Anthropology explores the dynamics and diversity of humankind. It asks a most difficult and most important question: What does it mean to be human? The discipline ranges from the study of culture and social relations, to human biology and evolution, to economics and politics, to religion and world views, to languages and the connections between language and social dynamics, to visual cultures and architecture, to medicine and disease, and to what we can learn about past societies through the study of material culture, including paintings, earthenware vessels, religious figurines, discarded stone tools, bone fragments, and the foundations of ancient homes.

This diversity of topics is linked by the common thread of “culture,” that uniquely human concept which is at the heart of anthropological studies. As a discipline, anthropology begins with a simple yet powerful idea: any detail of our behavior can be understood better when it is seen against the backdrop of the full range of human behavior. Anthropology considers why and how people from distant parts of the world and dissimilar cultures are different and the same, how the human species has evolved over millions of years, and the ways people make sense of and order their lives. By focusing on human diversity, the anthropologist learns to avoid “ethnocentrism,” the tendency to interpret seemingly strange practices on the basis of preconceptions derived from one’s own cultural background. Moreover, this same process helps us see our own society through fresh eyes. By thus making “the strange familiar and the familiar strange,” anthropology pushes forward understandings of ourselves and others, as well as of the nature of humanity as a whole.

The Department of Anthropology offers courses in the discipline’s four major subfields: social-cultural, archaeological, biological and linguistic anthropology. The major is structured to provide an introduction to anthropology’s core concepts, methodologies, and theoretical issues, while permitting each student sufficient latitude to pursue his or her own special interests.

Knowledge: Students completing the major in anthropology will come away with a strong understanding of:

- the diversity of human cultures and the interdependence of people around the world;
- the inequality in relations of power within and among the world’s societies and nations in the past and present;
- what it means to be a human being: who we are, how we came to be that way, and where we may go in the future;
- the major questions, concepts, theories, ethical issues and methodologies of anthropology as a professional discipline.
Core Skills: The anthropology major also emphasizes core skills in data collection, critical thinking and communication. Anthropology majors from Brandeis will be well prepared to:

- conduct scholarly, professional, and original research using a variety of published sources as well as core anthropological research methodologies, including interviews, participant observation, excavation and laboratory analysis;
- evaluate information critically, with particular attention to examining taken-for-granted assumptions using the lens of culture; and
- express clearly facts, ideas, opinions and beliefs in a variety of written and oral formats, such as traditional, web-based, visual and other media.

Social Justice: The anthropology curriculum provides graduates with knowledge and perspectives needed to participate as informed citizens in a global society. Anthropology emphasizes tolerance and respect for other cultures’ ways of living. Anthropological approaches oriented toward social and political engagement, collaborations with local communities, applied work, and public dissemination of research (through publishing, oral presentations, film, the internet and museum exhibits) also provide specific tools and opportunities for those committed to Brandeis’s ideal of learning in service of social justice.

Upon Graduating: A Brandeis student with an anthropology major will be prepared to:

- pursue graduate study and a scholarly career in anthropology; or
- use the knowledge and perspectives gained from the sustained study of humanity to pursue professional training and a range of careers in any field dealing with people—including healthcare, government, business, law, journalism, education, and human rights work—in local and international settings.

Many of our graduates go on to graduate school in law, medicine, public health, public policy, social work, museum studies, education, and business, as well as anthropology.