

Student Fieldwork

Whilst fieldwork is not a formal requirement of any of the degrees in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (SAME), it is an integral part of most research degrees and many taught degrees in anthropology, and is a major tool of anthropological research. The nature of fieldwork can vary enormously. It may, for example, consist of formal interviewing, analytical study, or informal observation; it may take place many miles away from the researcher's own home and in a very different social and political context, or even in the researcher's own household; a fieldwork study may last a few weeks or more than a year. The opportunity to engage directly and personally with the study of human behaviour, for many anthropologists, one of the key attractions of the discipline.

Details of the requirements for fieldwork in the degrees offered by SAME are outlined in the Graduate Studies Handbook. The individual course handbooks for the MSc and MPhil degrees include details of research training and fieldwork (where appropriate) for those degrees.

Because of the diversity of forms and objectives of fieldwork, the wide range of situations that may be experienced, and outcomes that may be achieved, fieldwork requires very careful planning. This means not only the planning of the travel and the research itself, but also of how data will be accumulated and handled during the fieldwork and afterwards, and how researchers will resume their more usual pattern of life and work after the fieldwork is complete.

Anthropology is not, of course, alone amongst academic disciplines in using fieldwork, though anthropologists often undertake especially long periods of fieldwork compared with other disciplines. In addition to the fieldwork training that is available within the School of Anthropology itself the university provides a good range of advice – including from experienced fieldwork researchers – and support. Some researchers in anthropology may find that the nature of their fieldwork shares more in common with that in another discipline (e.g. human geography, archaeology, sociology, psychology) than with that of many of their anthropological peers. For this reason it is well worth consulting advice and experience from the broader Social Sciences in addition to the detailed training and advice available in Anthropology itself.
