



Universität
Basel

Philosophisch-Historische
Fakultät



Guidelines Master's Degree Subject **Social Anthropology**

Guidelines for the Master's Degree Subject in Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Basel

The original German guidelines were established by the Social Sciences teaching committee in consultation with the the Dean of Studies Office at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Approved by the examination commission on 01.09.2026.

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Preamble

The examination commission (“Prüfungskommission”) of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Basel has approved the following guidelines. These guidelines govern details of the degree subject Master of Arts in Social Anthropology.

The paragraph numbers referenced in these guidelines refer to the Regulations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Basel for Master’s Studies (“Ordnung der Philosophisch-Historischen Fakultät der Universität Basel für das Masterstudium”), dated 25 October 2018. Should there be any contradictions between the study guidelines and the master’s regulations (“Masterordnung”) or the study program (“Studienplan”) for the Master of Arts in Social Anthropology, the master’s regulations or study program for the Master of Arts in Social Anthropology shall apply.

Please consult the relevant documents at philhist.unibas.ch/de/studium/.

1. The Master’s Degree Subject in Social Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Basel

1.1 Subject area concept and focal points in Basel

Social anthropology is the comprehensive study of humans as social beings. Its aim is to understand human behavior in various societies and to explain it within its social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

Social anthropologists focus on both rural and urban areas. They study everyday practices, social and religious movements, the administration of justice, conflicts, and the activities of state and international organizations, and examine how local cultures are embedded in regional, national, and global contexts.

Social anthropology explores what it means to be human and to become human in various social, cultural, and historical contexts. It asks: How is the relationship between the local worlds in which people live and the global structures into which they are embedded shaped? This requires social anthropolo-

gists to question and challenge conventional notions of social relationships, economic livelihoods, and political power. Social anthropologists therefore strive to broaden their own perspectives and conceptual frameworks to better understand the central challenges of our time.

While the regional focus of social anthropology at the University of Basel is on Africa and Eastern Europe, our researchers also conduct research and teach on Oceania, Asia, Latin America, and the Afro-Atlantic region, among other areas.

Research and teaching focus on a range of themes, including general social anthropology, global economic systems, migration, mobility and belonging, gender, sexuality and kinship, medicine, health and the body, and the politics of knowledge production.

From a methodological perspective, the program primarily adopts qualitative and interpretive approaches. In particular, it promotes the development of methods capable of capturing current changes brought about by globalization.

1.2 Admission requirements

Admission without additional requirements is granted to applicants who hold a Bachelor's degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Basel or who can demonstrate equivalent academic achievements in Social Anthropology totaling 30 credit points, earned at the University of Basel or at a higher education institution recognized by the University of Basel.

1.3 Subject-specific requirements and recommendations

The most important personal prerequisite for studying Social Anthropology is a deep and lasting interest in other people and the social contexts in which they live, including the relationship between people, nature, and objects. In addition to curiosity and a willingness to understand, students should also be open to engaging with people's everyday lives as the most significant sphere of their lived experience, as well as be prepared to immerse themselves in these everyday realities.

Solid English language skills are essential for independent study of specialist literature, participation in courses and lectures, and research work. Good knowledge of French is an advantage. Depending on the area of interest, the acquisition of additional foreign languages may be required.

The language of instruction in the master's degree subject Social Anthropology is English. Individual courses may be taught in German. The program can be completed without knowledge of German.

1.4 Academic advice

The subject-specific academic advising service answers all questions related to studying Social Anthropology. Contact information for academic advising can be found on the program's [website](#).

2. Learning outcomes, qualifications and professions

2.1 Learning outcomes and qualifications

The MA in Social Anthropology aims to provide students with advanced and in-depth knowledge and skills in the comparative cultural, social, and historical analysis of human behavior in different societies and environments.

Building on the foundational knowledge of social anthropology acquired at the bachelor's level, students in the master's degree subject are guided to expand their theoretical knowledge, deepen their focus in a specific subfield, and acquire specialized knowledge in a research area. This enables students to develop their own areas of expertise in understanding specific forms of social behavior in a globalized world.

Students also learn field research methods, acquire the ability to design and conduct an independent research project, and develop skills in analyzing and interpreting the resulting findings in relation to a theoretical framework, as well as presenting them in a scholarly text.

2.2 Professions

The competencies acquired during the study of social anthropology can be applied and further developed across a broad spectrum ranging from academically oriented theoretical research to applied social anthropology. Future social anthropologists are often expected to actively shape their own professional environments, which can represent both an opportunity and a challenge.

