

ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology studies humankind from a comparative perspective that emphasizes the diversity of human behavior and the importance of culture in both describing and explaining that variety. While the discipline encompasses the biological nature of our species and the material aspects of human adaptation, it takes as fundamental the idea that humans respond to nature and natural forces in large part through culture—that is, the system of practices and signs through which people interact and communicate. Anthropology, then, is the study of human beings as cultural animals. Sociocultural anthropology, the focus of the MIT program, draws its data from the direct study of contemporary peoples living in a wide variety of circumstances, from peasant villagers to tropical forest hunters and gatherers to professionals working in technological organizations to urban populations in modern societies.

Anthropology at MIT offers students a broad exposure to scholarship on human culture. The field is more generally distinguished from other humanities and social science disciplines by its insistence that understanding people's ways of life is often best accomplished by living and working among them—that is, by doing fieldwork. This immersive work—often described as ethnography—reveals the multiple positions and perspectives that constitute social worlds. Ethnographic representations in texts and films can provide excellent contextual resources for work in engineering, science, and other fields in the humanities, social sciences, and management.

Undergraduate Study

MIT's Anthropology Program introduces students to intensive studies in such areas as environmental politics and social dimensions of climate change; class and economic inequality; food studies; medical anthropology; cultures of science and technology; gender, sexuality, race, and family; and migration and nationalism.

Excluding Independent Study, Thesis, and Special Subjects, the Anthropology curriculum is divided into six topic clusters that provide depth on related topics:

- 21A.00, 21A.01, and 21A.157 are core subjects.
- 21A.100 to 21A.199 address general issues related to culture, politics, and identities.
- 21A.300 to 21A.499 examine bodies, health, and the environment in global and local settings.
- 21A.500 to 21A.599 focus on science, technology, and media in various institutional, economic, and political contexts.
- 21A.800 to 21A.899 focus on research methods in Anthropology.

For additional information about undergraduate study in anthropology (<http://web.mit.edu/anthropology/undergraduate/subjects.html>), visit the website.

Students taking a concentration in anthropology should enroll in 21A.00 Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures, 21A.01 How Culture Works, or 21A.157 The Meaning of Life, and two other subjects. Anthropology subjects qualify for several interdisciplinary concentrations, including those in Women's and Gender Studies, Latin American and Latino/a Studies, and Science, Technology, and Society.

Bachelor of Science in Anthropology (Course 21A)

The undergraduate program leading to the degree of Bachelor of Science in Anthropology (Course 21A) (<https://catalog.mit.edu/degree-charts/anthropology-course-21a>) provides a thorough grounding in cultural anthropology.

Majors learn about the concept of culture and the processes by which humans make meaningful transactions, the nature of ethnographic fieldwork, and the connections between anthropology and the other social sciences. Majors study the theories explaining human behavior as well as the range of methods anthropologists use to analyze empirical data. Students can focus on particular geographical areas, including Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, or North America, and on such issues as immigration, multiculturalism, environmental justice, medicine, globalization, religion, social media, cultures of computing, or food cultures.

The anthropology student comes to understand that the hallmark of the discipline is the comparative study of human societies. Emphasis is on understanding diversity and the importance of the concept of culture in explaining that variety, as well as on learning about the universals of behavior that may underlie diversity.

Joint Degree Programs

Joint degree programs are offered in anthropology in combination with a field in engineering or science (21E, 21S). See the joint degree programs (<https://catalog.mit.edu/schools/humanities-arts-social-sciences/humanities/#undergraduatetext>) listed under Humanities.

21A.00 Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures, 21A.01 How Culture Works, or 21A.157 The Meaning of Life is strongly recommended as a preliminary subject for all anthropology degree programs.

Minor in Anthropology

The Minor in Anthropology consists of six subjects arranged into two tiers as shown below. Students create individual programs with the help of the minor advisor to ensure that they gain a coherent understanding of the methods, approaches, and some of the results of the discipline.

Tier I		
21A.00	Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures	12
or 21A.01	How Culture Works	
or 21A.157	The Meaning of Life	

Tier II

With approval of the minor advisor, select five subjects 54-60
(not to include 21A.00 or 21A.01 or 21A.157) ¹

Total Units 66-72

¹ Examples of five subjects with a unifying theme are: Anthropology of Science, Medicine, and Technology (21A.311, 21A.407 (<http://student.mit.edu/catalog/search.cgi?search=21a.407&style=verbatim>) or 21A.410 (<http://student.mit.edu/catalog/search.cgi?search=21a.410&style=verbatim>), and three subjects from 21A.500J (<http://student.mit.edu/catalog/search.cgi?search=21a.500j&style=verbatim>) - 21A.520 (<http://student.mit.edu/catalog/search.cgi?search=21a.520&style=verbatim>); Gender (21A.103[]], 21A.111[]], 21A.141[]], 21A.143[]], and 21A.504[]]); or Culture and Identity (21A.104, 21A.111[]], 21A.130[]], 21A.150, and 21A.155).

Graduate Study

HASTS Graduate Program

The Anthropology Program, the History faculty, and the Program in Science, Technology, and Society collaborate in the graduate program History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS) leading to a PhD. See the HASTS Graduate Program description (<https://catalog.mit.edu/schools/humanities-arts-social-sciences/science-technology-society/#graduatetext>) under the Program in Science, Technology, and Society.

