

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

**&**

**AMERICAN MUSEUM  
OF NATURAL HISTORY**

**MUSEUM ANTHROPOLOGY  
MA HANDBOOK  
2026-27**

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## INTRODUCTION

**Welcome to the MA program in Museum Anthropology, a joint program between Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History.**

This handbook, updated for Fall 2025, provides all the basic information relating to the Museum Anthropology MA Program for the current academic year. If you notice any errors, identify omissions, or have suggestions for inclusion in future versions, please contact the Program Director, Dr. Brian Boyd at [bb2305@columbia.edu](mailto:bb2305@columbia.edu)

Program webpage: <https://anthropology.columbia.edu/content/ma-museum-anthropology>  
Past cohorts' exhibitions website: <https://archaeology.columbia.edu/featured-research/>

### **Advising in the Museum Anthropology MA Program**

#### *Core Faculty*

Brian Boyd (Program Director, Columbia University)  
Laurel Kendall (AMNH & Columbia University)  
Sally Yerkovich (Scandinavia House & Columbia University)

Students with specific questions about the academic aspects of the program, including its' requirements, are expected to consult the MA Program Director, Dr. Brian Boyd ([bb2305@columbia.edu](mailto:bb2305@columbia.edu)). GSAS Handbooks may be helpful for general information but for up-to-date correct information specific to the Museum Anthropology MA Program, and to the Department of Anthropology, please consult with Dr. Boyd. He is both the Program Director and your academic advisor. He will meet with you individually at the start of the program to discuss your course selections, work with you regarding any administrative issues concerning your enrollment, and guide you through academic issues that may arise. During your course of study, you will meet with the Program Director regularly throughout the academic year to help you keep track of your courses and academic progress.

Please note that it is the sole responsibility of students to make appointments with Dr. Boyd, and the Program's other faculty when necessary, and to keep track of deadlines for written work, thesis research schedule, applying for graduation, applying for summer funding, and so on.

It is also your responsibility to keep track of communications from GSAS and the Department of Anthropology. Both will send regular updates and reminders, but this is no substitute for staying on top of your timelines. The most important thing you can do to ensure you receive all the necessary updates is to **check your Columbia emails on a daily basis**. All Departmental and GSAS communications will be sent to your official Columbia email, not to your private (e.g. Gmail, etc.) accounts.

## STRUCTURE OF THE MUSEUM ANTHROPOLOGY MA PROGRAM

### *Program Requirements*

Total of 30 Credits (made up of graduate-level courses - GR or GU 4000-level or above - and internships)

2 Residence Units = 2 semesters of full-time study

MA Thesis (2 readers, assigned pass/fail grade)

### *Overview of structure*

Students in the Museum Anthropology MA program may complete the program under different timelines and enrollment categories. **The MA program requires the completion of 2 Full Residence Units** (equivalent to 2 semesters of full-time study).

### *Residence Units and Financial Matters*

A residence unit is an enrollment category. All students have to register for some form of a residence unit to sign up for classes.

One Resident Unit = 1 semester of full-time study.  
 One-half Residence Unit = 1 semester of ½ time study.  
 One-quarter Residence Unit = 1 semester of ¼ time study.

The requirement of 2 Residence Units may be met by a variety of enrollments, including full or part-time, with the exception of international students who must always be registered full-time, with the requirement that international students must register for a Full Residence Unit each semester of the first year. **The important thing to keep in mind is that your total Residence Units must add up to \*2\* by the end of your course enrollment.**

The number of courses you may take is connected to the Residence Unit you choose. The table below shows this.

Courses offered in the MA program are currently (2025-26) 3 credits per course.

Note that you have to also add Residence Units when you register for classes. The codes are as follows:

Full Residence Unit (RESI G0001)  
 Half Residence Unit (RESI G0002)  
 Quarter Residence Unit (RESI G0003)  
 Extended Residence (EXRS G0001)

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 Full Residence Unit (“RU”)       | Four or more courses (Max 20 credits, if it exceeds additional tuition fee will be charged)                                                           |
| Half Residence Unit (“0.5 RU”)     | Maximum three courses.                                                                                                                                |
| Quarter Residence Unit (“0.25 RU”) | Maximum two courses.                                                                                                                                  |
| Extended Residence (ER)            | Maximum 3 courses. This is considered a full-time enrollment and is suitable for international students who have already completed 2 Residence Units. |

For international students: as noted above, you must always keep a full-time enrollment status which means enrolling for one Full Residence Unit each semester for 2 semesters if you plan to complete your coursework within one year. If you choose to enroll for additional semesters you would enroll under the Extended Residence category.

