



Social and Cultural Anthropology (MSc)

VU University Amsterdam - Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen - M Social and Cultural Anthropology - 2015-2016

The Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology provides theoretical concepts and research skills for analyzing the social and cultural complexity of human communities, like local neighbourhoods, various kinds of organizations or transnational networks of migrants in the context of a globalizing world. The theoretical training is focused on the idea and concept of human security, which is critically unpacked and used as a prism. By doing so students discover the physical and existential dimensions of human security, and their interaction. A core principle of the programme is the interdependency between social transformations and the meaning that people give to these changes. The programme offers two profiles. The Development and Social Transformations profile focuses on poverty, sustainable development and politics; the Constructing Identities and Notions of Belonging profile addresses issues of nationality, ethnicity, gender and religion. Research skills are extensively trained by designing and implementing a three months qualitative field research and linking the findings with theoretical perspectives in the final Master's thesis.

Over the past years the Master's in SCA has proven to be highly successful, in terms of the quality assessment by the accreditation organisation for higher education in the Netherlands, NVAO; in terms of success rate of students; and by intake of students. Graduates find jobs in a large variety of positions and fields.

[Objective and attainment levels](#)

[Year schedule](#)

Index

Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology	1
Course: Field Research (Period 3+4)	1
Course: Field Research Design (Period 1+2)	2
Course: Master's Thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Ac. Year (September))	3
Course: Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1 (Period 1)	4
Course: Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 2 (Period 2)	5

Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology

Courses:

Name	Period	Credits	Code
Field Research	Period 3+4	18.0	S_FR
Field Research Design	Period 1+2	12.0	S_FRD
Master's Thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology	Ac. Year (September)	18.0	S_MTsca
Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1	Period 1	6.0	S_TOHS1
Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 2	Period 2	6.0	S_TOHS2

Field Research

Course code	S_FR ()
Period	Period 3+4
Credits	18.0
Language of tuition	English
Faculty	Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. L.A. Brouwer
Examinator	dr. L.A. Brouwer
Teaching method(s)	Lecture
Level	500

Course objective

Students gain experience with doing anthropological field research, which will form the empirical base of their Master's thesis.

Course content

Anthropologists distinguish themselves from other social scientists through their emphasis on field research as the most important method of data collection. During their field research, students collect the empirical data that will form the core of their Master's thesis. They will experiment with various techniques of data collection such as participant observation, interviews, and locally available data sets. Being away from their 'normal', daily lives and environments, students also gain experience with different life- and communication styles, ways of dealing with local authorities and bureaucracies, culture shock, moral dilemmas, et cetera. During their field research, they regularly report to their supervisors, keep good records of their experiences in the form of research notes and a diary. A strict deadline for the return is maintained in order to ensure that sufficient time is left for writing up the Master's thesis.

Form of tuition

Practical. Individual supervisor will comment on progress reports of the field research by way of the best possible communication means. If possible, a local supervisor will be appointed for face-to-face guidance

and feedback.

Type of assessment

Final field research report

Course reading

None

Entry requirements

Participation in Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1 (S_TOHS1), Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 2 (S_TOHS2) and Field Research Design (S_FRD).

Target group

Obligatory course for students in the Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Remarks

Completion of the field research and of a field report is a requirement for participation in the course Master's Thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Field Research Design

Course code	S_FRD ()
Period	Period 1+2
Credits	12.0
Language of tuition	English
Faculty	Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. G. Sinatti
Teaching staff	dr. M.E.M. de Theije, dr. G. Sinatti
Teaching method(s)	Study Group
Level	400

Course objective

Students write a full-fledged research plan and make the practical arrangements for their field research. Students will develop a research topic of their own in relation to anthropology and human security as the central theme of the Master's program. Students will also increase their knowledge and skills in qualitative data collecting methods.

