Australian National University

Biological Anthropology

Anthropology
#1
in Australia
#8 globally
*QS World University Rankings by Subject 2023

Biological Anthropology is the branch of anthropology that seeks to understand humans from a biocultural, evolutionary perspective.

Taking a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding human origins and behaviour, it encompasses subjects such as primatology, palaeoanthropology, human population biology, genetics, skeletal biology, demography, evolutionary ecology, bioarchaeology and forensic anthropology.

Biological Anthropology at ANU

The Australian National University (ANU) has an international reputation and is ranked 8th in the world for anthropology*. It is the only Australian university offering a specialised Biological Anthropology program and has the largest number of dedicated biological anthropology academic staff in Australia.

As a result, you will be trained by individuals who have specific expertise in the fields encompassed within this broad-ranging discipline.

Current biological anthropology research at ANU seeks to understand the biocultural evolutionary contexts in which humans evolved and live in today. Research focuses on primate conservation and disaster ecology, the evolution of human reproductive strategies, reconstructing aspects of social behaviour in extinct human species, investigating markers of health and disease in archaeological skeletons to understand life in the past, and developing new forensic anthropology techniques.

Biological Anthropology offers two majors: Human Evolutionary Biology and Biological Anthropology.

ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences

The Human Evolutionary Biology major focuses on courses from Biology and Biological Anthropology, while the Biological Anthropology major offers a wide range of courses, including Biology, Anthropology, Psychology and Archaeology, allowing you to tailor your degree to your own interests.

Both majors will give you the opportunity to explore the human journey: You can learn about the fossil evidence of our extinct hominin ancestors and the behaviour of our closest living relatives (chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans) to uncover the origins and evolution of our species; you can learn how evolutionary theory can help us to understand social and reproductive behaviours in modern humans; and by applying concepts of human skeletal biology and anatomy to both modern humans and ancient ones, you can learn to reconstruct human health and behaviour in archaeological and forensic contexts.

The Human Evolutionary Biology and Biological Anthropology majors will allow you to form your own insights and conclusions about the conditions in which humans evolved, understand the behaviour of humans in the context of our living primate relatives, and allow you to learn about the culture, behavioural ecology and skeletal biology of humans inhabiting the planet today.

Biological Anthropology students will be given the opportunity to:

- Understand the biocultural context in which humans and primates evolved and understand the scope of biological anthropology within the wider anthropological discipline
- Critically evaluate contemporary and historical research in at least four biological anthropology subfields
- Experience laboratory-based, hands-on learning using our extensive skeletal and cast collections
- Participate in practical field schools, including studying primates in the wild or conducting mock forensic excavations
- Apply evolutionary concepts to understanding modern human and primate behavioural diversity
- Reconstruct the behavioural innovations and morphological changes occurring throughout human evolution.

Career opportunities

Graduates of both the Biological Anthropology and Human Evolutionary Biology majors develop the skills necessary to work in a range of careers, with skills varying depending on the courses taken. Career opportunities may include working in academic or industry research, museum curation, contract archaeology and bioarchaeology, government, or science communication.

Grace

Bachelor of Arts (Honours in Biological Anthropology)
Majors in Biological Anthropology and Archaeology

As a child, I was convinced I would grow up to be a vet. I was fascinated by animals, particularly my dog. Then I discovered psychology and thought that human behaviour, particularly cognitive development, was the very thing for me. It wasn't until I was searching through potential universities that I discovered Biological Anthropology at ANU, and a whole new world opened up.

Through the courses ANU provided, I could combine all my interests by exploring humanity and its evolution. I could indulge in many intriguing subjects, from forensics to ancient medicine. The scope of Biological Anthology is wide, and while I sometimes felt out of my depth, the staff and students were always approachable and accommodating. A student run society from the school of Archeology and Anthropology (ABACUS) was a huge help. Through them I connected with visiting lecturers, and attended many social and academic events.

During my undergraduate in Biological Anthropology I found my true passion, Primatology. I was given an opportunity to do a field school in Cambodia, observing actual wild apes. This is a treasured experience and I will take what I learned with me through my career.

Graduates who have specialised in non-human primates can pursue careers in primate conservation and welfare, and graduates who have pursued a more 'human' focus may go on to work in professions relating to health policy, human demography, and forensic anthropology.

Flexible Double Degree

The Bachelor of Arts can be combined with degrees in Law, Business or Science as part of the ANU Flexible Double Degree program. For a full list of degree combinations see anu.edu.au/study/study-options/flexible-double

Further information

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ANU-School-Of-Archaeology-Anthropology

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