

Anthropology

Anthropology studies the range of the human experience, from the ancient past to the contemporary world, from our hominid ancestors to our primate cousins, from distant lands to our own communities. Anthropologists seek to uncover the mechanisms of culture, biology, and history that make human beings what they are. To do this, they use a wide variety of techniques, including fieldwork, laboratory analysis, and archival research. Undergraduates in the Department of Anthropology have opportunities to learn about and participate in all major areas of this research, making anthropology one of the broadest – and most broadly useful – areas of study in the university.

Preparing for Life and Work

Anthropology covers a wide range of topics, and professional anthropologists tend to focus on one of them in their own research. Undergraduates, too, often find themselves interested in a particular area of the field, often one connected with their own career plans. The main divisions are:

Cultural Anthropology: Cultural anthropology focuses on human cultural diversity, the kinds of variations and similarities found in human societies around the world. To investigate these issues, cultural anthropologists use *participant observation*, a form of research that involves living with other cultures and learning about them over long periods of time. The skills involved in this work – reading other cultures, learning other lifeways, conducting interviews and surveys in a variety of settings – apply directly to a number of professions outside the academy, including international development, management consulting, marketing, diversity consulting, international law and commerce, and public policy development.

Purdue Anthropology has seven faculty members specializing in cultural anthropology, all with active research programs. Their topical specializations include culture and gender, the anthropology of religion, medical anthropology, the anthropology of development, urban anthropology, psychological anthropology, kinship studies, and the culture of drug abuse. Their field projects span the globe, from Indonesia to Africa to Northern Europe to the United States.

Biological Anthropology: Biological anthropology studies the interaction between human biology and culture. It draws on research not only with contemporary human populations, but also with our hominid ancestors and with other primates. Biological anthropologists combine a number of types of field research with sophisticated laboratory analysis. Undergraduates studying this subfield often continue to graduate study in related fields like biology and medicine, as well as careers in medical research, conservation, health services, and related areas.

Purdue Anthropology has two faculty members specializing in biological anthropology. Their research programs focus on a number of subjects, including rain forest ecology and conservation, human gender and nutrition, field studies of the great apes, and human-animal interactions. Field sites include central Africa, northern India, and the United States.

Archaeology: Archaeology focuses on the human past, especially as it is reflected in material culture. Most archaeological work begins with excavation, digging into the earth to find evidence of earlier cultures and civilizations. Contemporary archaeologists augment their digs with sophisticated laboratory analysis of the human remains, ceramics, soils, faunal remains, and other materials they collect. In doing so, they can reconstruct not only the physical worlds of other times, but the cultural worlds as well. Many undergraduate archaeologists pursue the field professionally after graduation, working as archaeological consultants to industries and governments or setting up their own cultural resource management firms. Other career destinations include museum curatorial work, forensic sciences, and land use planning.

Purdue Anthropology has five faculty members specializing in archaeology, all with active field research programs. Their field locations include Central America, Peru, Armenia, Sudan, and Alaska, and their subjects range from state formation to technology to politics and ethnicity.

Linguistic Anthropology: Linguistic anthropology explores the connection between language and culture. To what extent do the languages we use shape our experience and culture? Conversely, how much do cultural systems and social relationships shape the ways that we use language? To find out, linguistic anthropologists conduct a variety of kinds of research, including participant observation, laboratory observation, and analysis of texts. Students in the field find applications for this experience in a variety of careers that focus on communication, including diversity consulting, marketing, and law.

Purdue Anthropology has one member specializing in linguistic anthropology, as well as close ties to Purdue's interdisciplinary program in Linguistics. Research topics include sociolinguistics, semiotics, and the relationship between language and culture change.

In addition to these broad subdisciplines, anthropology includes a number of cross-disciplinary subfields. Our department has both cultural and biological anthropologists who focus on *medical anthropology*, the study of the ways that different cultures think about and treat illness. The anthropology of *conservation and ecology* is a central concern for several members of our biological, archaeological, and cultural anthropology faculty. *Applied anthropology* – the application of anthropological methods and knowledge to business enterprise, government policy, and social welfare – is a growing focus of our department. Students interested in these fields can often apply their coursework directly to business and policy careers after graduation.

To learn more

Students can find out more about Purdue's Department of Anthropology by visiting our website at <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/anthropology/>. For information about careers in anthropology, students may also want to visit the American Anthropological Association's student resources webpage at <http://www.aaanet.org/resources/students/>.