

Why study anthropology?

The study of social anthropology and sociology both started nearly 200 years ago.

They have common roots and the central questions they share are very much alive today:

- What holds societies together?
- Do people pull together because they have to or because they want to?
- How do societies change or adapt?
- Why do people organise themselves socially in such different ways?
- Why do some societies flourish and others break down?
- What is at the root of the social experience we call religion?
- Why do people distinguish and discriminate on the basis of different kinds of bodies and why?

Although the questions sociologists and anthropologists ask are often the same, the way they go about answering them are often different.

Deep knowledge and community focus

Anthropologists tend to look at small numbers of people for an extended period of time, and have a deep knowledge of particular communities; sociologists are adept at designing surveys, observing organisations, evaluating data and handling basic statistics.

Sociologists have a long history of drawing on anthropological methods and many scholars at Essex have pioneered ethnographic methods in sociology. As a combined approach you will be able to analyse social issues from a very broad perspective and learn a wide range of research skills.

Visit Mexico with us

As part of your anthropology course, you have the exciting opportunity to spend two weeks on a field trip to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, experiencing first-hand what ethnographic field research is like, living and working with Maya families and contributing to village life.

You spend your first week lodging with a local family in the picturesque town of Merida and going on day trips to the Maya pyramids, archaeological sites, museums and nature reserves. You also take courses at the university catered to you, participating in seminars on local language and culture.

Your second week is spent again with a local family, in the traditional Maya village of [Yaxunah](#) where you carry out a small ethnographic research project under the supervision of a local anthropologist, as an assessed component of your course, contributing towards your final degree (a dedicated module in the spring term of your Second Year, with a focus on anthropological research methods will thoroughly prepare you for this).