

Anthropology 1: Uncovering Human Mysteries Course Syllabus

What you will learn in this course

Introduction to Anthropology: Uncovering Human Mysteries

Anthropology demands the open-mindedness with which one must look and listen, record in astonishment and wonder that which one would not have been able to guess. *Margaret Mead*

The aim of anthropology is to use a broad approach to gain an understanding of our past, present, future and address the problems humans face in biological, social and cultural life. This course will explore the evolution, similarity and diversity of humankind through time. It will look at how we have evolved from a biologically and culturally weak species to one that has the ability to cause catastrophic change. Exciting online video journeys to different areas of the world will also be presented in the course.

Unit 1: Studying Humans: What Anthropologists Do

What do all human beings have in common? Why do some cultures value outspoken people while others admire those who are thoughtful and contemplative? Do teenagers drive their parents nuts in every society? These are the kinds of questions an anthropologist seeks to answer. Anthropology is most concerned with questions about humanity and the kinds of cultures that it creates. To get answers, anthropologists will look everywhere from the earliest prehistoric societies to today's complex multicultural world. By understanding what we have in common with cultures that are very different from our own, we can better live together in an increasingly global and diverse society.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Describe the development of the field of anthropology
- Explain the significance of anthropology in contemporary society
- Articulate the relationship between anthropology and sociology
- Identify leading anthropologists and sociologists
- Consider career interests in the field of anthropology

Unit 2: Human Evolution: How We Got Here

Evolution is a change in a population's traits over time. As populations become better adapted to their environments, new species evolve. Natural selection is the major process that drives evolution. Fossils and other evidence show how evolution has occurred. The earliest human ancestors evolved about 6 million years ago. The first members of our genus appeared about 2.5 million years ago. Called *Homo habilis*, they were the first human ancestors known to make tools. They were followed by *Homo erectus* around 1.8 million years ago. *Homo erectus* was the first human ancestor to live in cool climates and use fire, but fully modern humans did not appear until about 200,000 years ago. There are still a lot of mysteries about how humans evolved for

biological anthropologists to consider. Humans are also part of the larger family of primates, so there is much we can learn from them as well.

What will you learn in this unit?

- State how and why evolution occurs
- Identify different types of evidence for evolution
- Outline the events of early primate evolution
- Identify early species of *Homo sapiens*, including their traits and distribution
- Describe where and when *Homo sapiens* evolved

Unit 3: Looking at Culture in Context

How do anthropologists learn about human culture? Like all social scientists, they have a specific methodology that they use, including living among other cultures to get to know them well. Everyone's got to eat, so how a culture acquires food is one of the most basic ways of classifying cultures, and can tell you a lot more than what's for dinner! Food production and diet are just one part of the interwoven elements that make up culture.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Identify the research methods anthropologists use
- Differentiate types of societies, including hunter-gatherer, agrarian, industrial and post-industrial
- Give examples of subcultures and what makes them unique
- Assess the impact of technology on society
- Trace socialization as a life-long process

Unit 4: Culture & Language: Why Humans Are Special

Culture is the entire way of life of a group of people. All human cultures have similarities, called cultural universals. Culture includes the goods people make, the ways people organize themselves and interact with one another, what they believe and value, and the art they create. Language is the single most important component of culture because much of the rest of culture is shared through language. Human language has several traits that make it different from nonhuman animal communication. Language is not just a powerful means of communication. It also influences how we think.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Define culture, and list cultural universals
- Give examples of material, social, and ideological culture
- Explain why art is an important part of culture
- List traits of human language
- Outline the origin of human language

Unit 5: All Environment and Culture

Do you live close to neighbors in a bustling city or out in the country on a rural farm? Do you have to worry about earthquakes or are hurricanes a bigger danger? The answers to these questions reveal not only where you live, but provide some insight into your culture. Population and its location will shape a lot of factors in your life, and anthropologists will focus on their influence. They are also going to need to know a bit about geography and the environments that host the communities that they study. Whether considering isolated cultures that keep to themselves or multicultural urban areas, geography will play an important role.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Interpret population growth and other demographic data
- Explain and critique theories of population growth
- Discuss the Six Essential Elements of geography
- Identify human and geographical characteristics of regions
- Define race, ethnicity, and characteristics of minority groups

