

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

What does it mean to be a New Zealander and a citizen of the world? What is the importance of cultural identity in the 21st century? How is social media changing human relationships? What makes people decide to live on the streets? These are the kinds of questions that studies in Cultural Anthropology ask and seek to answer. The anthropological mind is forever curious about why people behave in the ways they do; as peoples from different cultures move around the world living, working and trading together, so the need to understand each other increases. Because of their in-depth and broad understandings of human cultures, Anthropology graduates are in a position to advise on many issues that confront countries and companies the world over.

WHAT IS CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

Anthropology literally means 'the study of human beings', while cultures are patterns of human behaviour and knowledge that every human learns as a member of a society. Cultural Anthropology focuses on how these cultural patterns shape our experiences. Cultural anthropologists seek to answer questions such as: "Why are human groups and their ways of life so different around the world? Why, for example, do many New Zealanders believe it is disgusting and cruel to eat dog, while Muslims don't eat pork and Hindus think cows are sacred? Why do so many young people in New Zealand decide to get tattoos while many youths in Papua New Guinea willingly undergo painful scarification rituals? Why do such cultural differences develop and how might we understand them better?"

WHY STUDY CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY?

Students of Cultural Anthropology explore how culture is expressed in areas such as ritual, symbolism, language, personality, religion, inequality, gender, family, art and politics. Understanding how societies organise their lives and give meaning to their existence also increases people's understanding of their own cultural worlds. Whether studying the experiences of nuclear test veterans in the Pacific, the politics of global agribusiness, or the experience of migrants in New Zealand, anthropology students examine what it means to be human today.



Career View explores how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities and to life/work planning. It includes graduate destination information and current employment issues. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

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Research processes employed by social scientists to examine indigenous cultures are now being used to understand corporate cultures. Companies use the findings from anthropology to help their corporate processes run more smoothly. The meticulousness and rigorous 'ethnographic study' approach is at the core of user centred design, a model increasingly used in business, government, media and technology.

Dr Elizabeth Tunstall teaches anthropology at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She says, "Contemporary anthropology is no longer primarily concerned with exotic peoples and dinosaurs. Anthropology is engaged with issues of the global flows of people and goods, human rights and social justice, global feminism, design, technology adoption, the social effects of the environmental degradation, and local sustainability practices."

WHAT SKILLS DO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENTS DEVELOP?

Cultural Anthropology provides students with a broad range of holistic knowledge and skills concerning people and cultures, that are highly transferable and increasingly sought by employers.

A key ability that Cultural Anthropology students develop is the way they learn to approach issues, with **impartiality and openness** to different frameworks. They examine and question their own thinking and then attempt to work beyond what is understood by anthropologists as their own 'ethnocentric' assumptions. Another way to describe this is the ability to look at aspects of human life through different perspectives, as if they were their own, and draw new conclusions. This practice develops **cultural intelligence**, which in today's workplace is as crucial

as emotional intelligence and IQ.

Students develop **critical thinking and conceptual skills** as they learn to use different conceptual frameworks, to think in the abstract, and to analyse and interpret the form and content of live and written information. In turn, they may question, evaluate and compare the various frameworks they use. In writing an argument to support their views students also learn to critically evaluate and edit their own work.

Creativity and curiosity grows as Cultural Anthropology students make connections and arrive at insights from social research. Through assignment and project work students also learn to formulate new questions and hypotheses. Some may come up with innovative methods and apply theory in original ways. There is also a storytelling aspect, from different cultural paradigms, using film, literature and all kinds of creative media.

The **ability to communicate** verbally and non-verbally with empathy, respect and understanding is honed through degree studies that have people as the main focus. Students also learn to understand and communicate complex ideas and information through written work and oral presentations.

The study of Cultural Anthropology requires a **multi-disciplinary approach**. The ability to see the big picture and the connections between the many different facets of human activity is developed as students examine cultures and societies through the lens of social science. This skill enables graduates to get alongside and work with people from different disciplines in a range of settings, such as literature, media studies, design, linguistics, biology, environmental, development studies, sociology and social policy.

Anthropology students do extensive **research** using a range of approaches. For example they may gather descriptive data through participant observation, interviewing and ethnographic study. The process of asking questions, gathering information (facts and concepts) and evaluating material is a highly transferable skill. Research roles often require the ability to do literature searches, while advisory and business/service development roles require rigorous and methodical **observation and attention to detail**, taking note of and reflecting deeply on aspects of people's everyday experiences from their perspectives.

WHERE DO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY GRADUATES WORK?

