

SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY

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Sociology and anthropology examine how society and culture shape human beings in powerful ways. While these are two distinct disciplines, at St. Olaf they combine to form one major (SOAN). Sociology developed to understand the nature and problems of modern industrial societies, while anthropology grew out of European and American colonial encounters. Both seek to explain the relationships among individuals, groups, institutions, culture, and meaning; both seek insights into pressing issues.

The two disciplines share a commitment to social and cultural critique, by critically analyzing the relations of hierarchy and inequity that might otherwise appear natural. These could include analyzing systems like racism and colonialism, examining institutions like schools, hospitals, and cities, and broad processes like globalization and climate change. Sociologists and anthropologists both strive to understand the social mechanics of exclusion, marginalization, and domination.

SOAN majors go on to careers in many different fields, from social service work, public policy and law, and health care, to business and education. The aim of the major is to help students think like anthropologists and sociologists, so that they can better analyze taken-for-granted social dynamics.

Overview of the Major

Potential majors are invited to either begin with an introductory class to sociology or anthropology or try one of the SOAN 200-level courses. Those interested in exploring further should take the required theory course (SOAN 290) to see if the major is a good fit. If yes, they would do well to consult with one of the faculty members in the department. Aside from the four elective courses SOAN majors take, junior and seniors complete the two required research methods courses that include hands-on projects. The SOAN Senior Seminar explores ethical issues in sociological and anthropological work and serves as the capstone of the major.

Sociology/anthropology majors are highly encouraged to apply and test their skills by studying abroad or away, doing an independent study or research project, or completing an internship as part of their career exploration.

Intended Learning Outcomes for the Major

Special Programs

Faculty in the Sociology/Anthropology Department may be asked to provide academic supervision of internships that students arrange in community agencies (see SOAN 294 and SOAN 394). For details on study abroad and away programs, see The Smith Center for Global Engagement section of this catalog. The Sociology/Anthropology Department is a core participant in the following interdisciplinary majors: race and ethnic studies, Asian studies, Latin American studies, social work, nursing, social studies education, and gender and sexuality studies. The Sociology/Anthropology Department also contributes to

the Africa and the Americas, family studies, and the Middle Eastern studies concentrations.

Requirements

Requirements for the Major

Code	Title	Credits
Four core courses		
SOAN 290	Social Theory	1.00
SOAN 371	Foundations of Social Science Research: Quantitative Methods	1.00
SOAN 373	Ethnographic Research Methods	1.00
SOAN 399	Senior Seminar	1.00
One of the following: ¹		1.00
ECON 260	Introductory Econometrics	
SDS 172	Statistics 1	
Four elective courses ^{2, 3}		4.00
Total Credits		9

1

SDS 172 or ECON 260 should be taken before SOAN 371, but it is possible to take it concurrently if necessary.

2

Students are permitted to take one of the four elective courses, but not a core course, S/U.

3

An introductory course is not required but may be used as an elective.

Both SOAN 121 and SOAN 128 may be counted as electives for the major.

All core courses must be taken on campus. Students who study abroad on a St. Olaf program that includes a sociology or anthropology course may petition to have this course count as an elective toward their major. One independent study/research course or an off-campus field internship supervised by department faculty may also count as an elective toward the major.

**By completing this major, the student also satisfies the OLE Core Writing in the Major requirement.*

Courses

SOAN 121 and SOAN 128 are open to first-year students only. There are no prerequisites for level II courses, although one previous SOAN course is recommended. SOAN 371 and SOAN 373 are open only to juniors and seniors.

Level I Courses

SOAN 121: Introduction to Sociology

This course helps students explore the connections between society and their own lives. Students answer challenging questions such as "Do we have a 'human nature'?", "Why does social inequality exist?", "What is race?", and "How do societies change?" In answering these questions students learn to develop a sociological imagination. In doing so they review the various research methods and theories that form the sociological tradition. This course is open to first-year students or students in certain accredited programs. Open to all students when taught during the summer. Offered each semester.

SOAN 128: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

How do anthropologists study other cultures? Peoples around the world create different realities through the ways they conceptualize experience (cultures) and how they organize themselves to do what they need to do (societies). Anthropologists describe and compare cultures and societies, focusing on different aspects such as family and kinship, inequality and power, religion and values, economy and technology, cultural and social change. This course is open to first-year students or students in certain accredited programs. Offered each semester.