For domestic students: part-time enrollment is possible. You can construct your program in any enrollment categories that add up to 2 RUs.

### *Tuition and fees*

All students have the same tuition fees which will correspond to the Residence Unit you have registered. You can find the details of the fee structure on the cost of attendance page on the [GSAS website under All Other Master's Programs](#)

### *Planning your program of study*

The MA program allows you to structure your program with a great deal of flexibility. However, this flexibility of structure is dependent on the following:

- \*International or domestic student
- \*Full or part-time registration unit
- \*The number of courses you want to take per semester and the corresponding fees
- \*Registration in **all** required classes and internships

It is highly recommended that you reach out to the Program Director via email or set up an office hours appointment at the earliest stages of enrollment to ensure that you plan your timeline to complete the degree without administrative difficulties.

*Here are some possible structures to the MA program:*

| <b>One-Year Timetable (2 FULL RU Semesters)</b> |                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fall Semester (One Residence Unit enrollment)   | 4 classes                                                                                      |
| Spring Semester (One Residence Unit enrollment) | 6 classes (including two Internships, one carried out in the Spring, the second in the Summer) |
| Summer Semester                                 | Thesis research & writing                                                                      |
| Graduation                                      | October, February, or May                                                                      |

| <b>Two-Year Timetable (4 HALF RU Semesters)</b> |                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Year 1                                          |                                    |
| Fall Semester (1/2 Residence Unit)              | 2 classes                          |
| Spring Semester (1/2 Residence Unit)            | 3 classes (including 1 Internship) |

|                                      |                                             |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Summer Semester                      | No enrollment but carry out thesis research |
| Year 2                               |                                             |
| Fall Semester (1/2 Residence Unit)   | 2 classes                                   |
| Spring Semester (1/2 Residence Unit) | 3 classes (including 1 Internship)          |

*For International Students:* if you are continuing your studies to the next Fall semester through the ER, you remain on F1 visa status. If not, please contact the [ISSO](#) for further information on continuing to remain in the USA.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each student must take of total of 30 credits, which typically equals 10 graduate-level (GR and GU) classes, including 2 Internships, at 3 credits each. **18 of the credits are required classes in Museum Anthropology**, the other 12 can be taken from other departments at Columbia, Barnard (although arrangements may have to be made with professors to agree to assign graduate-level assessment), and Teachers' College.

All courses offered each semester are listed in the Columbia Directory of Classes, and in SSOL/Vergil.

### *Grading Policy*

*Letter Grade:* The Graduate School's grading system is as follows: A, B, C, D, F. Plus and Minus letter grades are also used. A letter grade is given to a student who has completed the required work in a course, including the final exam or paper, and it appears on a student's transcript as the letter grade A, B, C, D, or F.

*Reading Credit:* The grade of R is a non-evaluative grade that confers credit for registration without designating an A-F letter grade. It appears on SSOL and official transcripts. Students who wish to take a course for R credit must request permission from the course instructor. The requirements for R credit may differ according to the instructor.

For more details, see : <https://www.gsas.columbia.edu/content/grading-system>

## MUSEUM ANTHROPOLOGY MA COURSES

Please refer to the [Columbia Directory of Classes](#) for the current listing of courses available in the Fall and Spring semesters. If you are interested in a particular course or professor, reach out to Dr. Boyd to discuss. **Required classes** are taken at Columbia (Fall semester) and the American Museum of Natural History (Spring semester).

### **\*Required Courses\***

#### *Fall Semester*

ANTH GR6352 *Museum Anthropology: history & theory* 3 credits.

ANTH GR6353 *Ethical Issues in Museums* 3 credits.

Electives: 6 credits

#### *Spring Semester*

ANTH GR6365 *Exhibition Cultures – Politics and Practices of Museum Exhibitions* (at AMNH) 3 credits.

ANTH GR6192 *Exhibition Practice in Global Context* (at AMNH) 3 credits.

ANTH GR9110 *Internship I* (usually carried out in Spring) 3 credits.

ANTH GR9111 *Internship II* (usually carried out in Summer) 3 credits.

Electives: 6 credits (but see below recommended course)

### **Recommended Courses**

#### *Fall Semester*

If student has no anthropology background, we recommend taking ANTH GR5201 *Principles & Applications of Society & Culture* (3 credits).

### **\*Required Courses\* Outlines – Fall Semester (at Columbia University)**

#### **1. ANTH GR6352 *Museum Anthropology: history & theory***

*Instructor: Dr. Brian Boyd*

*Museum Anthropology: history & theory* focuses primarily on theoretical perspectives in contemporary museum anthropology and on the history of anthropology as it relates to museums. It is a close reading and discussion seminar. Class sessions will include weekly discussion of assigned readings as well as occasional short lectures. Each student will (co-)lead one discussion section during the term. During most classes there will be presentation and discussion of students' Critical Reviews (described below). **The class prioritizes critical and careful**

**reading, respectful debate, and mutual aid in the collective pursuit of advanced engagement with anthropological theory as it relates to museums.**

### ***Course Requirements***

- 1) *Attendance*: As this class is a requirement for the program, attendance is mandatory.
- 2) *Participation*: Class attendance, required readings, and active involvement in group discussions are mandatory. Each student will be asked to (co-)lead one discussion based on assigned readings during the semester. **If for any reason you cannot do the readings (or access them) in any given week, you must let Dr. Boyd know 24 hours in advance of the class.**
- 3) *Critical Reviews*: Students will undertake one museum-related activity, which they will choose and have approved by Dr. Boyd, over the course of the semester. Creativity is encouraged; the reviews should be diverse and related to issues discussed in class. Reviews might include discussions of exhibitions, attending auctions, researching virtual museums and websites, visiting installations, galleries, historical societies, or other cultural institutions, critiques of storefront windows and holiday displays, analysis of heritage centers, theme parks, zoos, and so on. Students should apply analytical questions and critical approaches to their chosen subject matter, including insights from any relevant material covered in class. A 2-3-page written report on each review will be due by the end of Fall semester.
- 3) *Final project*: a research paper or equivalent media on a museum-related subject of your choice (approximately 20-25 pages).

\*Note: We will also carry out preliminary work on the exhibition for the Spring semester.

### ***Assessment and grading***

Final grades will be evaluated on the following basis: 1/3 participation, 1/3 critical reviews, 1/3 final project.

## ***2. ANTH GR6353 Ethical Issues in Museums***

*Instructor: Dr. Sally Yerkovich*

*Ethical Issues in Museums* is an introduction to the range of ethical issues that museums face today. Ethical questions about museum activities are legion, yet they are usually only discussed when they become headlines in newspapers. At the same time, people working in museums make decisions with ethical and legal issues regularly and seldom give these judgments even little thought. In part, this is due to the fact that many of these decisions are based upon values that become second nature. This course will explore ethical issues that arise in all areas of a museum's operations from governance and management to collections acquisition, conservation, and deaccessioning. We will end the course with several weeks' discussion of issues related to cultural heritage, examining the issues that arise when the ownership of objects in a museum's collection is questioned and the ethical considerations involved in retention, restitution and repatriation.

This course will explore ethical issues that arise in all areas of a museum's operations from governance and management to collections acquisition, conservation, and deaccessioning. It will especially focus on issues related to cultural heritage, examining the issues that arise when the ownership of objects in a museum's collections is questioned and the ethical considerations involved in retention, restitution and return, and repatriation and voluntary return.

### *Goals of the Course*

- Provide professional and ethical perspectives on current and future controversial issues being considered in the museum field.
- Enable thinking about complex problems with professional, economic, political, legal and ethical aspects.
- Enhance critical thinking by focusing on a range of theories, policies, and case studies that are pertinent to ethical issues that affect museums.
- Develop conceptual and analytical tools to help understand and evaluate claims in the field of ethics applied to the museum professions.

### *Course Requirements*

In addition to active participation in class discussions, this course requires a final research paper, presented first in class as a PowerPoint, then reworked as a draft, and finally presented as a term paper of between 20 and 25 pages in length.

1) *Participation*: Students are required to attend class, do the assigned readings and assignments, and actively participate in classroom discussions based on the readings, media coverage and project research.

2) *Class Discussions on Assigned Readings*: Each student will be asked to lead at least one class discussion based upon assigned readings during the term. No later than 5:00 p.m. on the Wednesday before a Friday class, the discussion leader(s) will send the instructor at least three analytical questions for discussion. After the instructor reviews the questions, they should be posted to Courseworks. The posting should be made no later than the end of the day on Thursday before the Friday class.

3) *Term Assignment*: The purpose of this exercise is to promote critical thinking about ethical dilemmas, understanding not just one specific case, but also underlying ethical principles and their application. The assignment will help you identify an ethical dilemma, research and review related background information, determine the perspectives of the various stakeholders involved, and lead you to propose potential solutions/review steps taken by the museum— all in relation to professional codes of ethics.

During the semester, you should follow the coverage of museums (and similar cultural and educational organizations like universities, archives, and libraries) in the media. Although accounts in the media are often incomplete and sometimes biased, news reports provide a snapshot of an issue or ethical dilemma faced by an institution and can be the starting point for a deeper inquiry.

At the beginning of the semester, each student will be assigned a date on which to make a presentation to the class on an ethical dilemma of their choice. The selected case may be from a current news article or articles or it may be from cases featured in the media in the recent past. You should identify one article (preferably one that provides an as unbiased introduction to the issue as possible) to share with the rest of the class.

The presenter's research into the dilemma should go beyond the initial article that attracted their attention to other related articles in the media as well as in the academic literature. Students should apply a critical approach to their issue, developing a research question related to the larger ethical issue or issues that it involves.

*In-class presentation:* **In-class presentation: the case study.** Each student will present their selected issue in class as a case study and lead a 15-20 minutes discussion about it. The presentation should clearly identify the ethical issue that underlies their case study. The class discussion should seek possible reasoned resolutions to the dilemma in the case study. There may be more than one resolution to a particular dilemma, depending upon the facts involved. And in many cases, all of the facts are not necessarily evident or discoverable. If the situation in question has been resolved, discuss the museum's probable rationale for its decision as well as any alternate resolutions that might have been considered.

No later than Noon on the Wednesday before the assigned class discussion, presenters should share with the rest of the class on Courseworks a key background article and at least two discussion questions. **Dates for the presentations will be selected during the first class.**

**Paper.** After the in-class presentation, each student should draft a paper about the ethical dilemma of their presentation. The paper should pose a research question related to the ethical dilemma exemplified by the case presented in class. It should be framed as an inquiry into a specific ethical principle, citing relevant codes of professional ethics. It should explore the background and history of this principle for museums. The case study presented in class may be used to demonstrate how the ethical dilemma plays out in a specific situation by a presentation of all pertinent facts and an explanation of extraneous facts (e.g. personal opinions, feelings, attitudes, beliefs) that might interfere with a reasoned discussion of the dilemma. The paper may incorporate points raised in class, if relevant, and take into account the class discussion. **A complete draft of the paper will be due two weeks after the in-class presentation.**

*Discussion of draft:* During the week following the submission of the paper, each student should schedule a 20-30 minutes (either in-person or virtual) discussion with the instructor about their paper. In addition to a critique of the draft, the discussion will focus upon the following questions:

- What did you find most challenging about the assignment?
- How did this activity influence your thinking about museum ethics?

*Final paper/revision of draft:* Your final paper will be a revision of the draft, taking into account the points raised in the discussion with the instructor as well as class discussions and readings for the rest of the course.

## *Grading*

Final grades will be evaluated on the following basis: 20% attendance and class participation; 20% quality of discussion questions and leadership of class discussion; 20% in-class presentation of ethical issue; 40% research paper.

*Please note:* grading on written assignments will be based primarily on the substance of your paper; however, the clarity of your writing will also be taken into account.

## **\*Required Courses\* Outlines – Spring Semester (at the American Museum of Natural History)**

*In the spring semester, students receive “visiting researcher” badges to the AMNH. These are also good for admission to any museum in the city and beyond as “reciprocal institutions” who are members of the American Alliance of Museums. Students are encouraged to spend viewing time in AMNH and to take advantage of the many and constantly changing exhibits in New York City, using these experiences to inform their developing perspectives on the work of museum exhibitions.*

### ***1. ANTH GR6365 Exhibition Cultures – Politics and Practices of Museum Exhibitions***

*Instructor: Dr. Laurel Kendall*

*Course description:* Based at the American Museum of Natural History, studying a wide range of exhibitions, and meeting with staff across the Museum’s professional divisions, this course explores a series of debates about the representation of culture in museums, the politics of identity, and the significance of objects, addressing questions of materiality, meaning, ownership, value, and magic. We will continue conversations initiated in the fall semester but from an insider perspective on practice and through the practical, hands-on work of curating a small exhibition. We will look at how exhibits are developed, what they aim to convey, what makes them effective (or not), and how they sometimes become flashpoints of controversy. Multiple points of view - curators and other practitioners, critics, descendant communities, and audiences - will necessarily be considered.

G6365 also works in tandem with G6192 *Exhibition Practice in Global Context* in the task of making an exhibit. Recent projects have included public-facing label(s) and a QR site contextualizing standing exhibits.

*Class format:* Classes will be conducted as a seminar. You are expected to read, observe, and engage fully in all discussions. Class sessions are 2 hours weekly. Classroom discussions will cover assigned readings as well as curatorial work on the digital exhibit. Students are asked to present written assignments to the indicated folder in advance of class for mutual discussion and

critique and **everyone is expected to participate. Read each other's work before class and be constructive critics - this is how the work of exhibition happens.**

Keep an eye on museum coverage in the press and/or blogs of your choice to share your observations with the class.

### *Course Requirements*

*Participation:* Students are required to attend class, do the assigned readings and other assignments, and **actively** participate in classroom discussions based on the readings and our unfolding exhibition work.

*Exhibition project:* Students will work as teams researching different aspects of the exhibit and will produce and present materials as per a rigorous work schedule. Materials will be critiqued in-class, then vetted by museum staff.

*Individual Research and Writing Project:* The individual assignment is intended to give you deeper familiarity with a particular topic related to our exhibition work. Topics are negotiable but must be relevant to this semester's exhibition project. A list of suggested topics is provided at the end of the syllabus. 1.) Write a well-researched paper, approximately 10 pages (Times New Roman 12-point type, double spaced and not counting the illustrations you include. You can go over 10 pages if you are really inspired, many have used the paper as a lead-in to their thesis). 2.) Distill your research into a 100-word label and choose an appropriate illustration for your label. Make a PowerPoint slide of your label with the illustration for inclusion in an overall presentation of class projects. Bring a print-out of your labels to the last class for a pop-up exhibit in the Anthropology Division corridor.

### *Grading*

Final grades will be assigned on the following basis: 40% Reading the assigned texts and participation in all discussions; 30% Exhibition related assignments; 30% Individual Research and Writing Project.

## **HALF GRADE DEDUCTED FOR EACH DAY LATE - ALL ASSIGNMENTS**

## **2. ANTH GR6192 Exhibition Practice in Global Context**

*Instructor: TBA*

*Course description:* Museum exhibition departments and design firms create exhibitions in ways that shape the visitor experience. This course explores interpretive exhibition design as the creative process by which spaces become environments that help us tell stories and provide memorable experiences. Exhibition experiences are designed to encourage curiosity and learning. Carefully orchestrated journeys, engaging emotions and senses, implicitly and explicitly influence meaning and perspective for visitors. Through the study of museum exhibition practice, with emphasis on the interpretive design process, this course offers insights and experience helpful to develop an understanding of design in the museum context. The

exhibition design process is an effective, ever evolving means of connecting diverse audiences to art, history, science and the natural world. Exhibitions continue to rely on traditional techniques while increasingly drawing upon new trends in art, theater, lighting, media, digital and interactive technologies.

Drawing on prior and concurrent coursework in the Museum Anthropology program, students will collectively plan and execute a group exhibit project at the AMNH. The course exhibit project is a collaborative one, working in concert with Dr. Laurel Kendall's course *Exhibition Cultures: Politics and Practices of Museum Exhibitions*. Together we will curate and design an exhibit.

*Class format:* Class sessions are 2 hours per week (sometimes overlapping with Exhibitions Cultures course) conducted as a seminar with a hands-on component. There will be presentations and discussions by guest experts during the semester. Some classes may be rescheduled or extended. Exhibit installation, scheduled by AMNH, may take place following the official end of the semester.

*Location:*

All classes, except when noted otherwise, are to be held in the Anthropology Department at the American Museum of Natural History. Should we need to meet remotely, a Zoom link will be emailed to your Columbia University account.

*Course Requirements & Deliverables:*

*General Participation:* Students are required to attend all classes, do all assigned readings, submit deliverables one day prior to class, and to actively participate in all classroom discussions based on the readings, project Proposal/Documentation PPT slides, and to collaborate on group exhibit project work.

*“Lead-offs”:* Students are expected to actively participate during class discussions. Students will sign up to be lead-offs on Google Drive.

- Reading Lead-offs will summarize, ask questions and lead the class discussion on their assigned readings. Reading Lead-offs are to submit bullet points summary and questions for class discussion one day in advance to Google Drive.
- PPT Proposal/Documentation Lead-offs will submit new slides one day in advance to Google Drive and share those slides in class and discuss their approach.

*Project Proposal/Documentation:*

Students will, throughout the semester, produce a slide deck proposing, and then documenting, the process of making our exhibit project, capturing their sketches, writings, goals and techniques, research, etc. through to installation. This will serve as the final project and as a portfolio piece.

