

## Anthropology and the Disciplines

*Because of its attention to variation and complexity, anthropology is related to almost every academic discipline. People trained in anthropology contribute to a range of other academic perspectives.*

**Economics.** In the U.S., most economics departments mainly study economic patterns in developed market economies. By contrast, economic anthropologists, although interested in such conventional topics as production, consumption, and exchange, also examine economic thought in non-market societies, ancient civilizations, and societies in transition from one type of economy to another.

**Political Science.** Political science studies how public and private power is obtained, used, and contested. Cultural anthropologists study power too, such as leadership styles in societies of all types, from non-hierarchical ones (e.g., the !Kung and other hunter-gatherers) to highly stratified states, and from the contemporary world to ancient Mesoamerica and Greece. Political anthropologists are studying important contemporary issues such as ethnic violence and state disintegration in Ireland and the former Soviet Union, and the way that global phenomena such as Christianity, nationalism, and democracy vary in meaning and function across cultures and historical periods.

**Sociology.** Sociologists study the organization of people into groups, from smaller ones like the family to larger ones like the corporation. Cultural anthropologists also study social organization, but place greater emphasis on extensive fieldwork and the method of participant-observation. Anthropologists almost always work directly with the people they study, speaking their native language, and often living in their homes. Fieldwork is frequently, but not always, done in a culture different from that of the anthropologist. By promoting multi- and cross-cultural awareness, sociological generalizations based on mainstream American culture can be evaluated and sometimes challenged.

**Linguistics.** Linguists study the structure of language. By cracking the code through which linguistic information is transmitted, they hope to learn more about the structure of the human mind. Linguistic anthropologists study the ways in which people use language in different cultures to communicate. By investigating verbal behavior close-up and first-hand through ethnographic fieldwork, linguistic anthropologists are often able to demonstrate not only the variety of speech patterns, but the systematic ways in which such activities as greetings, oratory, jokes, stories, advertisements, baby-talk, and "women's language" vary in relation to situation and over time. These skills have practical applications in the fields of educational consulting, business communication, document design, and political communication.

**Religion.** Students interested in religion will find anthropology especially rewarding. Although anthropologists do study the major world religions, they also

tend to study the whole range of human beliefs and rituals--from the sacred cow in India, to witchcraft in central Africa, to shamanism in Korea. Anthropologists of religion describe the enormous array of philosophies and practices that people have created concerning the nature and meaning of the world; they also explain how beliefs and practices change with their cultural context.

**Geology.** Archaeologists and paleoanthropologists work hand in hand with geologists to identify the environments in which people lived and to determine the times of occupation. The study of early humans is an enterprise in which geologists and anthropologists must be well versed in each others' disciplines.

**Zoology.** The comparative study of our closest relatives, the primates, is an important part of anthropology. Anthropological field studies of these animals have advanced both the science of ethology and the understanding of human evolution. The acquisition and transmission of learned behavior, the nature of intelligence, and the origins of primate social systems are among the topics anthropologists address.

**Biomedicine, Psychology, Psychiatry.** Through the study of reproductive health, child survival, adolescent psychology, schizophrenia, eating disorders, and drug abuse, anthropology connects closely to the health sciences. Many anthropologists are researching the cross-cultural impact of the AIDS epidemic. Others are documenting the medical knowledge of traditional healers, some of which may be of considerable value.

**Anatomy and Neuroscience.** Biological anthropologists use their training in anatomy and neurology to investigate how human beings developed erect posture, tool use, and language and symbolic thought.

**Genetics.** Anthropological geneticists study how and why genetic traits vary with populations. Their studies reconstruct the movements, separations, and interminglings of peoples, as well as the selective forces (such as disease) that have operated on populations in the past.

**The Arts.** The expressive arts, including graphic art, music, dance, and literature, have long had a major place in anthropology. Archaeologists and cultural anthropologists study art for clues about the culture and social organization of a given people, as well as for psychological analyses of what art reveals about human thought. Archaeologists also seek the origins of humans' capacity for creativity and symbolic expression. Linguistic anthropologists look at artistic forms of speech, including ritual, to study how thought and feeling vary by culture and time..