Thanks to the broad range of knowledge acquired during the study of social anthropology – for example, the collection and processing of complex information, as well as writing, reading, and presentation skills, and the ability to reflect on and critically examine social values and norms, global contexts, power structures, and inequalities –, our graduates find employment in a wide range of professional fields, including NGOs, intercultural communication, international cooperation, migration services, refugee support services, social work, media, public relations and journalism, education and outreach, museums, archives and independent curating, research institutions, tourism, the public health sector and sustainability, international companies, diplomacy, and politics.

The master's degree also qualifies students to pursue doctoral studies in social anthropology and to participate in basic or applied research.

More detailed information on the competencies and learning outcomes of this

subject can be found in the qualification profile in the appendix.

3. Program structure

At the master's level, students deepen their knowledge of theories and topics in social anthropology and engage with research methods. The core of the master's degree subject is applied ethnographic research. As part of a two-semester course on varying topics, students carry out their own research project.

The master's degree subject Social Anthropology, in combination with a second subject and an elective component, leads to a Master of Arts in Social Anthropology and a second subject from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Basel, typically within a standard period of study of two years.

As a major, the master's degree subject Social Anthropology comprises 65 credits, consisting of coursework totaling 35 credits and a master's thesis (30 credits). It must be combined with a second master's degree subject (35 credits) and an elective component (20 credits), for a total of 120 credits.

For the minor, 35 credits are required, combined with a second master's degree subject (65 credits) and the elective component (20 credits).

The master's degree subject Social Anthropology can be combined with all subjects offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It is also possible to choose certain subjects from outside the faculty.

3.1 Study structure

Completing the degree subject, CP	Modules	Eligible course formats
13 CP , of which - 3 CP for a seminar or research seminar - 5 CP for a seminar paper - 5 CP for electives	Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology	All in accordance with § 7, section 4 and 5
17 CP , of which - 15 CP for a course - 2 CP for a colloquium	Ethnographic Research	course, colloquium
5 CP	Master's examination	
35 CP	Minor	
30 CP	Master's thesis	
65 CP	Major	

Column „Completing the degree subject, CP“

This column lists the minimum requirements for successfully completing the degree subject. It provides an overview of the study regulations, including the credit points to be earned within each module, as well as the types of courses that must be attended. The number in bold represents the total of the individual requirements for a given module. The credit points for seminar papers are included and count toward this total.

The sum of all bold numbers across the cells amounts to 35 credits for the minor and 65 credits for the major (including the master's thesis). In addition, 20 credits in the elective component are required for successful completion of the master's degree. (The credits for the elective component are not shown in the study program.)

All students are encouraged to take courses and complete written assignments beyond the minimum requirements. These additional achievements are recorded in the academic transcript and in the final degree documents.

Compulsory courses listed in the column „Completing the degree subject, CP“

Compulsory courses are recurring courses with the same learning objectives that are listed by title in the study program. In the course directory, they are assigned the same course number each time they are offered. Students must complete the compulsory courses to pass the module; these courses cannot be replaced by other courses.

Column „Modules“

A module is a collection of several courses forming a single learning unit, whose internal coherence is defined by the program's learning objectives. A study program specifies learning outcomes that must be achieved within particular modules.

Column „Eligible course formats“

This column lists the types of courses that may be offered / credited within the respective module. Only the “Completing the degree subject, CP” column specifies which types of courses students must take into account.

Information on elective credits in the column „Completing the degree subject, CP“

For elective courses, students may use this allocation of free credits to select any courses that are linked to the corresponding module in the course directory.

3.2 Modules

The four-semester master's degree subject, which builds on the Bachelor's degree, includes courses in the following modules:

- „Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology“ (13 CP)
- „Ethnographic Research“ (17 CP)

The module “Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology” involves an in-depth engagement with theories relevant to social anthropology.

In the module “Ethnographic Research,” students engage with qualitative research, including conducting their own fieldwork.

The master’s degree requires a master’s examination (5 credits) and, in the major, a master’s thesis (30 credits).

4. Teaching and study formats

4.1 Course formats

At the master’s level, the focus is on attending **seminars** and **research seminars**, as well as a **two-semester course** involving independent fieldwork (15 credits). The latter forms the core of teaching in the master’s degree subject Social Anthropology. This course is dedicated to specific topics that students work on individually as part of their own research projects, under the guidance of the lecturers. In the first semester, students develop a research proposal; during the break between semesters, they collect data; and in the second semester, the focus is on data transcription and interpretation. This results in various written assignments, including a proposal and a research report. Classes are interactive, with an emphasis on collaborative learning.

In the **colloquium**, students preparing for graduation present the topic of their master’s thesis to faculty members and interested students. This gives them the opportunity to discuss key questions related to their research. In addition, participants in the fieldwork course present their research projects. The colloquium also features guest lectures by scholars from Switzerland and abroad on current research topics.

4.2 Assessment

All assessments and performance evaluations require active and regular participation in the relevant courses.