Proposal pages will emulate the proposals that designers routinely submit to potential clients. Your finished proposal/documentation deck will be presented in the final class. An additional

slide of case installation documentation is also due one week after the actual installation of the exhibit, should it occur after the last class.

Students will sign up as a PPT “lead-off” to share and summarize the thinking behind their PPT slides. This semester-long approach is considered preferable to a large final assignment given near the end of the semester.

#### *Final Exhibit Project (group):*

Our group exhibition project will progress during the semester. In the first half, the class works with guidance from museum professionals to learn about the different disciplines of exhibition design. In the second half, we will work with professional designers to design and complete the exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History.

#### *Develop Critical Skills:*

During the course, you will learn to understand an exhibition through its design and how design influences interpretation and the visitor experience. Students will develop a heightened awareness around these questions:

- What do you see as the exhibition’s main idea or purported purpose?
- How well does the exhibition’s design convey that main idea or purpose?
- Reconstruct the exhibition’s content outline as you experience it.
- How well do you think the designers interpreted the curatorial content?
- Did the design contribute to an enhanced appreciation of the topic?
- How did the design skew the visitor experience or influence the visitors’ perception?
- Did the exhibition reveal new information or insights for you?
- Were you curious to learn more afterward?
- What was the exhibition’s “look & feel” and how did it contribute or distract from the experience?
- How would you characterize the contribution or distraction of each of these design practices? 3D design, environmental graphic design, media and interactive design, Lighting design, etc.?
- How might you have approached interpreting the content differently through design?
- How would you characterize the institution’s influence on the design of this exhibition?

#### *Google Drive:*

- You will receive an e-mail invitation to join the class Google Drive folders.
- There you will find the syllabus and folders for submitting your assignments, reading lead-off outlines/questions, etc.
- All assignments, reading lead-off outlines/questions are due to Google Drive on the day before class. It is essential that you meet Google Drive deadlines.

#### *Grading:*

Final grades will be assigned on the following basis: 40% Performance as lead-off, active class participation, class discussions, and familiarity with all readings.; 40% All assignments & Proposal/Documentation PPT; 20% Participation in the Case Exhibit Project.

**Half a grade will be deducted for each day an assignment is late to Google Drive or class. Assignments are due in Google Drive on the day before class, whether or not you attend class.**

## INTERNSHIPS

Students carry out **TWO** required internships, usually one in the Spring semester, the other during the summer. You should register for BOTH internships when you register for your Spring semester classes (for reasons we will discuss in class). Spring internships are usually advertised by museums and related institutions in October/November, *sometimes earlier, so keep your eye on their websites for announcements; some of these have early and firm application deadlines.* Museum Anthropology MA faculty can assist with finding internships, but you should invest a good deal of effort in finding and securing these for yourself. Students are required to keep a journal/record of their internships' work, and produce a 4-6-page reflection paper on each internship. These should be submitted to Dr. Boyd at the end of each internship.

## MA THESIS

### *Thesis Guidelines*

**Note: Students will be issued with a separate handbook containing the full guidelines for carrying out their Museum Anthropology MA thesis research. What follows is a basic outline of the thesis research process.**

The Master's thesis is the research capstone of the MA program. The thesis should be a substantive text of original work that requires critical examination of a research question framed as an anthropological inquiry into the myriad world of museums and their operation in the present, past and future. The thesis should make an original contribution to the relevant literature by producing new data and/or new analysis on the chosen thesis topic. In researching and writing the thesis, students bring the knowledge and skills they have accumulated throughout their course of study to bear on a topic of their choice.

Students should start thinking about possible topics and building relationships with potential faculty advisors early on in the program. Most students' thesis topic will change as they take more classes, carry out reading and research for seminar papers, and interact with members of the Columbia and AMNH faculty and curators, internship supervisors and so on. The journey from initial plans to a polished thesis is an important part of a student's university career.

## **Institutional Review Board Approval for Research on Human Subjects**

**Under Federal and New York State law, no one may undertake research that involves human subjects, including interviews, surveys, or related methods, without prior review and approval or evidence of exemption from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB guidelines and applications are available at [columbia.edu/cu/irb](http://columbia.edu/cu/irb).**

**If necessary, students go through IRB training to conduct fieldwork. Dr. Ellen Marakowitz (Department of Anthropology) is the point person for anthropology students and the IRB.**

### *Deadlines*

*The specific deadlines for each stage of thesis research will be discussed in the first thesis meeting at the start of the Spring semester. There are four deadlines to note:*

1. Submission of a title and proposal of the thesis topic.
2. Submission of initial chapter topics/themes.
3. Submission of first full draft of thesis.
4. Delivery of final thesis in electronic and hard copy versions.

