

About the Department

The Department offers undergraduate and postgraduate courses in three fields.

Anthropology

Archaeology

Community Development

The Department's teaching and research facilities are good, and have been significantly enhanced by the recent appointment of both new and young staff. The breadth of undergraduate teaching is wide, thanks to a policy of encouraging distinguished colleagues from South Africa and abroad to visit, lecture, and present seminars. Research has for a long time focussed on southern Africa, but there is now a concerted effort to direct staff and postgraduate students to work elsewhere in Africa and the world, specifically the Global South.

The Department is relatively small with ten full-time staff and has a friendly, collegial atmosphere. Undergraduate students are encouraged to participate in discussion and debate in class, and in the student societies. Postgraduate students and staff are drawn together in a fortnightly departmental seminar, where they have opportunity to present their own work as well as to learn from and discuss the research of their peers, staff members, and eminent visitors.

Anthropology

Anthropology is the comparative study of societies and cultures. Our anthropology lecturers come from different countries and have a wide range of local and international qualifications, experience and contacts. Anthropology, sociology, history and other social sciences often make use of similar theories, but anthropology adopts a distinctive approach by emphasising participant observation, paying detailed attention to the everyday lives of ordinary people, studying social relationships, and asking not only how things work, but also what they mean to the people involved. Anthropology uses ethnography, comparison and theory to make sense of the unfamiliar amongst people, and to think critically about things that appear normal to us. Anthropology is a small and friendly environment. Students enjoy easy access to staff, and there is a lively tutorial system for undergraduate students in addition to lectures. Undergraduate teaching is shaped by the research in which staff members are engaged, which creates the opportunity for stimulating student field trips and excursions to research sites.

Archaeology

Archaeology is the study of material evidence to find out about human cultures of the past. Through the material remains of the past, we are able to understand how people not only experienced their world, but what they believed, valued and tried to achieve. Archaeology in southern Africa can be divided into four main categories. The first focus is the origins of humanity. Archaeologists research fossil remains, stone and bone tools and evidence of art to understand the over 7 million year process which led to the evolution of anatomically and culturally modern humans. Next archaeologists attempt to understand the first human societies, whether hunter-gatherer bands or centrally controlled states, the material remains deposited in the archaeological record allow us to understand how these groups lived, how the society operated, and what things they valued. Closely linked to this is the study of rock art. With one of the largest collections of rock art in the world, southern Africa has produced a wide array of researchers attempting to understand the complex symbolic and religious nature of these art traditions. The more recent past is also of interest, and archaeologists focusing on the historical period seek to understand the first colonial contact and the encroachment into southern Africa of settlers, and how these interactions led to social change. The ultimate aim of the discipline is a deeper understanding not just of our past, but of our relationship to it. We seek to understand how processes of the past can enrich our experiences in the modern world.

Development Studies

Development Studies is a relatively new discipline in the Department, having been offered for the first time in 1998 as Community Development. Since then, in partnership with the **Human Economy** program located in the Faculty of Humanities, the discipline has been renamed to Development Studies. Offered only at the postgraduate level, modules in this discipline lay emphasis on the study of development history and theory, including critical approaches to development, and aim to prepare students for employment in the broad field of research and development studies.