

Anth 112 Introduction to Social-Cultural Anthropology



Anthropology is the search for understanding what it means to be human, based on careful observation and analysis of people's real lives, all over the world. Anthropology takes nothing for granted. We look at human life in a global perspective, in all of its diversity. We question everything, and so anthropology can help you ask new questions and gain valuable insights into every other field you study. Everywhere you go, people live profoundly different lives. The things you take for granted—your home, your family, how you get food on the table, your plans for the future—are, to many other people, really strange. By understanding who we are, this course will introduce you to the very specific approach of anthropological thinking, which, once mastered, will give you a new way of looking and thinking about the world and its people. The course aims to provide you with the understanding that there is more unity amongst humans than we sometimes expect, something that you will discover within your own life and society. There are many ways of thinking about this world and understanding it, and none of them are more right or wrong than others, but rather all are an attempt by humans to understand the vastness of the human experience. Thinking about space, time the body, identity and how humans express themselves through rituals or material objects, will lead you to the understanding that, even though all humans are the same, what makes us human is to create difference. This specific anthropological way of thinking and analysing is a skill that makes anthropologists most valuable in many work environments since it will challenge what is commonly believed, and introduce new approaches to companies, NGO's, development agencies or global enterprises, deriving from the insight that the the ingenuity of human sociality is vast and in permanent change. Learning about culture, society and complexity provides valuable experience and knowledge that helps you think creatively, grapple with ambiguity, and see things from multiple points of view. Professional anthropologists use the 'ethnographic method', participating as much as possible in the daily lives of the people they study. We learn to see interesting orders and patterns where others see dull routines, or chaos and confusion. We have, in the words of an early anthropologist, "the ethnographer's magic" (Malinowski 1922, 6). We figure out how people think, and the influence of the social environment. We see how and why societies change, and why they do not, and we challenge experts and powerful people with facts that they ignore.