Inquiries

Further information on subjects and programs may be obtained from the Anthropology Office, Room E53-335, 617-452-2837.

Faculty and Teaching Staff

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Head, Anthropology Program

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The anthropology subjects described below are grouped within six areas: Core Subjects; Culture, Politics, and Identities; Bodies, Health, and Environment; Science, Technology, and Media; Research Methods in Anthropology; and Independent Study, Special Subjects, and Thesis.

Core Subjects

21A.00 Introduction to Anthropology: Comparing Human Cultures

Prereq: None
U (Fall)
3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Through the comparative study of different cultures, anthropology explores fundamental questions about what it means to be human. Seeks to understand how culture shapes societies, from the smallest island in the South Pacific to the largest Asian metropolis, and affects the way institutions work, from scientific laboratories to Christian mega-churches. Provides a framework for analyzing diverse facets of human experience, such as gender, ethnicity, language, politics, economics, and art.

G. Jones

21A.01 How Culture Works

Prereq: None
Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)
3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Introduces diverse meanings and uses of the concept of culture with historical and contemporary examples from scholarship and popular media around the globe. Includes first-hand observations, synthesized histories and ethnographies, quantitative representations, and visual and fictionalized accounts of human experiences. Students conduct empirical research on cultural differences through the systematic observation of human interaction, employ methods of interpretative analysis, and practice convincing others of the accuracy of their findings.

M. Buyandelger

21A.157 The Meaning of Life

Prereq: None
U (Spring)
3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines how a variety of cultural traditions propose answers to the question of how to live a meaningful life. Considers the meaning of life, not as a philosophical abstraction, but as a question that individuals grapple with in their daily lives, facing difficult decisions between meeting and defying cultural expectations. Provides tools for thinking about moral decisions as social and historical practices, and permits students to compare and contextualize the ways people in different times and places approach fundamental ethical concerns.

S. Helmreich, H. Paxson

Culture, Politics, and Identities

21A.103[] The Science of Race, Sex, and Gender

Same subject as STS.046[], WGS.225[]
Prereq: None
Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)
Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
3-0-9 units. HASS-S

See description under subject WGS.225[].

A. Sur

21A.104 Memory, Culture, and Forgetting

Prereq: None
Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)
2-0-7 units. HASS-S

Introduces scholarly debates about the sociocultural practices through which individuals and societies create, sustain, recall, and erase memories. Emphasis is given to the history of knowledge, construction of memory, the role of authorities in shaping memory, and how societies decide on whose versions of memory are more "truthful" and "real." Other topics include how memory works in the human brain, memory and trauma, amnesia, memory practices in the sciences, false memory, sites of memory, and the commodification of memory.

M. Buyandelger

21A.111[] For Love and Money: Rethinking the Family

Same subject as WGS.172[]
Prereq: None
Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)
Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Cross-cultural case studies introduce students to the anthropological study of the social institutions and symbolic meanings of family, gender, and sexuality. Investigates the different forms families and households take and considers their social, emotional, and economic dynamics. Analyzes how various expectations for, and experiences of, family life are rooted in or challenged by particular conceptions of gender and sexuality. Addresses questions surrounding what it means to be a "man" or a "woman," as well as a family member, in different social contexts.

H. Paxson

21A.120 American Dream: Exploring Class in the US

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines the "American Dream" — the belief that all individuals and groups can succeed in the US through hard work and determination — in light of decreasing social mobility, increasing inequality, and shifting patterns of immigration. Focuses on how people use storytelling — such as oral narrative, memoirs, home movies, family photo albums, and novels — to reflect on their day-to-day experience of social class in the United States. Considers how social class intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Students undertake research projects and class assignments using oral histories, interviews, and analysis of archival records.

C. Walley

21A.127[J] Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Same subject as 11.045[J], 15.302[J], 17.045[J]

Subject meets with 21A.129

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

The study of power among individuals and within organizations, markets, and states. Using examples from anthropology and sociology alongside classical and contemporary social theory, explores the nature of dominant and subordinate relationships, types of legitimate authority, and practices of resistance. Examines how people are influenced in subtle ways by those around them, who makes controlling decisions in the family, how people get ahead at work, and whether democracies, in fact, reflect the will of the people. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

S. Silbey

21A.129 Power: Interpersonal, Organizational, and Global Dimensions

Subject meets with 11.045[J], 15.302[J], 17.045[J], 21A.127[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Spring)

3-0-9 units

The study of power among individuals and within organizations, markets, and states. Using examples from anthropology and sociology alongside classical and contemporary social theory, explores the nature of dominant and subordinate relationships, types of legitimate authority, and practices of resistance. Examines how people are influenced in subtle ways by those around them, who makes controlling decisions in the family, how people get ahead at work, and whether democracies, in fact, reflect the will of the people. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

S. Silbey

21A.130[J] Introduction to Latin American Studies

Same subject as 17.55[J], 21G.084[J], 21H.170[J]

Subject meets with 21G.784

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S; CI-H

See description under subject 17.55[J].

T. Padilla, P. Duong

21A.131[J] Latinx in the Age of Empire

Same subject as 21H.270[J]

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

See description under subject 21H.270[J].

