What Is Anthropology?

Anthropology is the study of human societies and cultural differences, at all times and in all places. Its approach is comparative: we ask not only why people think and act in the ways they do, but why they should do things in one way here and in another way there. It is holistic in that it looks for connections among all aspects of life – familial, economic, political and religious – that are otherwise parcelled up between different disciplines for separate study. It looks at social life ‘from the inside’, from the point of view of those living it, with an emphasis on understanding in detail different ways of being a human person.

Anthropologists do not so much study people as study with people. We learn to see things in the ways they do, and that can lead us to perceive our own world quite differently too.
Why Study Anthropology at Aberdeen?

International reputation for excellence

Aberdeen's department of Anthropology has an international reputation for excellence in teaching and research. We provide a supportive yet challenging environment within which students develop knowledge of anthropology, including issues of pressing concern for people the world over. Students are supported by research-active staff who are internationally recognised experts in their fields, and our courses reflect staff specialisms.

An outstanding student experience

We are committed to providing students with an outstanding student experience, with a focus on excellence in teaching. This involves a wide variety of course assessments, including a mix of traditional exams, group work, debates, and museum exhibitions. From year 3 (the Honours level), students are offered considerable choice in course selection, the courses reflecting staff research expertise. The programme allows for specialisation on the part of students, culminating in a dissertation on a topic chosen by the student. Students work on their dissertation from the second half of year 3 into the first half of year 4.

An innovative degree programme

We offer an innovative programme, with the emphasis throughout on work at the cutting-edge of the discipline. You will benefit from the close links with other programmes in the Schools of Social Science; Geosciences; Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture; and Divinity, History and Philosophy. The Anthropology Department also has close relationships with the University's King's Museum and Elphinstone Institute. With their unique anthropological and ethnological collections, they provide special opportunities for undergraduate students. Above all, you will be enthusiastically welcomed into an environment where staff and research students are actively engaged in top class, internationally recognised research. Our students are very active in University societies and debates. The Anthropology Society is one of the most active student societies on campus, and arguably the one that runs the most interesting events.
A forward-looking teaching programme

Our teaching programme involves the following themes:

- Religion and politics: Analysing the importance of religion in human life, its connections with politics, asking how we can best understand religion and politics.

- History and the legacy of colonialism: Discussing the history of relations between empire and the indigenous people encountering imperialism.

- Human environment relations: Understanding how humans in different parts of the world relate to and understand the environment in which they live, and the movement of people in that environment.

- Culture, creativity and objects: Exploring the importance of creativity and making in human life, including the curating and exhibiting of objects.

- Ethnographic focus: A unique ethnographic focus on the North, including Siberia, Alaska, Canada, Scandinavia, Iceland, Greenland and Scotland with further expertise in Central Asia, North Africa, the Andes, Tibet and Northern India.

- Research methods and anthropological theory: Understanding how research is done in anthropology and how anthropologists engage with theoretical ideas.

These themes allow us to keep pace with new global challenges that people face and emerging issues in the discipline of anthropology. As a department, we are well-placed to explore these challenges and issues and equip our graduates with the skills and knowledge to contribute to the tackling of these challenges.
We offer two types of Honours degrees. The first is a Single Honours Degree in Anthropology. The second is a joint degree, where Anthropology is combined with another discipline, e.g. International Relations, Sociology, English, History, Geography, Archaeology (many other combinations are possible).

**Year 1: Introduction to Anthropology I & II**
In the first year we offer two introductory courses, Introduction to Anthropology I: Peoples of the World in the first term and Introduction to Anthropology II: Questions of Diversity in the second term. In these courses we introduce some of the key questions of contemporary anthropology: Does human nature exist? How does culture affect the way we think? How do human beings differ from other animals? How and why do people differ in the ways they perceive their environments? What is the relation between language and thought? Do all people experience time and its passing in the same way?

How do societies define their kin? How does culture affect the way we think about sex and gender? How do symbols, rituals and religious systems regulate daily life? What are the causes of ethnicity and nationalism? Does development improve or worsen the plight of third-world peoples?