Course content

During the first part of the course students work on the so-called explorative paper (6,000 words). They select their theme and topic of research, a geographical region, and conduct literature research. The weekly assignments will facilitate the process of selecting a research subject and of narrowing down their focus. In-class exercises, peer review assignments and (group) discussions will further help students develop their ideas and to learn from/inspire each other. In order to optimize results students are encouraged to participate in or link up with research projects and issues of staff members. In the second part of the course students develop an analytical research question, informed by their previous and continuing literature search and by the literature of the selected profile of the parallel course Theoretical Orientation on Human Security Part 2. They also arrange practicalities for their

field research. Additionally students are informed about various qualitative data collection methods such as open interview, participant observation and photo-elicitation; are trained in writing down field notes; and are sensitized to ethical and reflexive issues in doing fieldwork. Various practical exercises will students help to do so. At the end of the course students will have written a research plan (8,000 words) containing a well-argued research problem; a critical discussion of relevant literature about the selected theme and region; an operationalization of the research question; a short description of the intended research methods; a brief reflection on research ethics pertaining to the intended research; a small report of practical preparations for the fieldwork. The plan will be expanded with an annotated bibliography on the topic and geographic area consisting of twenty-five titles (five titles can be used from the course Theoretical Orientation on Human Security Part 2).

Form of tuition

Practical

Type of assessment

The final grade is based on the explorative paper (30%) and the research plan. A 'fail' for the explorative paper may be compensated. All other assignments during the course need to be assessed with a pass.

Course reading

Sunstein, B.S. & Chiseri-Strater, E. (2007, 3rd edition). *FieldWorking. Reading and Writing Research*. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's [the 2006 edition is accepted as well] (available at VU bookshop at € 30).

Additional elective literature depending on topic of research and theoretical approach.

Target group

Obligatory course for students in the Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Remarks

- Students also need to participate in the course Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1.
- Completion of this course is an entry requirement for Field Research.

Master's Thesis in Social and Cultural Anthropology

Course code	S_MTsca ()
Period	Ac. Year (September)
Credits	18.0
Language of tuition	English
Faculty	Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. R.A. Gigengack
Examinator	dr. G. Sinatti
Teaching staff	dr. M.E.M. de Theije, dr. E.W. Bal, prof. dr. J.T. Sunier
Teaching method(s)	Study Group, Practical
Level	600

Course objective

Students demonstrate that they can analyze field research data in relation with a theoretical perspective and report on this in a Master's thesis. They show their knowledge of anthropological approaches, their skills to organize and interpret fieldwork data and their capacity to writing up ethnography and complete the task within given time limits. In doing so they prove their final qualification as a Master in anthropology.

Course content

Students work individually, supported by a personal supervisor with whom they discuss the field research report, the outline of the Master's thesis, some chapters of the thesis and a draft of the whole thesis in four meetings. Additional support is coming from weekly sessions of the graduate seminar in which students are provided with the tools to reflect on the transformation of fieldwork data into a written, academic text; to refine the writing skills of the students; and, to guide the students through the process of writing the Master's thesis. Topics include: fieldwork experience; linking ethnography and theory; ethical dilemmas of ethnographic writing; and rhetorical strategies. The seminar supplements the guidance by individual supervisors, but does not replace it. Working together in a seminar helps to keep spirits up on the lonely path of writing.

Form of tuition

Practical and tutorial

Type of assessment

Master's thesis (90%, graded by mark), and oral presentation of thesis draft in the last session – 'mini-conference' - of the graduate seminar (10%, graded by a pass). Attendance and participation in the graduate seminar is obligatory. In all parts a pass must be achieved.

Course reading

Some mandatory literature will be announced at the start of the graduate seminar; other reading will be determined with the thesis supervisor.

Entry requirements

Field Research Design (S_FRD), Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1 (S_TOHS1) and Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 2 (S_TOHS2) have to be completed (24 EC).

Recommended background knowledge

Participation in Field Research (S_FR).

Target group

Obligatory course for students in the Master's in Social and Cultural Anthropology.

Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 1

Course code	S_TOHS1 ()
Period	Period 1
Credits	6.0
Language of tuition	English

Faculty	Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. F. Colombijn
Examinator	dr. F. Colombijn
Teaching staff	dr. F. Colombijn
Teaching method(s)	Lecture, Study Group
Level	400

Theoretical Orientation on Human Security part 2

Course code	S_TOHS2 ()
Period	Period 2
Credits	6.0
Language of tuition	English
Faculty	Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. F. Colombijn
Examinator	dr. F. Colombijn
Teaching staff	dr. S.J.T.M. Evers, dr. F. Colombijn
Teaching method(s)	Study Group, Lecture
Level	500

Entry requirements

Having participated in the course Theoretical Orientation on Human Security Part 1 (S_TOHS1).