Majoring in Cultural Anthropology possibly in conjunction with other majors, is a valuable basis for planning a career in the social sciences, development studies, psychology, law, sciences, health, technology development or business. The holistic knowledge and skills concerning people and cultures acquired during these degrees are highly transferable and increasingly sought by employers. Conjoint or postgraduate degrees give graduates an additional advantage.

Public sector. Anthropology graduates are suited to policy and advisory roles especially in areas of social policy, such as poverty reduction, social housing policy, climate change impacts or the corrections system. They can be found in government agencies such as the Ministry of Social Development, Oranga Tamariki Ministry for Children, Department of Corrections or Department of Internal Affairs. A qualification combining Cultural Anthropology with Māori Studies and Law can be useful for work

in areas such as the Office of Treaty Settlements or the Waitangi Tribunal or other areas that focus on implementation of the Treaty of Waitangi or iwi development, such as the Department of Conservation. The work of New Zealand's International Aid Programme, administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) is relevant to Anthropology graduates, particularly those with postgraduate qualifications, conjoint degrees or relevant development experience.

Policy analysts and researchers need to be strong analytical thinkers, able to carry out detailed, thorough research using quantitative (data collection and analysis) and qualitative (exploratory or descriptive) methods. They must be able to see the big picture, think imaginatively and across disciplines, consider trends and possibilities in the longer term as well as gain a detailed understanding of a particular field. Graduates are also found in operational and project roles putting policies into action and ensuring that products and services are designed to meet the needs of their users.

Cultural Anthropology graduates can also specialise at postgraduate level in medical anthropology, leading to advisory and research roles with **District Health Boards** or **primary health care** agencies.

Local government organisations, such as councils and regional councils manage a wide range of services for the community. Cultural Anthropology graduates with their understanding of people, specific interests and skills may find employment in areas such as: housing, disability, sport and recreation, human resources, public health (e.g. homelessness, mental health, child health and safety, nutrition and physical activity), event management, emergency management, health and safety, community centres, holiday programmes, urban design and planning.

A **non-government organisation (NGO)** is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group, which is organised on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organised around specific issues, such as human





rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms, and help monitor and implement international agreements.

NGOs may also have a relationship with the United Nations, a large organisation that employs many people with a social science background. They may do research around improving service provision and good practice in relation to their clientele in particular regions. In New Zealand the staff of NGOs is often small. The work may involve research, surveys, advocacy, fundraising, giving policy advice to government, devising programmes and events, communications and publicity and general administration. Doing voluntary work is a way to get to know the work of an NGO and may lead to paid work.

Education. Teaching Social Studies and other related subjects in secondary schools is a rewarding career for graduates with a passion for interacting with young people. An additional secondary teaching qualification is required. Educational research and policy are other options.

Teaching at university level usually requires a PhD. Graduates can advance their research and teaching skills by undertaking a Master's degree or PhD and may have the opportunity to tutor undergraduate

students. Many students also go overseas to study. Other roles in tertiary institutions include academic advisors, career consultants, trainers or administrators. Employment opportunities for academic anthropologists in New Zealand are small; graduates seeking an academic career may need to consider employment overseas.

The **cultural and creative sectors** are growing and increasingly seeking the Cultural Anthropology graduate's unique skills. Depending on their size, **museums and art galleries** employ staff in research, collection management, administration, education, exhibition design and display, publicity and communications. Cultural Anthropology graduates may do research and work with collections and provide written material for exhibitions. A background in Anthropology is also valuable when mediating relationships between different cultural groups who contribute artefacts and cultural knowledge to collections. A relevant postgraduate qualification is increasingly helpful for key roles in the museum and heritage space.

Anthropology can enhance studies or experience in music composition and performance, creative writing, film and other forms of creative media production by opening up understanding of cultures and new forms of creativity. Such graduates may go on to work in **arts administration, performance or production**.

GRADUATE PROFILES

Cultural Anthropology graduates' skills in written and oral communication, social research, qualitative interviewing and fieldwork provide an excellent base for work in **communications and media**. Roles in the media can require a further journalism qualification, although work in this field is fast-changing and other communications, design or writing qualifications and experience are leading to increasingly flexible work in this field.

These skills can also contribute to the work of **consultants** and **business services** in the emerging area of **business or service design**, help organisations understand their stakeholders and design their products and services. **Public relations** specialists seek to manage public opinion by presenting positive information to those the organisation wants to influence. **Communications** is responsible for promoting an organisation's image and reputation to the public, as well as informing staff and clients about what is happening within the organisation. This may involve writing web content as well as material for articles, annual reports or media releases. **Human resource and industrial relations** advisers work in large public or private sector organisations. Eventually graduates may work with a consultancy or run their own business.