SOAN 199: Introductory Topics in Sociology and Anthropology

The department periodically offers special topics courses at the introductory level. The specific title of the course is listed in the class and lab schedule when it is offered.

Level 2 Courses

SOAN 233: A Sociology of Colonialism and Postcolonialism

This course examines the sociology of colonialism and the colonialism of sociology. The readings in this course use sociological concepts to understand the colonial legacy irrespective of geographical or temporal parameters and reflect on how sociology itself is implicated in the colonial legacy. The objective is to assay whether sociology can meaningfully render colonialism intelligible without being an instance of it and determine whether colonialism can be conceived outside of specific national instances. Offered periodically.

SOAN 236: A Sociology of the Arab World

This course focuses on the formation and development of contemporary Arab societies, politics, and cultures. It examines the evolving sociological bases of modern Arab states and societies, impact and legacies of European colonialization, religious and ethnic composition of the region and their impact on Arab identities, effects of economic crises and transformations on class structures and class relations, gender and sexuality matters, and social change and current social movements.

SOAN 237: Forging a Latin American Culture

This course explores the forces that shape contemporary Latin American society, including material and cultural interactions with Europe, Africa, and the U.S. Emphasis is placed on understanding the formation of the region in terms of the responses of key groups of actors (Indigenous peoples, women, peasants, workers, the poor, migrants, revolutionaries) to the actions of outside and/or more powerful forces and institutions (foreign invaders, the state, the military, missionaries, multinational corporations). Offered annually in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 243: Social Issues in South Africa (study abroad)

This course offers a sociological understanding of social issues in South Africa in the post-apartheid era, as shaped by historical conditions including enslavement, colonization, and apartheid. Students learn about issues of racism and poverty and how they intersect with other lines of inequality and are shaped by culture, policies, and institutions including government, economy, and education. The course draws heavily on guest lecturers and site visits. Offered alternate years during January term.

Prerequisite: One course in sociology or anthropology, or a related social science course approved by the instructor.

SOAN 247: Disasters

Disasters and crises loom large. They are not singular events. Their effects spiral starting where the crises occur and spiraling outward globally. This course examines disasters worldwide and anthropological approaches to studying them. This involves learning about disasters through various media, documentary film, written ethnography, and critical social theory. Studying disasters reveals much about scientific and institutional attempts to manage and control them and how power is articulated in disaster (mis)management. Offered annually.

SOAN 248: Sociology of Dying, Death, and Bereavement

This class investigates death-related behavior from an American and cross-cultural perspective, seeking to understand patterns of social interaction surrounding and giving meaning to dying, death, and bereavement. Topics include: death meanings and anxiety, religion and death-related customs, the dying process, hospice as a social movement, biomedical issues, the funeral industry, death rituals, and the social understanding of the bereavement process. Offered periodically during January term.

SOAN 250: Visual Sociology

Formal education has always emphasized written texts even though human beings are surrounded by photo-generated images and visual culture. This course helps fill that gap and offers methods for understanding the social world visually. The course challenges students to grapple with visual theory and develop their own visual research projects. Discussions of fieldwork, key writings about visual methodologies, and samples of groundbreaking visual sociological projects will inform student work. Offered alternate years.

SOAN 258: Drugs, Addiction, and Anthropology

This course explores the complex human interaction with drugs. The readings examine historical trajectories of substance use and the ways drugs shaped the development of societies. Students learn more about how drugs work biologically and socially, as well as reasons why drugs can create powerful forms of addiction that often resist treatment. Ethnographic evidence vividly depicts the layered intersection of drugs, addiction, and therapeutic intervention in the United States and elsewhere.

SOAN 260: Families, Marriage, & Relationships

This course provides a social science understanding of the "contemporary American family" and analysis of marriage and family issues from a cross-cultural perspective. Students discuss issues of dating and mate selection, marital and parent-child relationships over the family life cycle, gender issues, work and family roles, and problem-related issues affecting families (divorce, violence and death) caused by rapid changes in society. Offered annually in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 261: Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective

This course compares gender patterns and issues in various cultures around the world, such as Latin America, the Middle East, India, the U.S., and East Asia. How do cultural expectations for women and men vary? Why do some societies have more gender equality than others? How do economic and political change, including globalization, impact gender roles? How do U.S. and Third World feminism compare? Offered annually in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 262: Global Interdependence