**Year 2: Key debates in anthropology; Re-imagining colonialism**
In the second year we offer two courses:

**Key Debates in Anthropology** explores some of the key questions that anthropologists have debated: what it is to be human, the nature of human interaction with other humans, with non-humans, and with the environment, and the different ways that people perceive the world and act within it. Themes explored in this course include the category of the person, morality and ethics, art and aesthetics, what is power, how to engage with Otherness, and how anthropologists engage actively, outside academia, in development, health or business.

**Re-imagining Colonialism** explores contemporary colonial expressions from an anthropological perspective. It is split into two main themes: Material Histories and Mediated Histories. Within these themes it will address topics such as the ‘capturing’ of cultures in museums, kinship and politics, gendered colonialism, economic development, media, aboriginal rights and contemporary resistance movements.
Year 3: Researching in anthropology, anthropological theory, choice of themes in anthropology

At level 3 (Junior Honours) all students take a course in Anthropological Theory and single honours students take courses in Doing Anthropological Research and Ethnography. Single honours students furthermore do a course preparing them for their own individual research projects. Under the close supervision of a member of staff, single honours students begin work on their individual research projects, potentially involving the collection and analysis of original fieldwork material. In addition, all students have several course options from which to choose, each of which reflects a particular subject area within anthropology.

The course options include:
- Society and Nature
- Emotion, Self and Society
- Visual Anthropology
- Religion, Power and Belief
- Medical Anthropology
- Anthropology of Discourse

Year 4: Choice of courses from a list of electives; Dissertation through supervised study

At level 4 (Senior Honours) students choose from a wide range of courses and single honours students complete an original research dissertation on a subject of their choice. Joint honours students can also write their dissertation in anthropology.

Our Senior Honours courses include:
- Indigenous Rights
- Morality and Belief in Islam
- Museums and Society
- Constitutional Imagination
- Humans and other Animals
- Roads: Mobility, Movement and Migration
- Anthropology of Landscape
- Anthropology of the North
- Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture
- Materials, Technology and Power in the Andes
- North American Plains Cultures
- Oral Traditions
Anthropology provides insights into the complexity of social life and social processes and the diversity of cultures and social institutions. Anthropology challenges students to think critically and identify their own assumptions, training them in how to understand society from many different perspectives, and equips them with practical skills in working with people in a variety of contexts. It therefore offers an excellent introduction for entry into a career involving working with people or requiring qualitative research skills. Anthropology graduates work in research and teaching, in television, radio and journalism, with overseas development agencies and nongovernmental organisations, as well as in many other fields and professions.

**Careers**

Applications to this degree programme are made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). You apply online at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) and may apply to up to five institutions on the full-price UCAS application. Prospective students (and their parents/guardians/teachers) are welcome to visit the University at any time, or attend our University-wide Open Days in August and October. Please contact the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service, who will be happy to make arrangements for a visit with a member of the department.

**Study Abroad**

In recent years, many of our students have spent time studying abroad, mostly in North America or Europe but also in Hong Kong and Japan. Opportunities to study abroad are provided through the Go Abroad schemes. Students who wish to study abroad should plan ahead. In Anthropology, students have the option of going abroad in the second year of study or the second semester of third year.

**How Do I Apply?**

For further details relating to Anthropology at Aberdeen, please visit [www.abdn.ac.uk/anthropology](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/anthropology)

For all other inquiries, contact:

Student Recruitment and Admissions Service
University of Aberdeen, University Office
King’s College, Aberdeen AB24 3FX

Tel: +44 (0)1224 272090/91

E-mail: sras@abdn.ac.uk

Web: [www.abdn.ac.uk/study](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/study)

Or be our friend at

[www.facebook.com/universityofaberdeen](http://www.facebook.com/universityofaberdeen)

[www.twitter.com/aberdeenuni](http://www.twitter.com/aberdeenuni)
For further details relating to Anthropology at Aberdeen, please also visit www.abdn.ac.uk/anthropology

The University of Aberdeen is a charity registered in Scotland, No: SC013683.
July 2020