JOB TITLES

The following is a sample of job titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications and training.

Academic advisor • administrator • archivist • career consultant • communications officer/adviser • community development adviser • community coordinator • curator • development adviser • English language teacher • foreign policy officer • human resources adviser • immigration officer • information management adviser • library assistant • journalist • marketing adviser • mediator and dispute resolution adviser • lecturer • ministerial writer • policy analyst • policy advisor • primary teacher • programme manager • project coordinator • public health adviser • refugee resettlement coordinator • researcher • research assistant • research analyst • secondary school teacher • service designer • social media coordinator • social science researcher • tutor

Tom Coad

Product Owner
CoreLogic



I started by studying Law and History, and Dad had suggested Anthropology as well, as he had had an inspirational lecturer who, as it turned out, was still teaching when I was there! I had the same experience of being switched onto the subject so I continued to focus on that for my Bachelor of Arts. I liked the way Cultural Anthropology explored why people are the way they are and how aspects of human life tie together.

I have always had a strong focus on the needs of the customer and worked in customer support roles. Anthropology studies gave me a deeper understanding and insight into the worlds of my customers and their needs. I started out in retail at Bunnings part time and then full time for a year after completing my degree. This led to a customer support position at CoreLogic, a multi-national property information, analytics and service provider. At CoreLogic, it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. A merger with Australia meant many service processes and online content needed to be reviewed and refined. I moved to a Business Analyst role, leading the development team for a merger with a significantly larger consumer property website. I knew that this was a perfect area of work for me, with the right level of complexity, analysis, and depth of communication skill required.

I am now a Product Owner, a team leader who ensures that the team delivers the desired outcome, based on the user needs. I spend quite a bit of my time leading user testing. While I'm not fully embedded in other people's lives, as an anthropologist may be, it is still a form of close participant observation. There are also cultural issues in the multi-national development teams I work with. Leading a team, it was helpful to have the tools to understand people and apply techniques for effective communication.

You don't always need a degree in technology to work in tech. As technology has enabled interaction and building relationships with people from diverse backgrounds, I've found that the ways people process and use information is very different. What matters is having the capacity to learn and being prepared. Anthropology has enhanced my applied analytical skills and the ability to pull out the key messages and understand what is going on in the background.

Tessa Bercic

Policy Analyst
Oranga Tamariki Ministry for
Children



I remember attending a mock lecture during the University's open day and it was the first time I had heard anyone describe a subject where I could learn with others about different cultures and peoples, our shared histories, our similarities and our differences. This was my introduction to Cultural Anthropology and it quickly became my choice for my Bachelor of Arts major. I loved having the opportunity to tailor assignments to suit my own interests. I wanted to understand my own Māori culture more, and Cultural Anthropology provided a way to do that whilst also providing a 'bigger picture' of how it intersected with other cultures. I also liked the complexity of being an indigenous anthropologist and having to navigate the role of being a researcher and holder of people's stories in an academic setting.

Studying Cultural Anthropology has made me more inclined to question what the underlying cultural assumptions and values are, particularly in storytelling settings - watching foreign films is a great example of this! I also find that I am more interested in understanding how we give agency to people who don't often have a voice. I completed my BA(Hons) in Cultural Anthropology over two years, during which I applied for a government role in social policy. Despite having limited experience, I was able to refer to an Honours project I had completed working with young Māori, which helped me get the job. It was good to know that I didn't have to study policy in order to get a job in policy. Being able to understand a diverse range of perspectives and realities of people living all over the country can be just as valuable for the work I do.

If you're considering studying Honours in Cultural Anthropology I would highly recommend it for a number of reasons: the staff have a great wealth of knowledge and are very supportive, you get to develop your research and fieldwork skills (which can be applied in a range of career paths), and you get an opportunity to delve into issues that you're really interested in.

Aidan MacLeod

Senior Policy Adviser
MBIE



I took a Cultural Anthropology course in my first semester because my dad thought I would find it interesting. Turns out he was right.

I really enjoyed how my BA gave me an opportunity to think deeply about the issues facing our society and what my own contribution would be. Anthropology is especially good for 'making the familiar strange' - we take so much for granted about our social and cultural environment, and anthropology helps us see the assumptions and practices that underlie that environment. It's a bit like teaching a fish to notice (and then understand) the water it's swimming in.