H. Beltran, T. Padilla

21A.132[J] Race and Migration in Europe

Same subject as 21G.058[J]

Subject meets with 21G.418

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H; CI-H

Addresses the shifting politics of nation, ethnicity, and race in the context of migration and globalization in Germany and Europe. Provides students with analytical tools to approach global concerns and consider Europe and Germany from cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives. Familiarizes students with the ways in which histories of migration, travel, and colonial encounters shape contemporary Europe. Introduces the concepts of transnationalism, diasporic cultures, racism, ethnicity, asylum, and mobility via case studies and materials, including film, ethnography, fiction, and autobiography. Taught in English. Limited to 18.

B. Stoetzer

21A.133 Latin American Migrations

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines economic, cultural, political, and social dimensions of past and present migrations from Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean to, from, and within the United States. Explores Latina/o community dynamics, politics of migrant labor, relational formations of race, and transnational forms of belonging. Students analyze ethnographies, films, visual arts, journalism, and music to study migration using central analytic concepts from anthropology, sociology, ethnic studies, and Latinx studies.

H. Beltrán

21A.135[J] Africa and the Politics of Knowledge

Same subject as 21G.025[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Considers how, despite its immense diversity, Africa continues to hold purchase as both a geographical entity and meaningful knowledge category. Examines the relationship between articulations of "Africa" and projects like European imperialism, developments in the biological sciences, African de-colonization and state-building, and the imagining of the planet's future. Readings in anthropology and history are organized around five themes: space and place, race, representation, self-determination, and time. Enrollment limited.

A. Edoh

21A.136[J] Global Africa: Creative Cultures

Same subject as 21G.026[J]

Subject meets with 21G.326

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines contemporary and historical cultural production on and from Africa across a range of registers, including literary, musical and visual arts, material culture, and science and technology. Employs key theoretical concepts from anthropology and social theory to analyze these forms and phenomena. Uses case studies to consider how Africa articulates its place in, and relationship to, the world through creative practices. Discussion topics largely drawn from Francophone and sub-Saharan Africa, but also from throughout the continent and the African diaspora. Taught in English. Limited to 18.

A. Edoh

21A.137[J] African Migrations

Same subject as 21G.028[J]

Subject meets with 21G.328

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines West African migration to France and to the United States from the early 20th century to the present. Centering the experiences of African social actors and historicizing recent dynamics, students consider what migration across these three regions reveals about African projects of self-determination, postcolonial nation-building, and global citizenship. Students also comparatively analyze the workings of contemporary French and American societies, in particular, the articulations of race and citizenship in the two nations. Taught in English. Limited to 18.

A. Edoh

21A.138[J] Women and Gender in the Middle East and North Africa

Same subject as 21H.263[J], WGS.220[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

See description under subject WGS.220[J].

L. Eckmekcioglu

21A.141[J] Images of Asian Women: Dragon Ladies and Lotus Blossoms

Same subject as 21G.048[J], WGS.274[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores some of the forces and mechanisms through which stereotypes are built and perpetuated. In particular, examines stereotypes associated with Asian women in colonial, nationalist, state-authoritarian, and global/diasporic narratives about gender and power. Students read ethnography, fiction, and history, and view films to examine the politics and circumstances that create and perpetuate the representation of Asian women as dragon ladies, lotus blossoms, despotic tyrants, desexualized servants, and docile subordinates. Students are introduced to debates about Orientalism, gender, and power.

M. Buyandelger

21A.143[J] Gender and Japanese Popular Culture

Same subject as 21G.039[J], WGS.154[J]

Subject meets with 21G.591

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-H

See description under subject 21G.039[J].

I. Condry

21A.144 Asian American Experiences: Anthropological Perspectives (New)

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Broad, comparative, and in-depth analysis of Asian American experiences in the 21st century from anthropological, media studies, and gender studies perspectives. Explores the experiences of contemporary Asian Americans through ethnographic research and anthropological works by reflecting on some key concerns of our society today: digital reproduction of racism, backlash against the rise of Asia, fascism, #MeToo, and the explosion of racism against Asians since the COVID-19 pandemic. Attends to the experiences of racialization in the workspaces of college-educated upper middle-class professionals.

M. Buyandelger

21A.150 Teaching and Learning: Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores the diverse ways that people teach and learn in different countries, disciplines, and subcultures (computer gamers, magicians, jazz musicians, etc.). Compares schooling to other forms of knowledge transmission, from initiation and apprenticeship to recent innovations in online education. Students discuss various learning theories and apply them to a variety of in-class activities using qualitative methods to conduct original research on topics of their choice. Limited to 15.

G. Jones

21A.155 Food, Culture, and Politics

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores connections between what we eat and who we are through cross-cultural study of how personal identities and social groups are formed via food production, preparation, and consumption. Organized around critical discussion of what makes "good" food good (healthy, authentic, ethical, etc.). Uses anthropological and literary classics as well as recent writing and films on the politics of food and agriculture. Instruction and practice in written and oral communication provided.

H. Paxson

21A.461 What Is Capitalism?

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S; CI-H

Introduces academic debates on the nature of capitalism, drawing upon the ideas of scholars as diverse as Adam Smith and Karl Marx. Examines anthropological studies of how contemporary capitalism plays out in people's daily lives in a range of geographic and social settings, and implications for how we understand capitalism today. Settings range from Wall Street investment banks to auto assembly plants, from family businesses to consumer shopping malls. Enrollment limited.

C. Walley

Bodies, Health, and Environment

21A.301 Disease and Health: Culture, Society, and Ethics

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

From a cross cultural and global perspective, examines how medicine is practiced, with particular emphasis on biomedicine. Analyzes medical practice as a cultural system, focusing on the human and social side of things. Considers how people in different societies think of disease, health, body, and mind. Enrollment limited.

A. Moran-Thomas

21A.302[] Dilemmas in Biomedical Ethics: Playing God or Doing Good?

Same subject as 11.133[], WGS.271[]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

See description under subject 11.133[].

E. C. James

21A.303[] The Anthropology of Biology

Same subject as STS.060[]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Applies the tools of anthropology to examine biology in the age of genomics, biotechnological enterprise, biodiversity conservation, pharmaceutical bioprospecting, and synthetic biology. Examines such social concerns such as bioterrorism, genetic modification, and cloning. Offers an anthropological inquiry into how the substances and explanations of biology — ecological, organismic, cellular, molecular, genetic, informatic — are changing. Examines such artifacts as cell lines, biodiversity databases, and artificial life models, and using primary sources in biology, social studies of the life sciences, and literary and cinematic materials, asks how we might answer Erwin Schrodinger's 1944 question, "What Is Life?", today.

S. Helmreich

21A.305[] Topics in Critical Disability Studies (New)

Same subject as WGS.278[]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

See description under subject WGS.278[].

H. Arain

21A.311 The Social Lives of Medical Objects

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores the theories and assumptions built into objects meant to improve health. # Students read and discuss case studies that follow the often unexpected ways intended intervention objects are designed and developed, globally travel, and at times become part of people's everyday lives. # Studies include a broad range of medical materials and development technologies, such as penicillin, anti-malarial drugs, water pumps, air filters, prosthetic limbs, glucose meters, scales, DDT insecticides, bednets, and micro-nutrient pills. Limited to 20.

A. Moran-Thomas

21A.312 Planetary Change and Human Health

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores intersections between health of the planet and the health of human beings. Drawing upon case studies of growing ecological crisis around the world, topics include the human health implications of global climate change, sea level rise, weather disasters and fossil fuel pollution; connections between the health of plants, animals, microbes, and people; shifting industrial food systems and human nutrition; representations of race and indigeneity amid struggles for environmental justice; waste disposal and nuclear afterlives; and debates surrounding controversial issues such as geoengineering and climate AI. Students practice inserting environmental sciences in dialogue with toolkits from the social sciences and humanities to explore the uneven social worlds that shape how science gets traction (or not) in policy and law. Limited to 25 students.

A. Moran-Thomas

21A.319[J] History and Anthropology of Medicine and Biology

Same subject as STS.330[J]
 Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall)
 3-0-9 units

Explores recent historical and anthropological approaches to the study of medicine and biology. Topics might include interaction of disease and society; science, colonialism, and international health; impact of new technologies on medicine and the life sciences; neuroscience and psychiatry; race, biology and medicine. Specific emphasis varies from year to year.

S. Helmreich

21A.400 The Stakes of International Development

Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 Not offered regularly; consult department
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Offers an anthropological perspective on international development. Students consider development, not in policy or technical terms, but through its social and political dynamics and its impacts on daily life. Examines the various histories of, and meanings given to, international development as well as the social organization of aid agencies and projects. Follows examples of specific projects in various parts of the world. Examples: water projects for pastoralists in Africa, factory development in Southeast Asia, and international nature parks in Indonesia.

C. Walley

21A.402[J] City Living: Ethnographies of Urban Worlds

Same subject as 21G.029[J]
 Subject meets with 21G.419
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Introduces the ways in which anthropologists have studied cities. Addressing the question of what constitutes the boundaries of life in the city, students familiarize themselves with key themes - such as the relation between city and countryside, space and place, urban economies, science, globalization, migration, nature/culture, kinship, and race, gender, class and memory - that have guided anthropological analyses of cities across the world. Via engagement with case studies and their own small fieldwork projects, students gain experience with different ethnographic strategies for documenting urban life. Taught in English. Limited to 25 across 21A.402[J] and 21G.419.

B. Stoetzer

21A.403[J] Anthro-Engineering: Green Steel, Green Jobs (New)

Same subject as 3.082[J]
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)
 Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores attempts to decarbonize steel production in a context of climate change while also thinking about how better jobs might be created. Contrasts historical approaches to steelmaking with contemporary decarbonization efforts. Considers the work and community life associated with historic steel regions and the kinds of policy frameworks needed to transition to green technologies that complement workers' abilities and enhance overall productivity rather than eliminate jobs. Co-taught by an engineer and an anthropologist in conjunction with an engineering/policy specialist at Carnegie Mellon. Includes case studies from Pittsburgh, Southeast Chicago, and China. Includes an optional field site visit to Pittsburgh and/or Southeast Chicago, and discussions with steel mill managers, union leaders, environmentalists, and local historians.

C. Walley, E. Olivetti

21A.404 Living Through Climate Change

Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Uses anthropological approaches to better understand those social and political forces shaping climate change as well as proposed solutions, including those leveraging technical and scientific tools. Examines how climate change is bound up, historically and today, with other processes — including land dispossession, pollution, resource insecurity, industrial agriculture, eroding infrastructure, racial housing discrimination, and job loss. Explores perspectives on social justice, community engagement, and lived experiences of climate change — and their implications for science, engineering, and industry. Engages ethnographic case studies that address unequal climate impacts, the effects of policy, and ongoing mitigation efforts unfolding in agriculture, coastal engineering, architecture, urban planning, global migration, and historical repair. Includes a couple of mandatory field trips during class time.

S. Helmreich, A. Moran-Thomas, B. Stoetzer, C. Walley

21A.406[J] Anthro-Engineering: From Lab to Land - Infrastructures of Climate Justice in the Pacific Northwest (New)

Same subject as 11.046[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Spring)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines emerging practices of climate action through the conceptual lens of infrastructures of climate justice. Introduces ethnographic approaches to better understand the challenges posed by climate change. Focusing on land-based perspectives rather than the scientific lab, examines how social justice is at the core of infrastructure (re)development and climate action through several interconnected case studies in the context of the Pacific Northwest bioregion. Student projects in collaboration with community partners will provide an opportunity for students to contribute to real world, community-led initiatives.

B. Stoetzer, B. Meier

21A.407[J] Gender, Race, and Environmental Justice

Same subject as 21G.057[J], STS.022[J], WGS.275[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Provides an introduction to the analysis of gender in science, technology, and environmental politics from a global perspective. Familiarizes students with central objects, questions, and methods in the field. Examines existent critiques of the racial, sexual and environmental politics at stake in techno-scientific cultures. Draws on material from popular culture, media, fiction, film, and ethnography. Addressing specific examples from across the globe, students also explore different approaches to build more livable environments that promote social justice. Taught in English. Limited to 18.

B. Stoetzer

21A.408[J] Anthro-Engineering: Decarbonization at the Million-Person Scale (New)

Same subject as 22.082[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Fall)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Weaves engineering solutions with anthropological explorations of real-world problems, specifically the implementation of a molten salt heat bank to be used as an alternative to coal for heating in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Envisions and puts into practice "anthro-engineering," approaching engineering problems from a human- and anthropology-first, holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. Considers how user-centric design and stakeholder inclusion, responding to cultural and political constraints on clean energy issues, and working in diverse groups on open-ended problems can be more likely to succeed. Explores materials, design, and prototyping while learning about and employing ethnographic research methods through readings, discussion, ethnographic tasks, and project planning.

M. Buyandelger, M. Short

21A.409[J] Ethics of Intervention

Same subject as 11.238[J]

Prereq: Permission of instructor

Acad Year 2025-2026: G (Fall)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units

See description under subject 11.238[J].

E. C. James

21A.410 Environmental Struggles

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Offers an international perspective on the environment. Using environmental conflict to consider the stakes that groups in various parts of the world have in nature, while also exploring how ecological and social dynamics interact and change over time, subject considers such controversial environmental issues as: nuclear contamination in Eastern Europe; genetic bioprospecting in Mexico; toxic run-off in the rural US; the Bhopal accident in India; and the impact of population growth in the Third World.

C. Walley

21A.411[] People and Other Animals

Same subject as 21H.380[]
 Subject meets with 21A.419[], 21H.980[]
 Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 Not offered regularly; consult department
 2-0-10 units. HASS-S

See description under subject 21H.380[].
H. Ritvo

21A.419[] People and Other Animals

Same subject as 21H.980[]
 Subject meets with 21A.411[], 21H.380[]
 Prereq: None
 G (Fall)
 Not offered regularly; consult department
 2-0-10 units

See description under subject 21H.980[].
H. Ritvo

21A.429[] Environmental Conflict

Same subject as STS.320[]
 Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall)
 3-0-9 units

Explores the complex interrelationships among humans and natural environments, focusing on non-western parts of the world in addition to Europe and the United States. Use of environmental conflict to draw attention to competing understandings and uses of "nature" as well as the local, national and transnational power relationships in which environmental interactions are embedded. In addition to utilizing a range of theoretical perspectives, subject draws upon a series of ethnographic case studies of environmental conflicts in various parts of the world.

C. Walley

Science, Technology, and Media

21A.151 Language, Communication, and Culture

Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Provides an introduction to linguistic anthropology, which deals with the role of language in social, cultural, and political processes. Considers language as more than just a neutral conduit for exchanging information, but rather as a factor shaping and shaped by interpersonal relationships, national identity, and perception of the world. Drawing on case studies and first-hand observations, students apply methods for analyzing communication and miscommunication in everyday conversation, professional discourse, verbal performance, online interaction, political rhetoric, and more.

G. Jones

21A.500[] Technology and Culture

Same subject as STS.075[]
 Prereq: None
 U (Fall, Spring)
 2-0-7 units. HASS-S

Examines the intersections of technology, culture, and politics in a variety of social and historical settings ranging from 19th-century factories to 21st-century techno dance floors, from Victorian London to anything-goes Las Vegas. Discussions and readings organized around three questions: what cultural effects and risks follow from treating biology as technology; how computers have changed the way we think about ourselves and others; and how politics are built into our infrastructures. Explores the forces behind technological and cultural change; how technological and cultural artifacts are understood and used by different communities; and whether, in what ways, and for whom technology has produced a better world. Limited to 50.

