

ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the comparative study of human diversity through time and across the world. Its scope spans the humanities, the social sciences, and the biological, physical, and evolutionary sciences. As a history of the human species, anthropology studies all human biological and behavioral variation from the earliest fossil records to the present; it includes the study of nonhuman primates as well. As a social science, anthropology aims at uncovering the patterns of past and present societies. As one of the humanities, anthropology seeks to understand the ways cultural meaning and political power have shaped human experience.

At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, anthropology consists of three subfields: archaeology – the investigation and analysis of the remains from past cultures, uncovered through excavation; biological anthropology – the study of human evolution and the roots of the biological and genetic diversity found among contemporary peoples; and sociocultural anthropology – the comparative study of society, politics, economy, and culture, whether in historical times or in our contemporary moment. UW–Madison also offers some classes in anthropological linguistics – the analysis of language and its place in social life. Comparative and empirical work – and fieldwork in particular – are the hallmarks of anthropology on this campus.

Thus, anthropology at UW–Madison is characterized by a comparative point of view, a focus on humans and societies in all their variation and similarity, and an effort to reveal and understand the complex but organized diversity that has shaped the human condition, past and present.