I also honed my writing, which continues to serve me well today. You'd be surprised how powerful and uncommon good writing is. Essay writing is a great chance to learn about writing concisely and convincingly, especially at Honours level where the expected standard of writing rises.

A BA Anthropology doesn't lead to a specific job like a law degree or an accounting degree, which can be overwhelming when you get close to finishing your degree. The good news is that if you are willing to make a bit of effort, there are many jobs open to you. All you have to do is figure out why you'll be good at the job you're applying for, and then convince the people hiring.

One of my first job interviews was at the Ministry for the Environment. The advertisement said they were looking for diversity of thought and 'first principles analysis'. In my cover letter and my interview, I highlighted how anthropology has its own set of conceptual tools that would contribute to diversity of thought in my team. I talked about how anthropology involves 'making the familiar strange' and thinking from first principles. It must have sounded sensible, because I got the job.

If you're thinking about postgraduate study and you're interested in working in government, have a good think about what you want to get out of your studies. Many great careers in the public sector start with an entry-level admin or customer-facing role, and you don't need a postgraduate degree for that. However, an Honours degree can be useful if you want to step straight into a policy role.

Catherine Trundle

Senior Lecturer, School of Cultural and Social Studies
Victoria University of Wellington



My first year of studying Anthropology felt as if I was starting something brand new and fresh, I had no idea what to expect. I loved the genuinely global, diverse cultural viewpoints on just about any topic and the inclusive approach to solving problems.

I completed my MA at Wellington, where my thesis focussed on American migrants to New Zealand, and then was awarded a PhD Scholarship at Cambridge University. My PhD thesis looked at American migrants as charity workers in Tuscany, Italy. I lived and worked within these communities for 15 months for my research.

Since then I have shifted my focus, and I am what is known as a medical anthropologist. We look at cultural beliefs and practices around illness, medicine, and systems of healing. This field is really quite vocationally specific: I see jobs that specifically call for a medical anthropology backgrounds in the health and community sector. This is the way many sectors are going, as the need for cultural insight into customers, clients, patients or users becomes more critical in this fast-paced world.

My research since my PhD has included working with New Zealand veterans of nuclear testing in the Pacific, researching their experiences of making claims for healthcare, compensation and support. This led to a report aimed at government departments that detailed the difficulties nuclear test veterans face in accessing healthcare benefits and making recommendations suggesting ways to make government processes more responsive and accountable.

I have also engaged in the area of 'public anthropology'. This is all about writing to unsettle cultural assumptions, using all kinds of media. Recently, I had an article published about the ways we are pushed to master self-control in a way that is loaded with cultural assumptions. Another passion in my work is teaching: I learn something each time I go into the classroom. Learning is a partnership, and I enjoy invoking that curiosity in students that is so important to anthropological perspective. We challenge each other's assumptions, debating everything, from social justice to gender identity. My role is to turn my students' attention to the value and complexity of cultural diversity in the world.

Dionne Steven

Principal Advisor, Evaluation
Ministry of Health



Before going to university, I had a successful career in advertising. What I really enjoyed about my role in advertising were the people aspects; understanding people's lives, what is important to them and what motivates or drives them.

I was therefore naturally drawn to the humanities and social sciences. I started out studying Psychology, Anthropology and Sociology. I found Anthropology particularly fascinating so this ended up being my major for my BA, BA(Hons) and PhD. I love the holistic lens that anthropology uses to understand human societies and culture.

Since doing a paper as an undergraduate, I had developed a keen interest in ritual and the role it plays in people's lives and societies. My PhD was on same-sex civil unions. It examined what a civil union meant to same-sex couples and how they had chosen to mark or enact the occasion. What I loved most about my PhD was the fieldwork; meeting couples and hearing stories about their lives. I felt very privileged that people were prepared to share such personal aspects of their lives with me. Through their narratives I came to understand the significance of their civil union and what it meant in terms of their identity, relationships, and wider social inclusion.

Doing a PhD is one of the most challenging and rewarding things you can do. It really helped me understand the importance of looking at the big picture and how things interrelate and affect each other. I also honed my interview skills and my ability to think critically. Above all else, though, I learned empathy and the importance of listening. The research skills that I gained through my studies, along with a passion for social issues, helped me get a job as a Senior Analyst in the research and evaluation unit at the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). In the four years that I was at MSD, I undertook many research and evaluation projects that provided insights to help improve the lives of vulnerable New Zealanders. I also had the opportunity to step up into a management role. I am now working as a principal advisor at the Ministry of Health where I am responsible for leading the evaluation of a nationwide transformation of the disability support system.