### *The Thesis Research Process*

In the Spring semester, we will hold specific meetings designed to guide students through the process of writing their thesis. These meetings will focus on the processes involved in producing academic research and writing, and aim to help you refine your ideas, prepare a thesis research plan, and write a proposal and chapter outline.

*The first stage of developing a thesis is identifying a topic.* Students may arrive at Columbia with a sense of a field or topic of interest, but students should also reflect on what grabs their attention in classes or when following relevant news and research. Students are also encouraged to discuss their topics with their instructors and ask for their advice on turning the topic of interest into a concrete and manageable research question. Students should further ask their instructors for suggestions on readings that would help in the research process on the chosen topic.

*The second stage of developing the thesis is producing a proposal.* A proposal is a carefully organized discussion of the student's provisional plans for the thesis. It should present the main ideas and research questions, justify the topic's academic relevance/significance, and outline the plans for conducting the proposed study.

The proposal should outline a specific research question(s) and summarize the important scholarship on the topic, including a persuasive justification of the theoretical, methodological, empirical and/or applied need for answering the question(s) posed. It should also offer, if relevant, a coherent and compelling presentation of the (tentative) argument and possible alternative arguments. The proposal further conveys a detailed research design/strategy,

describing the information to be collected and the analysis to be performed to answer the main research question(s) in the thesis.

The entire proposal, including a bibliography, should be around ten double-spaced pages.

The student's MA Program Director will provide feedback on the proposal. The thesis requires a second advisor/reader, who must also approve the proposal. See below.

### *Finding a Second Advisor/Reader*

Students are responsible for finding a second thesis advisor/reader. The MA Program Director can help by directing students to members of the faculty with expertise in their topics of interest. Advisors must be current faculty members at Columbia, the AMNH, Barnard, or the student's Internship supervisor if appropriate. Students should start thinking about potential advisors during their first (Fall) semester. Students should introduce themselves to their instructors and other faculty and discuss their research interests. Students could look through the faculty and class directories on department websites or attend faculty research presentations on campus in order to identify faculty who teach or do research on relevant topics. The advisor will provide intellectual guidance on the background of the topic, literature, sources, and research methods. Students should not expect their second advisor to read all drafts.

*The third stage of developing the thesis is one of intensive research.* Students will have learned the methods appropriate for their thesis research through classes and discussions with their thesis advisers and will have planned their research through the MA Fall and Spring semesters. The research for some theses is best conducted in a library, whereas other topics will require fieldwork, such as museum visits to consult and research archives, collections, conducting interviews or oral histories and interviews, archaeological research, and so on. Full-time students normally complete intensive research in the late spring and early summer.

*The fourth stage of developing the thesis is writing and follow-up research.* Diligent, active and well-executed research will help students put the findings of their research, and their arguments about them, onto paper. Full-time students generally write their thesis in the summer. As they write, students often discover that they need to do some follow-up research, for example to support a part of their argument that is more important than initially thought. Students should keep in close contact with their advisors as they write.

*The final stage of producing the thesis is evaluation and possible revisions.* Students should submit the first full draft of the thesis to both of their advisors/readers by August 31. The readers(s) will recommend revisions and edits, if required, and return comments to the student within two weeks. The student then addresses the readers' comments and submits the final version of the thesis for final approval no less than one week before the graduation date in October.

**The final version of the thesis should be approximately 50 to 70 double-spaced pages excluding footnotes/endnotes, illustrations/photos and bibliography.**

When the thesis is complete and approved, students will deposit a print copy with the Department of Anthropology.

### *Submitting the Final Version of the Thesis*

When the advisor and student agree that the student's thesis is ready to be submitted, the student needs to assemble it according to the instructions in the Museum Anthropology MA Thesis Handbook. The student should give a final (electronic) copy of the thesis to both of their advisors/readers by the final deadline in October. When the advisors and student agree that the final version of the thesis is ready to be submitted, the student needs to assemble it according to the format instructions in the Museum Anthropology MA Thesis Handbook.

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND FACILITIES

### *Study Spaces*

As well as the numerous libraries at Columbia University, there are dedicated graduate student study and social spaces.

*Department of Anthropology MA students' research space.* Details to be announced at the beginning of Fall semester.