H. Paxson

21A.501[J] Art, Craft, Science

Same subject as STS.074[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Credit cannot also be received for 21A.509[J], STS.474[J]

Examines how people learn, practice, and evaluate traditional and contemporary craft techniques. Social science theories of design, embodiment, apprenticeship learning, skill, labor, expertise, and tacit knowledge are used to explore distinctions among art, craft, and science. Also discusses the commoditization of craft into market goods, collectible art, and tourism industries. Ethnographic and historical case studies include textiles, Shaker furniture, glassblowing, quilting, cheesemaking, industrial design, home and professional cooking, factory and laboratory work, CAD/CAM. Demonstrations, optional field trips, and/or hands-on craft projects may be included. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

H. Paxson

21A.502 Fun and Games: Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Considers the cultural organization of play in different communities and societies. Explores why all people play, how different cultures experience fun, and what particular games mean, if anything. Surveys major theories of play in relation to a variety of play phenomena, such as jokes, video games, children's fantasies, sports, and entertainment spectacles. As a final project, students develop their own case study.

G. Jones

21A.503[J] The Human Past: Introduction to Archaeology

Same subject as 3.986[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S; CI-H

See description under subject 3.986[J].

F. Rossi

21A.504[J] Cultures of Computing

Same subject as STS.086[J], WGS.276[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines computers anthropologically, as artifacts revealing the social orders and cultural practices that create them. Students read classic texts in computer science along with cultural analyses of computing history and contemporary configurations. Explores the history of automata, automation and capitalist manufacturing; cybernetics and WWII operations research; artificial intelligence and gendered subjectivity; robots, cyborgs, and artificial life; creation and commoditization of the personal computer; the growth of the Internet as a military, academic, and commercial project; hackers and gamers; technobodies and virtual sociality. Emphasis is placed on how ideas about gender and other social differences shape labor practices, models of cognition, hacking culture, and social media.

H. Beltrán

21A.505[J] The Anthropology of Sound

Same subject as CMS.406[J], STS.065[J]

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines the ways humans experience sound and how perceptions and technologies of sound emerge from cultural, economic, and historical worlds. Consider how the sound/noise/music boundaries have been imagined, created, and modeled across sociocultural and historical contexts. Learn how environmental, linguistic, and musical sounds are construed cross-culturally as well as the rise of telephony, architectural acoustics, sound recording, multi-channel and spatial mix performance, and the globalized travel of these technologies. Questions of sound ownership, property, authorship, remix, and copyright in the digital age are also addressed.

S. Helmreich

21A.506 The Anthropology of Politics: Persuasion and Power

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Not offered regularly; consult department

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Introduces the ethnographic study of politics, i.e., what anthropologists understand to be "political" in various social and economic systems, from small-scale societies to liberal democratic states. Examines politics across three contemporary contexts: electoral politics, public spheres, and bureaucracies and humanitarian governance. # Students consider and analyze how questions of authority, coercion, and violence have been theorized to relate to the political, and how some aspects of social life are regimented in explicitly non-political ways.

Staff

21A.507[J] Resonance: Sonic Experience, Science, and Art

Same subject as 4.648[J]

Subject meets with 4.649[J], 21A.519[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-A

See description under subject 4.648[J].

Consult C. Jones

21A.508 Culture and Ethics in Science Fiction Worlds

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Examines the ethical and controversial aspects of technology's impacts on society, as approached through the lens of science fiction and media. From novels such as *Kindred* to films like *Sleep Dealer*, the social inequalities and political complexities portrayed in science fiction worlds offer a launch point to discuss the uneasy aspects and uneven reach of science, technology, and medicine. Covers issues including gene editing, data privacy, border surveillance, human experimentation, environmental crises, war industries, and the impacts of AI.

A. Moran-Thomas

21A.509[J] Art, Craft, Science

Same subject as STS.474[J]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall)

3-0-9 units

Credit cannot also be received for 21A.501[J], STS.074[J]

Examines how people learn, practice, and evaluate traditional and contemporary craft techniques. Social science theories of design, embodiment, apprenticeship learning, skill, labor, expertise, and tacit knowledge are used to explore distinctions among art, craft, and science. Also discusses the commoditization of craft into market goods, collectible art, and tourism industries. Ethnographic and historical case studies include textiles, Shaker furniture, glassblowing, quilting, cheesemaking, industrial design, home and professional cooking, factory and laboratory work, CAD/CAM. Demonstrations, optional field trips, and/or hands-on craft projects may be included. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

H. Paxson

21A.511 Hacking from the South

Subject meets with 21A.539

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Using anthropological perspectives to propose critically reflexive modes of participation in existing socio-technical systems, students draw on ethnographic case studies to understand how practices and definitions of "hacking" are grounded in specific political and cultural contexts. With a focus on the Global South (Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Middle East, Asia and Southeast Asia, Oceania), examines the relationship between international development and technological empowerment by interrogating assumptions associated with particular locations and peoples, especially those constructed as peripheral to geographic centers of power. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

H. Beltran

21A.513 Drawing Human Experience

Prereq: None

U (Spring)

3-3-6 units. HASS-A

Introduces fundamental techniques of drawing with traditional media and their application as tools of anthropological inquiry. Examines what the human impulse to draw reveals about connections between mind, hand, and eye. Explores ideas, refines perceptions, and communicates insights through both abstract and figurative drawing. Each student completes a portfolio of original drawings with accompanying written analysis. Limited to 20 due to space constraints.