Anthropology Midterm Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from the first five units in this course (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)

Unit 6: Material Culture: How Humans are Handy

Archaeology is the study of past cultures through the material remains that people have left behind. Archaeologists find and excavate sites that people once occupied. From objects that people made and other evidence, they reconstruct how people lived, the problems they faced, and how they used culture to solve them. Material remains are the only way to learn about much of our past. This is because there are no written records of what happened during most of human existence. Writing was a recent invention, and even after writing was invented, the lives of ordinary people were usually not recorded. However, the objects they left behind tell us a lot about what they believed and the issues that their society faced.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Define archaeology and the archaeological record
- Identify the types of material remains that people leave behind
- Outline how archaeologists find and excavate sites
- Explain how archaeologists analyze and interpret what they discover
- Describe the earliest evidence of culture that was left behind by human ancestors

Unit 7: Religion: What We Believe

Religion is one of the universals of human culture. It may be defined as a set of beliefs and practices that relate to the supernatural, or things outside of nature. Religion serves important purposes, such as explaining the unknown and helping people cope with stressful events. Major world religions include Christianity and Islam. There are also hundreds of local, or folk, religions. Most religions share certain things in common, including myths, supernatural beings, religious practices such as rituals, and ideas about right and wrong. Most religions also identify people that play special religious roles. Like other aspects of culture, religion can change. This occurs most often when societies are under great stress.

What will you learn in this unit?

- State how anthropologists define religion
- List purposes that religion serves in society
- Name examples of world and folk religions
- Describe elements that are common to many religions
- Explain how and why religions change

Unit 8: Family Ties & Social Bonds: What Keeps Us Together

In all human cultures, family members share special biological and social bonds. A family usually begins with marriage. Marriage occurs in all human cultures, but how people choose marriage partners and how many spouses they can have vary from one culture to another. After people marry, they usually set up a household, which is the basic economic and social unit of society. Family ties, known as kinship, will do a lot to determine who lives in the household. Each society will define kinship a little differently, but families are a core social unit that are designed to help people thrive. Governments serve a similar function. Although they are arranged differently in each culture, they share the goal of serving the needs of their society.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Identify types of marriage rules and forms of marriage
- Explain how residence patterns are related to household makeup
- Describe different ways to trace relationships and name kin
- Analyze trends in American society regarding family life
- Evaluate the importance of civic participation

Unit 9: Information and Enculturation

Any culture can be examined through an anthropological lens, even the United States. Like most complex societies, there are many ways in which enculturation occurs. Beyond family and community, enculturation also comes from media outlets. As you have probably noticed, there are a lot of different perspectives presented in the press. Sometimes it is hard to tell what is fact and what is opinion; fortunately, there are ways to distinguish the two. American culture is also complex because of the numerous immigrant groups who have joined this country, adding their own culture to this eclectic mix. Social change also comes from within as social mobility allows

people to improve their status, or drop if times are hard. No matter what aspect of American culture an anthropologist explores, it's going to be complicated!

What will you learn in this unit?

- Evaluate the role of history in shaping national character
- Describe the changing role of the media in politics
- Analyze various types of communication for bias, factual accuracy, etc.
- Discuss changing ideas about citizenship and the participation of different groups
- Detail the differences between the developing and developed worlds

Unit 10: Anthropology in Current Cultures

As the world develops and changes, so does the role of anthropologists. Many anthropologists will focus on current issues, looking at events that destroy cultures, such as war and genocide, and the events that bring cultures together, like treaties. The 20th and early 21st centuries have seen their share of conflicts, but also some significant strides towards finding common ground.

What will you learn in this unit?

- Describe the causes and effects of nationalist conflicts
- Determine cultural, historic, and economic factors that lead to genocide
- Explain how the world's nations are governed differently
- Assess human rights in the U.S. and other countries
- Compare indications of democratization in other countries

Anthropology Final Exam

- Review information acquired and mastered from this course up to this point.
- Take a course exam based on material from units six to ten in this course – the last four units. (Note: You will be able to open this exam only one time.)