Social Sciences

Faculty Office Bldg. (47), Room 13-C
Phone: 805.756.2260
http://socialsciences.calpoly.edu/
Department Chair: Terry L. Jones

Academic Programs

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The Social Sciences Department offers bachelor’s degrees and minors in Anthropology-Geography and Sociology, as well as a minor in Latin American studies.

Within each major, students are required to choose a concentration relevant to their future career endeavors. The Anthropology-Geography major concentrations include cross-cultural studies and international development, environmental studies and sustainability, and human ecology. Sociology majors can choose a concentration in criminal justice, organizations, or social services.

The strength of our department lies in its focus on practical training, critical thinking, and “Learn by Doing” experiences. Students are trained in applied technical skills including GIS, remote sensing, research design, social data collection, and qualitative/quantitative methodology.

Alongside these skills, students are encouraged to critically investigate contemporary issues, asking hard questions about society, behavior, and the environment in an increasingly diverse and global world. Finally, students are required to bridge classroom learning with the real world through hands-on practical experience such as internships, service learning, study abroad, and senior projects.

Undergraduate Programs

BS Anthropology and Geography

The Anthropology and Geography major provides students with the skills for understanding and examining patterns of human activity and resource utilization across space and time, as well as the interactions between humans and the natural environment. Interdisciplinary in nature, this program focuses on the applied areas of cross-cultural studies, international development, ecological research design and method, the evolution of humans, environmental assessment, and sustainability. Courses in Anthropology and Geography train students to examine human ecology from the ancient past to the modern present through courses in biological evolution, cultural adaptations, behavioral ecology, environmental impacts, and the ecology of human health and disease. In addition, students gain an understanding of the physical environment in which humans are placed, through courses in physical geography, resource management, biogeography, and climatology. Students are trained in relevant skills, including Geographic Information Systems, remote sensing, and quantitative methods.

Students interested in this major should be curious about the relationships between humans and the environment (including biology, behavior, climate and landscapes) from a broad hands-on perspective.

Our students typically have particular interest in study abroad and involvement in international opportunities.

The program offers a four-year curriculum leading to a BS degree that prepares students for careers in environmental and regional planning, cultural resources management, archaeology, international development, climatology, science education, international health research, and federal government work in behavioral analysis.

Internship or Study Abroad Requirement

As a means of promoting relevant job skills, hands-on learning, and field experience, majors are required to complete either an approved internship or study abroad program. Students who do an internship will receive a minimum of 3 units of credit (ANT 465 or GEOG 465). The department will assist students in identifying suitable internships. However, students are encouraged to explore options for themselves based on their interests. In place of an internship, students may choose to participate in a study abroad program. Four units of approved coursework taken while studying abroad will be substituted for the internship course.

Concentrations

Students may select one of the following concentrations or the individualized course of study.

International Development

Provides students with the theoretical knowledge and applied skills necessary for the study and practice of international development in cross-cultural settings. Students attain an in-depth knowledge of the social, political, economic, and ecological dimensions of international development and gain practical skills through research projects, international study, and applied internships. The concentration provides expertise and training for internationally focused careers, including public and private development institutions, the Peace Corps, the public health field, education, and numerous other careers where cross-cultural and international understanding are essential.

Environmental Studies and Sustainability

Provides students with the theoretical knowledge and applied skills important to assessing the environment and promoting sustainability are emphasized.

Human Ecology

Students learn about the natural environment, human behavioral and cultural systems, and the complex interrelationships between the three. Major concepts and practice emphasize broad spatial and temporal perspectives. Students acquire knowledge and skills related to global and regional climate and physical geography, human evolution, cultural ecology, behavioral ecology, prehistoric and recent environmental change, indigenous cultures of the New World, methods for analyzing climate change and related human responses in the past and present.

Other Concentration Options

With prior approval of the Social Sciences Department and the Political Science Department, students may select one of the following concentrations: Pre-Law, or Global Politics.
Individualized Course of Study

One of the two opportunities to pursue a course of study which meets a student's individual needs and interests. As their course of study, students may pursue an academic minor or create a program, with faculty approval, based upon their interests and career goals. The coursework may be specifically tailored for a career in industry, education, government, or as preparation for graduate school.

