

Alice Hawkins (Third-year undergraduate)

Social Anthropology was the discipline that most fundamentally challenged and transformed my worldview. Deconstructing the biases and histories of our own forms of knowledge, so often assumed as natural and universal, is academically transformative.

Anthropology trains you to see beyond the mundane in everyday life. It is an irreversible process that has enriched me within and beyond my university experience. More than anything, this exponential learning (and unlearning) has been made a joy and a passion by the quality and commitment of the lecturers comprising the Department.

For my final year dissertation, I have been supported in conducting my own ethnographic fieldwork investigating revolution and constitutional change in Cuba – a level of freedom to follow my own passions and extraordinary life experience within an academic context I could never have anticipated.



Social Anthropology

Human, Social, and Political Sciences

Key facts

- **There are no specific subject requirements to study HSPS or to study Social Anthropology.**
- **You do not need to have studied Social Anthropology before.**
- **The standard offer is A*AA at A level.**
- **All Cambridge Colleges admit students to study HSPS and Social Anthropology within it.**
- **Social Anthropology can be combined in Years 2 and 3 as a joint track with Politics, Sociology or Religious Studies.**

Contact

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Further details about the Human, Social, and Political Sciences Tripos (HSPS) may be found at:
hsps.cam.ac.uk



Studying Social Anthropology

Social Anthropology addresses the big questions about 'what it is to be human' by studying the amazingly diverse ways in which peoples in all parts of the world make a living, organise themselves, make families and communities, and relate to each other.

Topics studied include love and intimacy in online worlds, how Amazonian communities respond to deforestation, how globalisation affects factory workers in India, how communities in the Arctic understand climate change, and experiences of citizenship and democracy in African cities.

Social Anthropology has been taught in Cambridge since 1900 and the University has been home to many of the most distinguished anthropologists in the history of the discipline. Today it is one of the foremost anthropological institutions in the world, with a diverse and flourishing community of researchers, teachers, students, and teaching resources such as a world-leading anthropology museum, and Social Anthropology's own Visual Anthropology Lab with film-making equipment and a unique collection of ethnographic films.

Teaching

You will be taught by people who are at the forefront of the subject, through a combination of lectures, seminars, and supervisions. For supervisions, students discuss their work in a very small group of two or three students with a supervisor. Additionally, if you choose to do a dissertation in Social Anthropology, you receive one-on-one supervision for this in your final year.

Details of the course

First Year

In Year 1, students interested in Social Anthropology take a core introductory paper on:

- Social Anthropology

Students take a further two papers from among:

- Politics
- International Relations
- Sociology

Students also take a fourth paper, chosen either from the above core HSPS subjects or alternatively from a range of papers outside the Tripos.

A real strength of this course is its flexibility. It works well for students who are interested in one or several of its subject options, but would like a chance to explore them first before they choose how to specialise. Equally, however, students who already have a strong interest in Social Anthropology can tailor the course to their interests from the start.



Second Year

Two core papers in Social Anthropology give a grounding in the fundamental subject areas of the discipline: states and political processes, economic production, exchange, consumption, kinship, marriage, gender, sexuality, religion, myth, and ritual, as well as the study of anthropological theory and methods.

Each student also chooses:

- a third paper studying an ethnographic region of the world in depth (e.g. South Asia, Africa, Europe)
- a fourth optional paper either from within Social Anthropology or from one of the other subjects in the Faculty.

Third Year

Two core papers in Advanced Social Anthropology address cutting-edge questions in the fields of ethical life and subjectivity, and power, economy and social transformation. These papers put anthropological studies into direct dialogue with the latest research in fields as diverse as cognitive science, economics, moral and political philosophy, and social theory.

In this year, students can also take a new ethnographic area paper and an optional paper from within Social Anthropology and other related subjects. One of these optional papers may be substituted with a dissertation, based on your own fieldwork.

Optional Papers

Optional papers in both Years 2 and 3 may include the anthropology of city life, gender, colonialism, law, development, medicine and health, and media and visual culture; and also choices from other HSPS subjects and beyond.

Joint Tracks

If you choose to combine Social Anthropology as a joint degree with Politics, Sociology or Religious Studies in Years 2 and 3, you will take two core papers from each subject, each year. In Year 3 one of these papers can include a dissertation in Social Anthropology.