# 3. Understanding Culture



Decorative image of eight people of diverse nationalities with their arms around each others shoulders and waists. Photo by fauxels on Pexels

Decorative image of eight people of diverse nationalities with their arms around each others shoulders and waists. *Photo by fauxels on Pexels*

## Overview

***Welcome to ANTH 101!***

Anthropology is the study of all humans in all times in all places” (Wesch, 2017).

I have chosen two textbooks for this course. One that introduces you to a wide range of topics through a systematic, descriptive approach. However, you will notice that we do not cover all topics nor all chapters – there simply are too many. I have selected instead, the most common topics that will expose you to how contemporary people across the world live their lives differently than how you live yours. That textbook, called ***Perspectives,*** fittingly has numerous authors for the different chapters. However, I will refer to this resource as ***Perspectives*** rather than by the individual names of authors for each chapter.

The second textbook called ***The Art of Being Human*** is limited in scope and topics, but it takes you on a journey of discovery. The author, Michael Wesch, asks questions, and challenges you to find answers. He is masterful in working with core themes, which he presents as videos and challenges for you to do yourself. The New York Times recognized Wesch as an innovative teacher who “give(s) students an experience that might change how they think, what they care about or even how they live their lives” (p. 359).

Here are a couple of quotes that introduce you to the experience you are about to have through this course:

Anthropology is not only the science of human beings, but also the art of asking questions, making connections, and trying new things” (p. 5).

You will have to overcome your fears, step outside your comfort zone, and get comfortable with the uncomfortable” (p. 5).

… my willingness to change myself might be simultaneously the ONLY and BEST thing I can offer the world … ” (p. 353).

Wesch talks about being stretched himself – and he challenges you to be stretched – and become a healthy and responsible individual who can create a healthy and responsible society. If each of us does that, we collectively can create a healthier more inclusive and humane world. The fundamental experience of this textbook and the challenges through ***The Art of Being Human,*** is summarized this way:

“You cannot just think your way into a new way of living. You have to live your way into a new way of thinking” (p. 6).

### Topics

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. What is Anthropology? What is Cultural Anthropology?
2. Anthropological Perspectives- Why is Anthropology Important?
3. What is Culture?

### Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this unit, you should be able to:

Define *culture* and the six characteristics of culture.

Discuss *ethnocentrism* and the role it played in early attempts to understand other cultures.

Explain how the perspectives of *holism*, *cultural* *relativism*, *comparison*, and *fieldwork*, as well as both *scientific* and *humanistic* tendencies make anthropology a unique discipline.

Evaluate the ways in which anthropology can be used to address current *social*, *political*, and *economic* issues.

### Activity Checklist

## 3.1 What is Anthropology?

We begin our study by introducing the discipline of anthropology. Anthropology is an attempt to systematically study and document cultural differences. This course is solely a study of one sub-field: cultural anthropology. We will not study the other sub-fields which are archaeology, biological anthropology and linguistic anthropology. All four sub-fields are “applied” meaning that applied anthropologists span the subfields and use anthropological methods, and findings to solve practical problems in public and private sectors such as business and health.

## 3.2 Anthropological Perspectives and Problem-Solving

Anthropology is unique from other social sciences, like psychology and sociology, in that anthropological perspectives involve four features:

* Holism
* Relativism
* Comparison
* Fieldwork

Because of its focus on differing and shifting perspectives, the study of anthropology enables students to think their way to another way of relating and living, and therefore “the anthropological perspective is an essential skill for nearly any career in today’s globalized world” (p. 17).

The *Perspectives* textbook introduces you briefly to the dual perspectives of anthropology being both scientific and humanistic (see p. 17). It is a science in its systematic approach. It is an art in that individuals are unique in their experience of their humanity. Michael Wesch, the author of your second textbook, shares “what the science of human beings can tell us about the art of being human.”

### Resources

In order to build a foundational understanding of anthropology, it is important that we first understand why anthropology is important. The readings provided below are intended to guide your exploration of anthropology. When reading chapters in the textbooks, the chapters should be read in their entirety, unless you are instructed that you can omit certain sections. The entire articles have been provided for your reference but the instructions below outline important sections to focus your attention on.

### Activity Reading

### Activity Learning

## 3.3 What is Culture?

Several sources will be used to learn and reinforce the fundamental ideas about culture. This section has several important terms and concepts. You will learn about the characteristics of culture and also learn about cultural universals versus cultural relativism, and about ethnocentrism which influences how you see yourself and others.

We will cycle through the ideas of Culture with three rounds. First an introductory exposure to the study of culture, then aim to gain perspective through a classic article about Americans and a modern perspective on a Western pastime, golf. The third round of readings and embedded videos will revisit some concepts you’ve already been introduced to, and add important new ideas. The material covered in this unit provides the fundamental concepts, and therefore, we will cycle through some terms or concepts more than once.

### Resources

The resources below will help you better understand the content explored in this unit. Take some time to explore this material- it will be discussed during the Learning Lab and will play an important role in course assessments.

### Learning Activity

### Learning Lab Information

Welcome to the first Learning Lab of the course. Each week, it is expected that students attend, and actively engage in a Learning Lab. For this course, the structure and expectations of this time will vary. During this time, however, students will be engaging with their Instructor and/or their Facilitator- they will be leading the session and providing guidance. Additionally this time provides an opportunity for students to seek support or ask questions about any of the elements of the course.

It is expected that students preview the **Learning Lab** section of each unit ***prior*** to attending this session. Often their are readings or activities that you will need to complete in order to prepare for this component of the course. It is also important to note any guiding questions from the Learning Activities embedded throughout each topic- your Facilitator will also be using this time to review the themes from these activities. It is important to review each so that you are prepared to engage with the rest of the group.

{–For most Learning Lab sessions, students will earn marks towards their “Participation” grade for the course. However, some of the Learning Labs will require students to formally present their ideas and research- this will count towards the “Activities” component of your final grade.–}

Be sure to carefully read through the instructions for the Learning Lab each week and organize your time accordingly.

### Learning Lab: Talking to Strangers

We begin our first Learning Lab with a challenge: talking to strangers! As you have learned in this unit, anthropology involves exploring the lives and cultures of others. Based on that exploration, we can develop an understanding of how people live and what things make them unique.

***To begin this activity,*** follow the link below. Here you will find instructions for this challenge.

[**Talking to Strangers**](https://anth101.com/challenge1/)

Once you have completed the challenge, you will be asked to share your experience. Use the guidelines provided on the link to prepare your thoughts.

During the set time for the Unit 1 Learning Lab, students will be expected to share their thoughts and ideas from their experience during this *challenge.* Your Facilitator will be guiding the conversation but will be expecting each of you to engage and contribute to the conversation.

As noted above, some time during this Learning Lab will also be set aside so that you can ask any questions you have about the course. Your Facilitator will also be taking some time to review some general information and expectations for the course.

In addition to the activity above, each student should be prepared to discuss the readings and activities found throughout Unit 1. The Instructor and/or Facilitator will be using the Learning Lab to explore these resources.

## Summary

[add content]

//todo #1

## Assessment

## Checking your Learning