and our courses in anthropological technique and theory. Learn about other groups of people and, in the process, find out more about yourself!

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Why study Social Anthropology?

Anthropology will broaden your understanding of the human condition and the way in which this is changing around the world. What are the patterns by which people organise their lives? How do ideas of difference and sameness come about? How does the movement of people through a globalised world impact on the meaning and experience of culture and our sense of belonging and heritage?

Life as an anthropologist means that you visit many other parts of the world, ask major questions about human variation and human difference, and study some of the pressing issues for different societies such as changing economic and political arrangements of power, sustainable living alternatives, the tensions around community inclusion and exclusion and the contributions of local revivals, resurgences and resistance to our changing worlds.

Anthropology gives you the academic tools to create meaningful connections with a wide diversity of peoples. You will learn to engage with cultural groups ethically and to explain social life through systematic questioning and critical analysis.

Background required

No special high school papers are needed as preparation for your Anthropology degree – anthropology has been described as the most scientific of the arts and the most humanistic of the sciences.

Careers in Anthropology

A degree focussed in Social Anthropology provides the sort of broad-based training that can lead to a wide range of careers. Students acquire a high level of expertise in skills which employers report are much sought after in the employment market. These include problem solving, analysis of information, research and writing skills, emotional and ethical intelligence, independent thinking, project management and expertise in audiovisual presentations.

Graduates in social anthropology find work in museums, as policy advisors for the government or local bodies, in community development, the police force, and project co-ordination and management for non-governmental organisations such as Volunteer Service Abroad.

Other interesting careers include journalism, film and media industries, foreign affairs, international aid, teaching, tourism, working with refugees, disaster relief, management, historic preservation, social impact assessment, environmental management – the list is almost endless!

There are also opportunities for pursuing careers specifically in Anthropology and these opportunities, such as working in universities, museums, consultancy, applied research, require further postgraduate training after finishing the BA.

Student exchange

The University of Otago has exchange agreements with more than 70 institutions in over 30 countries. If your marks average B or better, you may qualify to attend one of these institutions for one semester or one year. Exchange programmes are particularly beneficial to Anthropology students for the learning experience of deep immersion into another culture.

Social Anthropology at Otago

Anthropology has been taught at Otago University as a major for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) since 1966. The major normally takes three years and requires a minimum of nine papers in the subject, out of a minimum of 20 papers for a BA. We also offer our graduate students a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and a Post Graduate Diploma in Arts, which are both one-year courses available following the completion of a BA. Those students who do not want to major in anthropology can pick up some anthropology papers as part of their degree, or do a minor in the subject, which requires a minimum of five papers.

Two first year papers provide an introduction to Anthropology: ANTH 103 Introduction to Anthropology and ANTH 105 Global and Local Cultures. In ANTH 103 you will enjoy lectures on both Archaeology and Social Anthropology. The relationship between these different branches of anthropology will be explained, along with some history of the discipline, basic concepts, and the principal means of conducting anthropological research.

In ANTH 105 using global and local examples, as well as ethnographic research by social anthropologists, you will examine systems of

kinship, the importance of gifts and exchange, rites of passage, and local organisation in order to study how social hierarchies, political organisation, ethnicity, religion and globalisation have developed.

At the second and third year levels of the degree, you will begin to specialise in the areas of social anthropology that interest you the most. These papers draw upon the area specialisations and contemporary research interests of our internationally-recognised lecturing staff. Topics include Pacific societies, contemporary issues in anthropology, and the ethics, politics and practice of ethnographic representation, a chance for 'hands on' learning through immersion in the ongoing friendship research project, cultural politics, grieving and ritual, new reproductive technologies, the anthropology of money, the study of religion and the supernatural, and ideologies of health.

These subjects lead on to our strong postgraduate programme which offers papers in the Anthropology of Evil, Transnationalism, Medical Anthropology, Anthropology and the Past, and independently studied research dissertations. Students may then continue to a Master of Arts, or a PhD.

Teaching style

Our programme offers a relaxed intellectual exchange with staff dedicated to good learning outcomes for students. All of our staff are active researchers and award-winning teachers who incorporate their research findings into their teaching.

Double major/degree options

It is perfectly possible to qualify with an Anthropology degree in which all of the papers are social anthropology although we recommend taking some archaeology papers as well.

In addition, some useful double major options include History, Classics, Politics, Film and Media Studies, Māori Studies, Pacific Studies, Languages, Gender, Sociology, Criminology and Religious Studies. Social Anthropology (because of its diverse subject area) also combines exceptionally well in double degrees with studies in Commerce, Law, Science and Health Sciences.

PROFILE

Harry Saunderson-Warner

BA (Honours) | Youth Coach, Taranaki

Studying a subject that made him "look at the world in a different way" changed the course of Harry Saunderson-Warner's career.

Harry chose Otago because it had a reputation for academic excellence, and offered a good variety of subjects.

The former soldier says his family's history of studying at Otago also made it an obvious choice and his experiences at Otago – with its great lecturers and facilities – exceeded his high expectations.

"I loved Dunedin's great atmosphere. I went to rugby games, explored the region's 'great outdoors' – its beaches and bush – and got into fishing and hunting."

Although Harry initially enrolled in a law degree, taking an anthropology paper out of interest, the subject's complexity and many "fascinating real-world applications" led him to change his programme to a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Anthropology – a decision he hasn't regretted.

"Social Anthropology gave me a grounding in communication and research, and the ability to look at the world in a new way."

Since graduating he has been working in social services, and is currently a Youth Coach working with young people through a kaupapa Māori health organisation, providing support and advice to motivate youth to get involved in, and complete, their NCEA qualifications.

"My studies were great prep for this role.

"We learnt about cultural relativism, which is so relevant to my job. I work with young people who come from many different cultures, and who have an incredibly wide range of values. A huge part of my job involves incorporating goals into each person's unique cultural and value system to help them reach their potential."



For questions about
Anthropology
otago.ac.nz/anthropology