G. Jones, S. Riskin

21A.519[JJ] Resonance: Sonic Experience, Science, and Art

Same subject as 4.649[JJ]

Subject meets with 4.648[JJ], 21A.507[JJ]

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall, Spring)

3-0-9 units

See description under subject 4.649[JJ].

Consult C. Jones

21A.520 Magic, Science, and Religion

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores the origins of magic, science, and religion as forms of belief within and across cultures. Addresses the place of rationality and belief in competing sociocultural theories, with a focus on analyzing modern perspectives. Examines how cases of overlap between magic, science, and religion raise new questions about modernity and human nature.

G. Jones

21A.525 Oceans and Us

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: U (Fall)

Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered

3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Explores how people have understood and encountered the ocean, cross-culturally, as a site of danger, pleasure, travel, food-procurement, commerce, and tourism. Topics include imperial voyaging, piracy, the invention of seaside vacations, the politics of fishing, the culture of onboard living in surface and submarine ships, the rise of undersea entertainment and documentary, regimes of managing maritime spaces and species, and the emergence of the ocean as an object of global ecological concern, particularly around climate change and sea level rise.

S. Helmreich

21A.529 Virtual and Other Realities

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Spring)

3-0-9 units

Explores virtual worlds created in cyberspace, non-internet ritual spaces, science laboratories, tech companies, and artistic performances from an anthropological perspective. Students acquire analytical tools for thinking about immersive experiences of being someone else, and the socio-economic, political, and technological contexts behind creating specific types of parallel worlds. Examines and contextualizes the ways in which scientists, designers, shamans, ritual specialists, and corporations imagine, respond to, and steer people's desires and needs. Considers debates on the future of imagination, sensory experiences, and creativity in technology. Limited to 20. This class is designed as a seminar class for graduate and advanced undergraduate students.

M. Buyandelger

21A.539 Hacking from the South

Subject meets with 21A.511
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Spring)
 3-0-9 units

Using anthropological perspectives to propose critically reflexive modes of participation in existing socio-technical systems, students draw on ethnographic case studies to understand how practices and definitions of "hacking" are grounded in specific political and cultural contexts. With a focus on the Global South (Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, Middle East, Asia and Southeast Asia, Oceania), examines the relationship between international development and technological empowerment by interrogating assumptions associated with particular locations and peoples, especially those constructed as peripheral to geographic centers of power. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments.

H. Beltran

21A.550[J] DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media

Same subject as STS.064[J]
 Subject meets with 21A.559
 Prereq: None
 U (Fall)
 Not offered regularly; consult department
 3-3-6 units. HASS-A; CI-H

Uses documentary video making as a tool to explore everyday social worlds (including those of science and engineering), and for thinking analytically about media itself. Students make videos and engage in critical analysis. Provides students with instruction on how to communicate effectively and creatively in a visual medium, and how to articulate their own analyses of documentary images in writing and spoken word. Readings drawn from documentary film theory, anthropology, and social studies of science. Students view a wide variety of classic documentaries and explore different styles. Lab component devoted to digital video production. Includes a final video project. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 12.

C. Walley, C. Boebel

21A.559 DV Lab: Documenting Science through Video and New Media

Subject meets with 21A.550[J], STS.064[J]
 Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Spring)
 3-3-6 units

Uses documentary video making as a tool to explore everyday social worlds (including those of science and engineering), and for thinking analytically about media itself. Students make videos and engage in critical analysis. Provides students with instruction on how to communicate effectively and creatively in a visual medium, and how to articulate their own analyses of documentary images in writing and spoken word. Readings drawn from documentary film theory, anthropology, and social studies of science. Students view a wide variety of classic documentaries and explore different styles. Lab component devoted to digital video production. Includes a final video project. Students taking graduate version complete additional assignments. Limited to 12.

C. Walley, C. Boebel

Research Methods in Anthropology

21A.802 Seminar in Ethnography and Fieldwork

Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: U (Spring)
 3-0-9 units. HASS-S

Introduction to ethnographic practices: the study of and communicating about culture. Subject provides instruction and practice in writing, revision of fieldnotes, and a final paper. Preference to Anthropology majors and minors.

Staff

21A.809 Designing Empirical Research in the Social Sciences

Subject meets with 15.347
 Prereq: Permission of instructor
 G (Spring)
 3-0-9 units

Foundations of good empirical research in the social sciences. Introduction to the basic assumptions and underlying logic of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Explores a variety of approaches to research design, evaluates the products of empirical research, and practices several common techniques. Discusses several major theoretical paradigms used as interpretive frameworks for social science research. Students develop a proposal for their own research project.