Approaching the world as a "global village," the course will focus on the development of the world as an interdependent entity, the relationship between the "developed" and "developing" world, alternative explanations for planned social change, and new institutions for this international world. Global challenges such as the information revolution, population, the status of women, and migration are analyzed to illustrate this interdependence. Offered annually in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 264: Race and Class in American Culture

Students explore the continuing significance of color, class, and immigration in the U.S., with a focus on the experiences and concerns of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and Asian-Americans. The course examines the nature and functions of prejudice; the relationship among race, class and gender; the persistence of racism and inequality; and social policies and social movements intended to create greater social justice. Offered annually in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 265: Religion, Culture, and Society

This course examines and analyzes religious beliefs, meanings, rituals, and organizational patterns from empirical and theoretical perspectives. Students are introduced to the sociological study of religion through its foundational thinkers as well as current theoretical approaches and research in the field. Important contemporary issues and debates examined include secularization, conversion, new religions and religious movements, gender and sexuality, and fundamentalism. Offered periodically in the fall or spring semester.

SOAN 267: Medical Anthropology

How do people understand illness and healing? How does social inequality shape health? These are among the questions explored by medical anthropology. In this course students examine the ways people in different societies experience their bodies, by looking at AIDS in Haiti, old age in India, and childbirth in the United States. Students investigate diverse understandings of health, different means of promoting healing, and the role of power in providing medical care. Offered annually.

SOAN 269: Urban Sociology

Urban sociology investigates the complex interactions of human beings in cities and beyond. Topics include the changing relationship between people and place; social stratification along the lines of race/ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and class; and urbanism's importance in global political power and economics. Chicago will serve as an important case study for considering these social, political, and economic dynamics. Offered annually.

Core Courses/Independent Study/Internships

SOAN 290: Social Theory

This core SOAN course covers critical concepts from Sociology and Anthropology to understand complex social and cultural dynamics systematically. Focusing on key concepts and thinkers that have shaped the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology, the course will provide majors with the critical analytic tools important for subsequent courses that they will take.

SOAN 291: History of Sociological Theory

This course provides an overview of the major thinkers who sought to create a science of human society, the ideas they found fundamental to a science of society and how human society changes through history. Classical thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and Mead are studied along with the schools of theory which they inspired: positivism, interpretive and critical conflict theory. Offered annually in the spring semester.

Prerequisite: one sociology/anthropology course. Open to sociology/anthropology majors only.

SOAN 292: Anthropological Theory

This course introduces students to anthropological theory and the "culture" of the discipline itself. Students examine anthropology's formation during the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Empire, which called for new explanations of human differences and gave new significance to the nature and meaning of "culture." They explore the method of participant observation research, the question of whether anthropology is a science, the problem of representing one culture to another, and the changing nature of ethnographic writing. Offered annually in the fall semester.

Prerequisite: open to sociology/anthropology majors only.

SOAN 294: Academic Internship**SOAN 298: Independent Study****SOAN 299: Topics in Sociology/Anthropology**

The department periodically offers special topics courses. The specific title of the course is listed in the class and lab schedule when it is offered.

SOAN 371: Foundations of Social Science Research: Quantitative Methods

Students gain the skills necessary to conduct and critically evaluate quantitative research. Students learn the underlying theoretical assumptions and orientations of quantitative research, including research design, sampling techniques, strategies for data collection, and approaches to analysis. Students gain practice in data analysis by conducting a search project and using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a standard in sociology. Offered annually in the fall semester.

Prerequisite: STAT 110 or SDS 172; open to junior or senior sociology/anthropology majors only.

SOAN 373: Ethnographic Research Methods

Students learn to design and conduct qualitative research in the tradition of sociological and anthropological ethnography. Students discuss theoretical approaches to ethnography and learn data collection methods through case studies and fieldwork assignments. Students use their own research to gain experience in interpreting field notes, doing analysis, and writing an ethnographic interpretation of their research findings. Offered annually in the spring semester.

Prerequisite: SOAN 291 or SOAN 292; open to junior or senior sociology/anthropology majors only.

SOAN 394: Academic Internship

SOAN 396: Directed Undergraduate Research

This course provides a comprehensive research opportunity, including an introduction to relevant background material, technical instruction, identification of a meaningful project, and data collection. The topic is determined by the faculty member in charge of the course and may relate to their research interests. Offered based on department decision. May be offered as a 1.00 credit course or .50 credit course.