BA Sociology

Sociology explores the nature and dynamics of human society and the interrelationship between individuals and their social groups. The goal of sociological study at Cal Poly is twofold. The first objective is to develop a sociological imagination that enables students to see their personal circumstances and problems in context of the broader, local, national, and global forces that shape their lives. The second objective is to prepare students for graduate studies and careers in such fields as criminal justice, law, social services, complex organizations, and teaching. Sociology also offers general education courses that provide an understanding of the complexity and diversity of the world’s peoples and their problems. Some courses focus on American society, emphasizing issues of class, race, ethnicity and gender. Other courses have a global orientation dealing with both the past and present diversity of the world’s societies, economics, politics and religions.

Internship Requirement

As a means of promoting relevant job skills, hands-on learning, and field experience, majors who select the criminal justice or social services concentrations are required to complete an approved internship. Majors who select the organizations concentration will be encouraged to complete an internship, but will not be required to do so. These internships in criminal justice or social services will be up to one year, but with a minimum of two quarters, and count for 8 to 12 units of credit (SOC 440). The department will assist students in identifying suitable internships. However, students are encouraged to explore options for themselves based upon their interests.

Concentrations

Students are required to take one of the following concentrations or the individualized course of study.

Criminal Justice

Prepares students for careers in law, law enforcement, corrections, detention, probation, parole and other criminal justice agencies.

Organizations

Students learn to apply the general principles of human behavior to the understanding of modern organizations. It prepares them for careers in business, government or non-governmental organizations.

Social Services

Provides the general principles of human social behavior and specialized professional courses to prepare for careers in the helping professions such as social work and counseling.

Other Concentration Options

With prior approval of the Social Sciences Department and the Political Science Department, students may select one of the following concentrations: Pre-Law, or Global Politics.

Individualized Course of Study

One of two opportunities to pursue a course of study which meets a student's individual needs and interests. As their course of study, students may pursue an academic minor or create a program, with faculty approval, based upon their interests and career goals. The course of study may be specifically tailored for a career in industry, education, government, or as preparation for graduate school. When creating an individual program, it should consist of 28 units, with 16 of the 28 at the 300-400 level. Courses are selected by the student in consultation with an advising faculty member. The student must also provide a written justification for the courses and the way they constitute a cohesive, integrated course of study. The list of courses is a contract between the student and the Department.

Anthropology and Geography Minor

The minor develops broad spatial and cultural knowledge of our world. The program consists of foundation courses and directed electives that allow flexibility for students to tailor the program to meet their individual interests and goals. The objectives of the minor are to increase student awareness of the: (1) cultural and ecological diversity of the Earth’s surface; (2) inter-relationships between peoples of varying cultures; (3) interactions of different cultures with their resource habitats and environmental alteration; and (4) methodologies and technologies used to evaluate cultures and environments. The goal is to instill a respect for cultural diversity and environmental sustainability. A minimum of 14 units must be upper division and taken at Cal Poly.

Latin American Studies Minor

Latin America is a region of critical importance to the United States, and California in particular. Students gain an interdisciplinary understanding of Latin America, as well as its cultural, political, and economic connections to California and the United States. This knowledge is increasingly important for a number of careers. The minor also promotes critical thinking skills and enhances the appreciation of diversity as students confront issues relevant to Latin America and US-Latin American relations.

Sociology Minor

The minor provides students with a broad understanding of contemporary society with a focus on the analysis of social change. The objectives of the program are to increase awareness of the: (1) nature of international social, economic and political structures and their consequences; (2) social results of emerging technology; (3) changes in family life, especially the role of women; and (4) changing ethnic mix in California and the United States and its implications. Coursework includes the study of the shifting demographic patterns in society, emerging life styles, the increase in the percentage of elderly in the population, and the nature of specific subculture influences.