S. Silbey

21A.819 Ethnographic Research Methods

Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered
 Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Spring)
 3-6-3 units

Training in the design and practice of qualitative research. Organized around illustrative texts, class exercises, and student projects. Topics include the process of gaining access to and participating in the social worlds of others; techniques of observation, fieldnote-taking, researcher self-monitoring and reflection; methods of inductive analysis of qualitative data including conceptual coding, grounded theory, and narrative analysis. Discussion of research ethics, the politics of fieldwork, modes of validating researcher accounts, and styles of writing up qualitative field research.
G. Jones

21A.829[J] Ethnographic Writing (New)

Same subject as STS.360[J]
 Prereq: Permission of instructor
 Acad Year 2025-2026: G (Spring)
 Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
 3-0-9 units

Introduces students to strategies in ethnographic writing. Readings highlight examples of different ethnographic writing techniques — such as life histories, broken line narratives, memoir, relational ethnography, object histories, landscape writing, and other strategies in literary anthropology and speculative fiction since the time of Zora Neale Hurston — to offer insights into the literary craft and narrative structures at work behind the scenes of a given text. Paired with an example of a different ethnographic form, students undertake a related writing experiment. Preference to HASTS students; open to others with permission of instructor.
A. Moran-Thomas

21A.839 Indigenous Research: Theories and Methods

Prereq: None
 Acad Year 2025-2026: G (Spring)
 Acad Year 2026-2027: Not offered
 3-0-9 units

Provides space to delve deeply into key Indigenous theoretical frameworks, methods, and methodologies of conducting research with Indigenous peoples and/or utilizing Indigenous modes of knowledge production in the research process. Utilizes an Indigenous research circle to consider each stage of the research process. Provides the theoretical breadth to formulate a research design, consider appropriate research methods, and reflect on ethical concerns in this area of scholarship allowing space to explore, consider, develop, discuss, reflect, and write about theories and methods students may draw from in thesis, dissertation or related research projects. Meets every week in a hybrid format, alternating in person between MIT and UMass Amherst. Students at the campus where class is not meeting in person in a given week will attend via Zoom. Students may travel between campuses but are not expected to.
S. Atalay

21A.859[J] Social Theory and Analysis

Same subject as STS.250[J]
 Prereq: None
 G (Spring)
 3-0-9 units

Major theorists and theoretical schools since the late 19th century. Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Bourdieu, Levi-Strauss, Geertz, Foucault, Gramsci, and others. Key terms, concepts, and debates.
S. Helmreich

Independent Study, Special Subjects, and Thesis**21A.901 Independent Study in Anthropology**

Prereq: Two subjects in Anthropology
 U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)
 Units arranged
 Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for independent study, guided research, practicum, or field work under regular supervision by a faculty member. Projects require prior approval of the instructor and Head of the Anthropology Program. Normal maximum is 6 units; exceptional 9- or 12-unit projects occasionally approved.
Consult Program Head

21A.902 Independent Study in Anthropology

Prereq: Two subjects in Anthropology

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for independent study, guided research, practicum, or field work under regular supervision by a faculty member. Projects require prior approval of the instructor and Head of the Anthropology Program. Normal maximum is 6 units; exceptional 9- or 12-unit projects occasionally approved.

Consult Program Head

21A.929 Graduate Independent Study

Prereq: None

G (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for study or projects at an advanced level with an Anthropology faculty member.

Consult Program Head

21A.939 Graduate Independent Study

Prereq: None

G (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for study or projects at an advanced level with an Anthropology faculty member.

Consult Program Head

21A.949 Graduate Independent Study

Prereq: None

G (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Opportunity for study or projects at an advanced level with an Anthropology faculty member.

Consult Program Head

21A.989[J] HASTS Dissertation Writing Workshop

Same subject as 21H.960[J], STS.860[J]

Prereq: None

G (Fall)

1-0-5 units

Can be repeated for credit.

See description under subject STS.860[J]. For PhD students only. PhD students outside the HASTS program require permission of instructor.

Staff

21A.S01 Special Subject in Anthropology

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Units arranged

Seminar or lecture on a topic in anthropology that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21A.S02 Special Subject in Anthropology

Prereq: None

U (Fall)

Units arranged

Seminar or lecture on a topic in anthropology that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21A.S10 Special Graduate Subject in Anthropology

Prereq: None

G (Fall)

Units arranged

Seminar or lecture on a topic in anthropology that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21A.S11 Special Graduate Subject in Anthropology

Prereq: None

Acad Year 2025-2026: Not offered

Acad Year 2026-2027: G (Fall)

Units arranged

Seminar or lecture on a topic in anthropology that is not covered in the regular curriculum.

Staff

21A.THT Anthropology Pre-Thesis Tutorial

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Students writing a thesis work with an advisor to develop research topics, review relevant research and scholarship, frame research questions, choose an appropriate methodology for data collection and analysis, and draft the introductory and methodology sections of their theses. Includes substantial practice in writing (with revision) and oral presentations.

Consult Program Head

21A.THU Undergraduate Thesis in Anthropology

Prereq: 21A.THT

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Completion of work on the senior major thesis under supervision of a faculty thesis advisor. Includes oral presentation of thesis progress early in the term, assembling and revising the final text, and a final meeting with a committee of faculty evaluators to discuss the successes and limitations of the project.

Staff

21A.UR Undergraduate Research

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged [P/D/F]

Can be repeated for credit.

Individual participation in an ongoing research project. For students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

Staff

21A.URG Undergraduate Research

Prereq: None

U (Fall, IAP, Spring, Summer)

Units arranged

Can be repeated for credit.

Individual participation in an ongoing research project. For students in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program.

Staff