

What Can You Learn from an Anthropology Major?

The Career Development Center at SUNY Plattsburgh developed a document that highlights what students typically learn from a major in anthropology.

- 1. Social agility**
In an unfamiliar social or career-related setting, you learn to quickly size up the rules of the game. You can become accepted more quickly than you could without this anthropological skill.
- 2. Observation**
You must often learn about a culture from within it, so you learn how to interview and observe as a participant.
- 3. Analysis and planning**
You learn how to find patterns in the behavior of a cultural group. This awareness of patterns allows you to generalize about the group's behavior and predict what they might do in a given situation.
- 4. Social sensitivity**
Although other people's ways of doing things may be different from your own, you learn the importance of events and conditions that have contributed to this difference. You also recognize that other cultures view your ways as strange. You learn the value of behaving toward others with appropriate preparation, care, and understanding.
- 5. Accuracy in interpreting behavior**
You become familiar with the range of behavior in different cultures. You learn how to look at cultural causes of behavior before assigning causes yourself.
- 6. Ability to appropriately challenge conclusions**
You learn that analyses of human behavior are open to challenge. You learn how to use new knowledge to test past conclusions.
- 7. Insightful interpretation of information**
You learn how to use data collected by others, reorganizing or interpreting the data to reach original conclusions.
- 8. Simplification of information**
Because anthropology is conducted among publics as well as about them, you learn how to simplify technical information for communication to non-technical people.
- 9. Contextualization**
Although attention to details is a trait of anthropology, you learn that any given detail might not be as important as its context and can even be misleading when the context is ignored.
- 10. Problem solving**
Because you often function within a cultural group or act on culturally sensitive issues, you learn to approach problems with care. Before acting, you identify the problem, set your goals, decide on the actions you will take, and calculate possible effects on other people.
- 11. Persuasive writing**
Anthropologists strive to represent the behavior of one group to another group and continually need to engage in interpretation. You learn the value of bringing someone else to share—or at least understand—your view through written argument.
- 12. Assumption of a social perspective**
You learn how to perceive the acts of individuals and local groups as both shaping and being shaped by larger sociocultural systems. The perception enables you to "act locally and think globally."