

Anthropology Department Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Anthropology Department at UAlbany to provide undergraduates with an intellectually rigorous, four-field education that prepares them well for graduate education in anthropology, for graduate and professional programs in other fields, and/or for employment in community settings in which an awareness and understanding of human biological, linguistic, and cultural diversity is a valuable asset.

Anthropologists study human cultural, linguistic and biological variation over space and time, through prehistory and history to the present; they analyze cultures, peoples, and languages all over the earth. Across this vast time and space the discipline focuses on similarities and differences. Regardless of subfield or specialty, anthropologists investigate what makes us human, and we examine how to account for differences within our shared humanity. The Anthropology program at UAlbany introduces students to the basic concepts and methods of inquiry that address these issues in each of the four subfields of anthropology – archaeological, biological, cultural and linguistic. The department is committed to a student learning experience involving holistic and comparative approaches to data. Opportunities for internships and supervised fieldwork, both locally and abroad, allow interested students to receive credit for hands-on experience and active engagement with faculty in the research process; several courses involve students in field research in the local area. Students have opportunities to study topics that integrate material and approaches from multiple subdisciplines, through our courses and research opportunities in Mesoamerican studies, indigenous North American cultures, medical/biocultural anthropology, applied anthropology, and fieldwork opportunities. In their senior year, anthropology majors take a capstone course that is intended to help them reflect on and integrate the variety of experiences they have had in the major. It was originally instituted as a seminar, but owing to class size it has come to be run as a partial seminar in which students pursue a project of their choice under the direction of a full-time faculty professor. The professor role rotates among the subdisciplines but each time the course material is chosen to allow students with interests in any of the subdisciplines to develop their own project.

The overarching mission of the Human Biology program is to provide undergraduate students with a Bachelor of Science degree program of substantial breadth and depth dealing with the biology of human beings. The program is interdisciplinary, with concentrations of courses in Biology and Anthropology, and a substantial amount of coursework in Chemistry, Physics, and Mathematics. The introductory level courses in the sciences and mathematics serve as prerequisites for advanced courses, and form a general base of methodologies and information upon which the rest of the program is built. Through 55 credits of required and elective courses, the faculty seek to guide students through the basic sciences and into areas where human biology and behaviors are considered in integrative ways. Until Fall 2004, this program was a faculty-initiated major

with a concentration in human biology; as of Fall 2004, it became an institutionally recognized major leading to a formal B.S. in Human Biology. The program serves many students who seek advanced education in health fields and its curriculum is designed to satisfy requirements for many such programs.

Linguistics is the science of human language. It examines all aspects of language use and structure in the world's many languages. The linguistics major is designed to provide students with a basic understanding of the nature of human language and the principles and methods of contemporary linguistics theory. Students learn how to analyze the structure of sounds (phonology), words (morphology), and sentences (syntax).

The linguistics major at UAlbany has a particular focus on the description and analysis of lesser-studied and endangered languages of the world. We teach students to gather data from the primary sources of data on such languages – speakers of the languages in question – and to critically analyze secondary data found in sources such as dictionaries and grammars. Instruction is provided on gathering data from primary as well as secondary sources, and students have multiple opportunities to present their research both verbally (e.g., oral presentations in class), and in writing (e.g., research papers).

In the capstone course of the major, Field Methods, students gather data themselves from a little-studied language and account for the facts using the theoretical and analytical tools they have acquired in previous courses. Majors and many minors enjoy the advantages of a small unit within a large research university and receive a high level of faculty attention.