Student performance is assessed by lecturers on a pass/fail basis or graded. The grading scale ranges from 6 to 1, with 4 being the minimum passing grade. Grades are awarded in whole or half grades:

6	excellent
5,5	very good
5	good
4,5	satisfactory
4	sufficient
<4	insufficient

5. Master's thesis and master's examination

Master's degree

The master's degree serves as proof of the successful completion of the master's program. In particular, it is intended to demonstrate that students have developed a coherent social anthropological understanding of societies based on the individual insights gained throughout their studies and are able to apply this understanding to specific cases and examples in both theory and practice.

Master's thesis

The master's thesis is an independent research project based on the content taught in the master's degree subject and on the methodological and theoretical approaches of the discipline. The main text should generally not exceed 80 pages. Students have up to nine months to complete the master's thesis. The thesis may be written in German, English, or French, subject to agreement with the supervisors.

Students are eligible to begin their master's thesis if, at the time of registration, they have earned at least 20 credits across both subjects, have fulfilled any additional requirements, and have provided proof of language proficiency. In addition, at least one of the required seminar papers must have been completed in the subject in which the master's thesis is being written. Requirements and procedures are governed by

the Regulations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Basel for Master's Studies (§ 17).

Master's examination

An oral master's examination of 60 minutes is held in each of the two subjects. For the master's examination in Social Anthropology, three topics are agreed upon that do not overlap with the topic of the master's thesis. Each topic is examined for approximately 20 minutes. Ideally, the topics are defined three months (and no later than one month) before the oral examination. The candidate submits a reading list, which may be revised by the examiner if necessary.

Students are admitted to the master's examination if they have earned at least 25 credits in the subject, can demonstrate completion of at least one of the required seminar papers in the subject, have fulfilled any additional requirements, and have submitted any required proof of language proficiency (see the Regulations of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Basel for Master's Studies, § 21).

Examiners are faculty members in Social Anthropology who hold a doctoral degree or an equivalent qualification. The language of the examination is German, French, or English, subject to agreement with the examiner. Examination administration (registration for the examination, examination organization, including the appointment of the chair) is handled by the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

6. Electives

Electives (20 CP) are available to all students regardless of their degree subject or program. They are free to choose any courses to acquire these 20 credit points. Usually, elective courses aim to help students gain general skills (languages, IT, rhetorics, etc.), engage in interdisciplinary learning (courses outside the degree subject, interdisciplinary courses) and/or deepen their knowledge of their own subject by taking additional courses in Social Anthropology, or earn a certificate. Please see the guidelines for elective courses at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

7. Further information and contacts

For general information and regulations regarding student mobility, please consult: <https://www.unibas.ch/en/Studies/In-My-Studies/Mobility.html>.

Within the framework of the EUCOR program, it is possible to take courses at the Upper Rhine universities of Strasbourg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Karlsruhe, and Mulhouse without additional administrative hurdles (<https://www.unibas.ch/en/Studies/In-My-Studies/Mobility/Mobility-Europe/Eucor-Epicur.html>). These courses are recognized at the University of Basel, either within modules (if they fit) or in the elective component.

Further information on the master's degree subject Social Anthropology can be found in the FAQ section on the website <https://ethnologie.philhist.unibas.ch/en/>.

7.1 Contacts

Website of the subject

<https://ethnologie.philhist.unibas.ch/en/>

Website of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Information and documents relating to master's studies, Study Administration and Examinations Office, other subject areas, etc.

philhist.unibas.ch

Website of the University of Basel

Dates and general information

<https://www.unibas.ch/en/Studies.html>

Online course directory

<https://vorlesungsverzeichnis.unibas.ch/en/course-directory>

University Library

<https://ub.unibas.ch/en/>

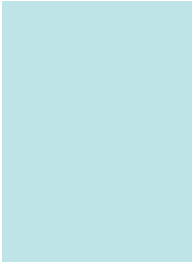
IT Services of the University of Basel

Support desk, email access, VPN etc.

<https://its.unibas.ch/en/>

List of abbreviations

BA	Bachelor's studies
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System ("Kreditpunkte-System"), sometimes also used synonymously with CP
EUCOR	European Confederation of Upper Rhine Universities Strasbourg, Basel, Freiburg/Br., Karlsruhe, Mulhouse (https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/)
CP	Credit point(s)
MA	Master's studies
UK	Teaching committee ("Unterrichtskommission")



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Sample Study Plan MA Social Anthropology

1. Semester (FS)

S	Seminar and seminar paper from the module «Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology»	8
Course	Two-semester course «Ethnographic Research» (part one)	--
		8

2. Semester (SS)

Course	Two-semester course «Ethnographic Research» (part two)	15
	Start master's thesis	--
		15

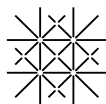
3. Semester (FS)

C	Colloquium	2
	Completion of master's thesis	30
		32

4. Semester (SS)

	Course(s) of your choice from the module «Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology»	5
	Master's examination	5
		10

Important: This sample study plan, which begins in the fall semester, is intended to show how the master's degree subject in Social Anthropology can be organized so that students can complete their studies within the regular period of study (full-time study).



