Anthropology

Most students coming into college have no idea what anthropology is. Anthropology is not usually part of high school curricula, and gets minimal coverage in the media. We in the Anthropology Department rely on you to let incoming students know that anthropology exists. Please call/email us if you have any questions about it. Contact the Chair, Jesse Shipley (jshipley@haverford.edu) for info.

At Haverford we teach social and cultural (or sociocultural) anthropology. Social and cultural anthropologists study human beings and human communities. Anthropology is the study of the human condition across different times and places, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of humankind and of the promotion of informed social policy. To do this, anthropologists conduct "participant-observation" ethnographic research with diverse social groups in different parts of the world, examining how people imagine and structure their lives and aspirations.

We are interested in social life and organization, modes of subsistence, exchange practices, the family, politics and power, ritual and religion, gender, and all forms of expressive culture. We study social, economic, cultural, and political systems--how these systems are inhabited, contested, changed and reproduced over time. We pay particular attention to the relationships between local contexts and broader global social, geographic and historical regimes and ideas. We aim to address through ethnographic and documentary research the most pressing issues of our times, especially with reference to the effects of globalization, the challenges of social and ethnic diversity, and the pursuit of social justice in the domains of health, the environment, and human rights.

Socio-cultural anthropology has three central traits. First, it is comparative. This means that we compare social and cultural phenomena in one place to those in another, and that we explore the particular features of a specific people and place in relation to general theories about humans and human societies. This comparative method allows us to tease out what is unique and distinctive about the subject we are studying and what generally tends to be true about human beings across contexts. Second, it is holistic. We try to get a sense of the context in which a particular incident or practice is occurring, as a way of developing a fuller understanding of specific practices, places and peoples. Third, it involves participant-observation fieldwork. Social and cultural anthropologists live in the communities they are studying for extended periods of time, in order to build a perspective that integrates an insider's and an outsider's points of view.

Anthropologists have long studied people and social institutions deemed to be at the margins of modernity in Africa, Asia and Latin America, paying particular attention to the value and diversity of the human cultural record as well as to the contemporary predicaments of marginalized peoples. Over the last two decades scholars in anthropology have begun to focus their work on powerful metropolitan and cosmopolitan social actors, both in the United States and globally. As ethnographers study the work of businessmen, planners, state officials, doctors and professionals in transnational institutions such as Wall Street and the World Bank, the discipline has made key contributions in critical debates about globalization, financial reform, public health, education, environment and urbanization. Building on these exciting new directions, and complementing a continuing focus on both rural and urban marginalized populations, faculty in the Haverford Anthropology Department have been engaged in a wide variety of research contexts, working together with artists, businessmen, doctors and public health professionals, teachers and planners, in the production of critical social scientific research. These research projects have, in turn, produced a range of course offerings that straddle disciplinary lines and that have drawn students from across the curriculum, particularly those that have been pursuing interdisciplinary concentrations and minors.
Haverford’s Department of Anthropology offers a rich and thorough training to students in social and cultural anthropology. We have developed a dynamic, rigorous and coherent core curriculum grounded in theory, empirical research and area studies that culminates in a year long faculty supervised thesis.

Currently, faculty in the department offer classes on topics such as human rights, art and architecture, performance, colonialism, medical anthropology, development, gender and sexuality, urbanization, environmental justice, capitalism, and ethno-political conflict and violence. In so doing, we have actively supported a range of Bi-College and Tri-College programs including Peace, Justice, and Human Rights; Gender and Sexuality Studies; Visual Anthropology; Growth and Structure of Cities; Environmental Studies, and the new Health Studies minor. In addition, the faculty offer courses, expertise, and advising in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Africana Studies and East Asian Studies, as well expertise in Europe, the Mediterranean area, and South Asia, supporting college programs that help students develop area-based understandings of the modern world. Our focus on area training and field research in the United States and overseas has generously supported by the Center for Peace and Global Justice and the Hurford Center for the Arts and Humanities, which allows our students to pursue internships and independent research projects in their chosen field of interest.

There are other kinds of anthropology besides sociocultural anthropology. Traditionally, American anthropology is divided into four fields: sociocultural anthropology, linguistic anthropology, archaeology (the study of the material culture of past societies), and physical or biological anthropology (bones, monkeys, apes, human evolution and biology). We have some linguistic anthropology offerings at Haverford (regularly through Jesse Shipley’s courses), and you can find others at Bryn Mawr and Penn. Physical anthropology and archaeology are taught at Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore.

At Haverford we teach Introduction to [Sociocultural] Anthropology in the fall semester. In Introduction to Anthropology we talk about methods and the history of anthropology (focusing on social and cultural anthropology), and do short studies of topics that have been central to the discipline, such as kinship, race, gender, political violence, and globalization. Introduction to Anthropology is a good place to start learning about anthropology, and it is a prerequisite for many of our upper-level courses. We encourage freshmen who are interested in the social sciences/humanities to take this course as a foundation for future study in those areas (there are two sections). We teach some 200 level courses that do not require 103 or any other introductory courses. We encourage students to shop any course in anthropology to get a feel for what the discipline might offer them. We also invite students to attend lectures and other events (such as showings of ethnographic films) in Anthropology at both Haverford and BMC as another great way to find out about anthropology.

The Bryn Mawr anthropology department offers a two-semester introduction, with archaeology and physical anthropology (which we do not count for the Haverford sociocultural major) in the fall and cultural anthropology in the spring (which we do count towards the Haverford major), and the Growth and Structure of Cities program offers a 100 level course in urban anthropology that may be of interest to first-year students.

In 2012-13, Jesse Shipley (Chair of Department), Zolani Ngwane, Zainab Saleh, Joshua Moses (environmental anthropologist), and one other professor (medical anthropologist, yet to be determined) will offer courses. Students should check the Tri-co course guide for updates to department offerings. The department maintains a bulletin board outside Roberts 105 where we post notices about the department and other information related to anthropology. Our website (http://www.haverford.edu/anthropology/) also has a lot of information about us, including
information on recent and upcoming happenings. Our department office is Roberts 105, and Kathy McGee is our administrative assistant. We have some popular anthropology publications, departmental equipment, senior theses, and information about majors and minors in the department office. Please encourage students to drop by, and to come visit the department faculty too.

Curriculum:

Major in Anthropology
Students majoring in anthropology are required to take a one-semester introduction to sociocultural anthropology (Anthropology 103), six core courses in social and cultural anthropology (an area studies course, a course on the history and theory of anthropology, a 300 level course, a 200 level course, and a two-credit senior thesis sequence) and five other courses in anthropology. Courses in the history and theory of anthropology, the senior thesis seminar, and at least one 200 level and one 300 level course must be taken at Haverford. The senior thesis is the culminating project of the major. Students design, implement, and write up an original research project based on independent field work and/or archival, material culture, and library research. Past theses have been written on such diverse topics as the “cultural defense” in the American legal system, the construction of Afro-Brazilian ethnicity, the suburbanization of rural Pennsylvania, microcredit and women’s empowerment in Columbia, beauty queens in politics, and the controversies surrounding the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act.

Minor in Anthropology
The minor in Anthropology consists of six courses, including Anthropology 103, a course in the history and theory of anthropology, an ethnographic area course, and three other courses at the 200 or 300 level, including one course at the 300 level. A minimum of three courses must be taken in the Haverford Department.

Many anthropology majors choose to deepen their understanding of a field area through the junior year study abroad programs offered at Haverford. Some choose to conduct research for the senior thesis in conjunction with these programs. Others carry out independent summer research projects, some of which are funded through college fellowships and internships offered through the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship and the Hurford Arts and Humanities Center. Students who plan to conduct field research in a foreign language may acquire language training through courses offered in the tri-college area or at the University of Pennsylvania.