



Opinion on Anthropology Beyond Books: A Survey on the Importance of Anthropology

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Opinion

These authors provide an important paper on why students study anthropology and their satisfaction with doing so. They present data from a study of 100 students both undergraduates and postgraduates. Their findings indicate that students perceive anthropology to be holistic, not only studying all of mankind, but also men past, present and insights into the future. They further assert that anthropology provides good competency for employment.

It is interesting to relate the findings above to the situation in the UK. There are 22 anthropology departments in the UK. Only a minority of departments of anthropology teach biological anthropology, the majority are solely devoted to social anthropology [1]. However, it is possible to do joint honours in anthropology with history, international development, sociology and many other topics. Anthropology is now offered pre-university as an A' level subject, pre university, and is often advertised as a "replacement for religious studies".

The highest ranking in terms of the research assessment exercise are Cambridge and Oxford Universities. The Royal Anthropological Institute describes anthropology as a study of people throughout the world, their evolutionary history, how they behave and adapt to different environments, communicate and socialize with each other. The study of anthropology is concerned with the biological features that makes us human and with social aspects. It notes that Anthropologists are interested both in every day and the more dramatic and exotic aspects of people's lives. It emphasizes that anthropology allows us to explore what makes us uniquely human and understand each other and ourselves at the same time. These ideas are reflected in the websites of the different anthropological departments which emphasize the importance of anthropology in understanding other people and its holistic nature.

How Satisfied are Anthropology Students With Studying Anthropology and What are the Benefits?

Although there have been no formal studies of this in the UK, analysis of two internet sites suggest that students find anthropology beneficial and interesting. Furthermore studying anthropology is beneficial in terms of gaining employment after university. An examination of the London School of Economics' anthropology department, a major department of anthropology in London, suggests that students find anthropology useful and has led them to go on to gain employment [2]. Student statements include:

"Studying anthropology has really helped me work in multicultural settings and understand others culture and mind. It also gave me skills like writing, thinking critically and the ability to understand complicated policy issues."

"Anthropology teaches us to critically assess human dynamics and so in many ways the skills are transferrable".

"What I have gained from anthropology is the ability to explore, research and understand situations in a very holistic way before making any decisions on what can be done to address it".

"Anthropology managed to satisfy my curious mind and certainly kept me busy by forcing me to challenge what we take to be everyday social and norms of our life. Your world, your society diminishes when you realize just how small you are in comparison to the many complex and rich cultures which surround you".

"Your eyes are opened to different ways of perceiving the world which renders questions of wrong and right or difficult to answer".

"There is something about studying anthropology that simply makes you sit back and consider the bigger picture. It is one of the most exciting and satisfying feelings to delve into an initially unfamiliar subject and just like that feel you know what, why and how. Anthropologists are creative and exceptionally critical thinkers who are well equipped for a writing profession".

"An MSc social anthropology group in 1998 fundamentally engaged my intellectual curiosity, showing me how what I considered normal was actually quite peculiar and how the bizarre can become quite familiar".

What do Students do Following their Anthropology Degrees?

Another study from the LSE anthropology students suggests that in 2012/13, 91% of undergraduate leavers and 90% of postgraduate leavers from the Department of Anthropology are in employment, completing further studies or taking time out for six months after graduation [3].

According to the Guardian Newspaper of the anthropology graduates who left university in 2008, 51% were in employment after six months in a diverse range of careers such as advertising and sales (8%), business and finance (6%), public or private sector management (12%). A large number were working in catering (15%) or in clerical roles (20%). This is probably a reflection of the current scarcity of graduate level jobs. While only a tiny proportion of graduates become anthropologists as academics or researchers, a relatively high number of 2008 anthropology graduates did go onto study further (21%). Courses included law, industrial relations, teaching, journalism, criminology and marketing. Some of the students did go on to study a master degree in some areas such as International Development and medical anthropology or sociology and economics. Craig Scott mentions that anthropology graduates enter a variety of professions

[4]. Their employability will increase no doubt as the world becomes more globalized.

Applied Anthropology in the UK.

The term Applied Anthropology refers to the application of the methods and theory of anthropology to the analysis and solution of practical problems. Applied Anthropologists often work for governments, development agencies, non-government organizations, tribal and ethnic associations, Social Services and educational agencies and businesses. Applied anthropology courses are relatively rare in the UK. Typical examples are a master's degree in Applied Anthropology in Community Development at Goldsmith's College in London and an MSc in Medical Anthropology at University College London which teaches on applied medical anthropology: An MSc in Global Health Policy at the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine has a significant applied anthropology component. There is only one Applied Anthropology course in the UK which is a BA in Applied

Anthropology at the University of Wales "this course is designed to provide the student with a set of skills and tools to help tackle the pressing issues evident in the world today". Many of the courses in International development contain significant teaching on social anthropology. They focus on the solutions to the problems of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation for developing countries.

Overall it appears that students find the study of anthropology, interesting, satisfying and see it as offering good career prospects.

References

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