Degree Profile

Master in Social Anthropology

Organizational unit	Department of Social Sciences, Anthropology
Degree	MA Social Anthropology
Scope, Duration, Start	65 ECTS Major, 35 ECTS Minor; 4 semesters (if full time), fall and spring semester
Language of instruction	English

Program Goals

Building on the fundamentals of social anthropology acquired in the bachelor's program, students in the master's program are guided in expanding their theoretical knowledge, delving deeper into a specific subfield, and acquiring training in a specific research area. Students learn ethnographic methods and acquire the ability to design and carry out an individual research project, evaluate the findings, interpret them in relation to a theoretical framework, and present them in an academic text.

Program Characteristics

Orientation	Scientific-oriented education
Majors	–
Program structure	The students select a major (65 ECTS), a minor (35 ECTS) and free elective (20 ECTS). The curriculum consists of the modules: Theory and Themes of Social Anthropology (13 ECTS); Ethnographic Research (17 ECTS); master's examination (5 ECTS); master's thesis (30 ECTS, if Social Anthropology as major).
Distinctive Features	While the regional focus of social anthropology at the University of Basel is on Africa and Eastern Europe, our team also conducts research and teaches on Oceania, Asia, Latin America, and the Afro-Atlantic region, among other areas. Thematic research and teaching focuses on general social anthropology; global economic systems; migration, mobility and belonging; gender, sexuality and kinship; medicine, health and the body, and the politics of knowledge production. In terms of methodology, the subject primarily advocates qualitative and interpretative approaches. In particular, it promotes the development of methods that can capture current changes under globalization.

Career Opportunities

Employment	Development cooperation; intercultural mediation; migration, refugee services and social work; media, public relations and journalism; museums, archives and independent curating; tourism; public health sector and sustainability; international enterprises; diplomacy and politics.
Further Studies	Doctorate

Teaching

Approaches	Field research, interactive learning, reflective learning, literature research, research-oriented learning
Assessments	Oral and written examinations, active participation in courses, term papers, master's thesis

Competences

Generic Attitude / Communication Approach / Management	Students acquire the skills to ... – examine conceptual alternatives and research literature critically and substantially. – deal successfully with diversity. – become quickly acquainted with new disciplinary and methodological approaches. – test hypotheses, work and design research questions as well as research drafts from conception to implementation, choosing suitable approaches and methods. – explain and communicate complex and systematic scientific relations and communicate effectively and persuasively in written and oral form. – defend their own insights from criticism while critically reflecting on own positions. – read, understand, revise and write scientific texts.
Subject-related Knowledge / Understanding Application / Judgment Interdisciplinarity	Students acquire the skills to ... – understand what being and becoming human means across different social, cultural and historical contexts. – exercise their imagination and decenter common understandings of social relations, economic livelihoods and political power. – comparatively analyze economic, cultural, and social contexts in different societies and their integration into regional, national, and global networks. – present the relationship between these contexts in a convincing, coherent, and meaningful form. – critically reflect the specific disciplinary perspective of social anthropology and to situate it within the broader spectrum of subjects and disciplines. – know and use ethnographic field research methods. – design and carry out an individual research project, evaluate the findings, interpret them in relation to the theoretical framework, and present them in an academic text.

Learning Outcomes

Graduates of the master's program in Social Anthropology...

- demonstrate a broad and in-depth knowledge of relevant anthropological theories and literature and can describe as well as apply selected current anthropological research fields and questions adequately to a research question.
- are able to deepen methodologically, conceptually and theoretically selected anthropological questions in fields such as global economic systems, mobility and belonging, gender and sexuality, and health and the body and discuss their significance critically and relevantly with peers and experts.
- demonstrate a coherent anthropological understanding of societies on the basis of independent insights and can refer them to theoretical and practical examples of individual case study.
- can recognize and reflect the fundamental anthropological principles based on a concretely experienced reflection of their own social identity.
- know empirical research methods in detail and are thus able to describe and select them appropriately, to apply them step by step correctly as well as to justify the criteria for their choice.
- can handle specific regional, topical, historical and theoretical anthropological research questions based on accessible sources such as publications, archives, collections or on self-collected data, and can critically analyze and interpret their findings in relation to a theoretical framework.
- are able to develop their own research foci by identifying, formulating and refining research questions through context-based and comparative analyses of social practices, cultural processes and forms of social action in a globalized world.
- are able to argue for the chosen scientific approach and to present their results for discussion clearly and adequately in written and oral form.