*Department of Anthropology Lounge, 465 Schermerhorn Ext.* The Anthropology Lounge is open Monday–Friday from 9am–5pm during the academic year. The Lounge is available to current students as a quiet place to study, work, and relax. The space is also used for departmental gatherings and parties, as well as dissertation defenses. On days when an evening event is scheduled, the Lounge closes at 3pm. For questions about Lounge availability, please contact Marilyn Astwood (mp20@columbia.edu).

*Graduate Study Center, 301 Philosophy Hall.* The Graduate Student Center provides a study and quiet meeting space for graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and faculty across disciplines and schools. There is also a café (Nous) in the same building. You may access the Graduate Student Center by using your Columbia ID card.

*Printing:* See here for printing facilities on campus: <https://www.cuit.columbia.edu/printer-locations>

### **Research Funding Sources**

*Summer Research Funding:* To apply for summer research funding (often for thesis research) offered by the Department of Anthropology and matched (ie: doubled) by GSAS see [here](#).

*Conference Presentation Funding:* The Department of Anthropology also provides some funding for travel to *present* papers or posters – not for simply attendance - at national and international conferences. Again, this funding is matched by GSAS. See [here](#).

### **Anthropology Graduate Student Association (AGSA)**

AGSA is the representative student body that advances the concerns of anthropology graduate students (MA and PhD) to the Department —usually to the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the Chair of Department. Should situations arise that affect some (but not all) students these concerns can still be presented by AGSA. If issues arise that AGSA deems necessary to bring to the attention of the entire faculty (not just the Chair and DGS) they should appoint two students to represent these issues and consult with the Chair about presenting the concerns at a Department faculty meeting. Please do look out for emails that seek MA Student Representatives from your program's cohort.

## MA DEGREE PROCEDURE AND COMMENCEMENT

Columbia confers degrees three times per academic year: October, February, and May.

Please consult the Columbia academic schedule for the exact dates as they differ each year. **In the semester prior to your graduation, you will need to go online to the Registrar (through Student Services Online – SSOL) and apply for the MA degree.** If you do not graduate when you originally planned (e.g. October) your application automatically renews for graduation at the next available conferral date (e.g. February, May).

MA students who complete their degree may participate (“walk”) in the MA Convocation and Commencement ceremonies which take place each May. You may walk in the MA Convocation ceremony if your degree is conferred in the October, February, or May conferral dates of the current academic year. In addition, if you will be completing your degree by the FOLLOWING October, you may participate in the Convocation and Commencement ceremonies of the preceding academic year, but obviously you will NOT receive your degree until all your program requirements have been met.

## OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM: EVENTS & TALKS

Please check your email daily for the announcements regarding the dates and times of academic and social events hosted by both the Department of Anthropology, and by the Museum Anthropology MA Program.

### ***Boas Seminars***

The Department of Anthropology hosts the Boas seminars on most Wednesday afternoons from 2pm-4pm, followed by a reception in the Anthropology Lounge. MA students are encouraged to attend. This is a valuable opportunity to hear and meet prominent scholars in the discipline, and to build your academic network. Make sure to take advantage of this opportunity, and respect the time and effort the speaker has made to come to the City and to the campus to meet and talk with us about their latest research.

### ***Museum Anthropology Seminar Series***

This is a series of engaging talks held throughout the academic year, covering a range of topics that are particularly relevant to MA students. These sessions provide an excellent opportunity to deepen your understanding of key subjects, engage with expert speakers, and connect with your peers in a stimulating environment.

### ***PhD Application Workshop***

This workshop is designed to assist crafting strong academic statements for those MA students who wish to apply to PhD programs either at Columbia or elsewhere. Led by Dr. Ellen

Marakowitz, the two-session workshop guides students through the essential elements of a compelling statement, offering personalized feedback and strategies to enhance your doctoral application.

***Anthropology Writing Groups with Postdoctoral Scholar***

Join a supportive weekly writing group led by the Anthropology Postdoctoral Scholar in the Department, where you can collaborate with fellow students to improve your writing skills. These sessions offer a structured environment to work on your academic writing, receive constructive feedback, and make consistent progress on your classwork and research projects.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

*Readers:* Occasionally MA students are able to be readers for large undergraduate classes. More information will be available to the students at the start of the semester as needs vary.

*Work Study and On-Campus Jobs:* [GSAS Compass](#) assists students in GSAS doctoral and master's programs in identifying, working toward, and achieving their post-graduation career goals. Ensure that you are subscribed to alerts through the [Compass Portal](#) updates.

## DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY CONTACT INFORMATION

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