Prerequisite: determined by individual instructor.

SOAN 398: Independent Research

SOAN 399: Senior Seminar

This seminar offers in-depth reading, writing, and discussion on a selected topic from areas common to sociology and anthropology with an emphasis on contemporary analysis and ethics. Specific content will vary from year to year. Offered annually in the spring semester.

Prerequisite: open to senior sociology/anthropology majors only.

Plan of Study
Sociology/Anthropology Major - Plan of Study

This is a sample plan that meets the prescribed requirements for the Sociology/Anthropology major at St. Olaf. This tool is meant as a guide and does not replace working closely with the student's academic advisor.

SOAN 121 and SOAN 128 are open to first-year students only. There are no prerequisites for level II courses, although one previous SOAN course is recommended. SOAN 371 and SOAN 373 are open only to juniors and seniors.

Course	Title	Credits
First Year		
Fall Semester		
FYS 120 or WRIT 120	First-Year Seminar (or Conversation Program) or Writing and Rhetoric	1.00
World Language		1.00
SOAN 121 or SOAN 128	Introduction to Sociology ¹ or Introduction to Cultural Anthropology	1.00
Credits		3
Spring Semester		
WRIT 120 or FYS 120	Writing and Rhetoric (or Conversation Program) or First-Year Seminar	1.00
World Language		1.00
SDS 172 or ECON 260	Statistics 1 ² or Introductory Econometrics	1.00
SOAN 128 or SOAN 121	Introduction to Cultural Anthropology ¹ or Introduction to Sociology	1.00
Credits		4
Sophomore Year		
Fall Semester		
ECON 260 or SDS 172	Introductory Econometrics ² or Statistics 1	1.00
SOAN 200-level Course (1 of 4)		1.00
SOAN 290	Social Theory ³	1.00
SOAN 291	History of Sociological Theory ⁴	1.00
Credits		4
Spring Semester		
SOAN 292	Anthropological Theory ⁵	1.00
SOAN 200-level Course (2 of 4)		1.00
Credits		2

Junior Year		
Fall Semester		
SOAN 371	Foundations of Social Science Research: Quantitative Methods	1.00
Credits		1
Spring Semester		
SOAN 373	Ethnographic Research Methods	1.00
SOAN 200-level Course (3 of 4)		1.00
Credits		2
Senior Year		
Fall Semester		
SOAN 200-level Course (4 of 4)		1.00
Credits		1
Spring Semester		
SOAN 399	Senior Seminar	1.00
Credits		1
Total Credits		18

- 1
- Both SOAN 121 and SOAN 128 may be counted as electives for the major.
- 2
- The prerequisites for ECON 260 include MATH 119 or MATH 120 and one of ECON 110-121. These would need to be taken or met during the first year of study.
- 3
- This course is required for students graduating in 2028 and later
- 4
- SOAN 291 and SOAN 292 are required for students graduating in the class of 2027 and earlier
- 5
- SOAN 292 is required for students graduating in 2027 and earlier

Students must successfully complete the equivalent of 35 St. Olaf credits through a combination of full-credit and fractional-credit courses to earn the Bachelor of Arts.

Visit the sociology/anthropology webpage for more information.

Faculty

Department Chair, 2025-2026

Vivian Choi

Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology

South Asia; science and technology; disasters

Ibtesam âl-Atiyat

Professor of Sociology/Anthropology

Arab society; gender; social movements; Islamic movements

Sidonia Alenuma

Visiting Assistant Professor of Sociology/Anthropology

Emily Bowman

Visiting Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology

Christopher (Chris) L. Chiappari

Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology

Guatemala; religion; immigration

Andrea Conger

Associate Professor of Practice in Dance

public health studies

Marc David

Associate Professor of Practice of Sociology/Anthropology
Social class, race, cultural politics of heritage and historical
representation in the U.S.

David C. Schalliol

Associate Professor of Sociology/Anthropology
social stratification; urban sociology; visual sociology; criminology;
education

Ryan R. Sheppard

Associate Professor of Practice in Sociology/Anthropology
family; gender; race/ethnicity; social movements; quantitative research

Thomas A. Williamson

Kenneth Bjork Distinguished Professor of Sociology/Anthropology
Southeast Asia; theory; globalization; medical anthropology