WHAT IS ANTHROPOLOGY?

- Anthropology is the study of the human species and its immediate ancestors.
- Anthropology is holistic in that the discipline is concerned with studying the whole of the human condition: past, present and future. Anthropology studies biology, society, language, and culture.
- Anthropology offers a unique cross-cultural perspective by constantly comparing the customs of one society with those of others.
- People share both society and culture.
- Society is organized life in groups, a feature that humans share with other animals.
- Cultures are traditions and customs, transmitted through learning, that govern the beliefs and behaviors of the people exposed to them.
- While culture is not biological, the ability to use it rests in hominid biology.

ADAPTATION, VARIATION, AND CHANGE

- Adaptation is the process by which organisms cope with environmental stresses.
- Human adaptation involves interaction between culture and biology to satisfy individual goals.
- Four types of human adaptation:
  - cultural (technological) adaptation
  - genetic adaptation
  - long-term physiological or developmental adaptation
  - immediate physiological adaptation
Adaptation, Variation, and Change

- Humans are the most adaptable animals in the world, having the ability to inhabit widely variant ecological niches.
- Humans, like all other animals use biological means to adapt to a given environment.
- Humans are unique in having cultural means of adaptation.

Adaptation, Variation, and Change

- Through time, social and cultural means of adaptation have become increasingly important for human groups.
- Human groups have devised diverse ways of coping with a wide range of environments.
- The rate of this cultural adaptation has been rapidly accelerating during the last 10,000 years.
  - Food production developed between 12,000 and 10,000 years ago after millions of years during which hunting and gathering was the sole basis for human subsistence.
  - The first civilizations developed between 6,000 and 5,000 years ago.
  - More recently, the spread of industrial production has profoundly affected human life.

Four Subdisciplines of Anthropology

- The academic discipline of American anthropology is unique in that it includes four subdisciplines:
  - cultural anthropology
  - archaeological anthropology
  - biological or physical anthropology
  - linguistic anthropology
- This four field approach developed in the US as early American anthropologists studying native peoples of North America became interested in exploring the origins and diversity of the groups that they were studying.
- This broad approach to studying human societies did not develop in Europe (e.g. Archaeology, in most European universities, is not a subdiscipline of anthropology; it is its own department).
Four Subdisciplines of Anthropology

- **Variation in “Time”** (diachronic research): using information from contemporary groups to model changes that took place in the past, and using knowledge gained from past groups to understand what is likely to happen in the future (e.g. reconstructing past languages using principles based on modern ones).

- **Variation in “Space”** (synchronic research): comparing information collected from human societies existing at the same or roughly the same time, but from different geographic locations (e.g. the race concept in the US, Brazil, and Japan).

- Any conclusions about “human nature” must be pursued with a comparative, cross-cultural approach.

Cultural Anthropology

- Cultural Anthropology combines ethnography and ethnology to study human societies and cultures for the purpose of explaining social and cultural similarities and differences.

- **Ethnography** produces an account (a book, an article, or a film) of a particular community, society, or culture based on information that is collected during fieldwork.

- Generally, ethnographic fieldwork involves living in the community that is being studied for an extended period of time (e.g. 6 months to 2 years).

- Ethnographic fieldwork tends to emphasize local behavior, beliefs, customs, social life, economic activities, politics, and religion, rather than developments at the national level.

- Since cultures are not isolated, ethnographers must investigate the local, regional, national, and global systems of politics, economics, and information that expose villagers to external influences.

Archaeological Anthropology (Archaeology)

- **Archaeological anthropology** reconstructs, describes, and interprets past human behavior and cultural patterns through **material remains (Material Culture)**.

- The material remains of a culture include artifacts (e.g. potsherds, jewelry, and tools), garbage, burials, and the remains of structures.

- Archaeologists use paleoecological studies to establish the ecological and subsistence parameters within which given group lived.
Archaeological Anthropology (Archaeology)

- The archaeological record provides archaeologists the unique opportunity to look at changes in social complexity over thousands and tens of thousands of years (this kind of time depth is not accessible to ethnographers).
- Archaeology is not restricted to prehistoric societies.
- Historical archaeology combines archaeological data and textual data to reconstruct historically known groups.
- William Rathje’s “garbology” project in Tucson, Arizona.

Biological Anthropology

- Biological, or physical, anthropology investigates human biological diversity across time and space.
- There are five special interests within biological anthropology:
  - paleoanthropology: human evolution as revealed by the fossil record
  - human genetics
  - human growth and development
  - human biological plasticity: the body’s ability to change as it copes with stresses such as heat, cold, and altitude
- Biological anthropology is multidisciplinary as it draws on biology, zoology, geology, anatomy, physiology, medicine, public health, osteology, and archaeology.

Linguistic Anthropology

- Linguistic anthropology is the study of language in its social and cultural context across space and time.
- Some linguistic anthropologists investigate universal features of language that may be linked to uniformities in the human brain.
- Historical linguists reconstruct ancient languages and study linguistic variation through time.
- Sociolinguistics investigates relationships between social and linguistic variation to discover varied perceptions and patterns of thought in different cultures.
Theoretical/Academic Anthropology

- Theoretical/academic anthropology includes the four subfields discussed above (cultural, archaeological, biological, and linguistic anthropology).
- Directed at collecting data to test hypotheses and models that were created to advance the field of anthropology.
- Generally, theoretical/academic anthropology is carried out in academic institutions (e.g. universities and specialized research facilities).

Applied Anthropology

- Applied anthropology is the application of any of anthropological data, perspectives, theory, and techniques to identify, assess, and solve contemporary social problems.
- Some standard subdivisions have developed in applied anthropology: medical anthropology, environmental anthropology, forensic anthropology, and development anthropology.
- Applied anthropologists are generally employed by international development agencies, like the World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations.