

Social and Cultural Anthropology

This is a supplementary report following the May 2014 session and should be read fully in conjunction with the last subject report (May 2013).

The range and suitability of the work submitted

As in previous sessions a wide range and variety of extended essays for Social and Cultural Anthropology were presented. The quality of submissions varies greatly. As has been true in past sessions, most of the weaker essays are neither anthropologically grounded, nor do they present evidence of a good background subject knowledge.

The choice of well-established anthropological topics resulted in stronger essays. Excellent essays demonstrated initiative in showing how anthropological method and theory might be adapted to issues arising under new, contemporary situations and processes. Some examples include one essay considering whether interpretive or critical medical anthropological approaches might be more useful in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Other excellent essays addressed

- how restrictions on the expression of emotion among a group in the Canadian Arctic are connected to the society's social structure;
- an examination of intergenerational variability in the process of spouse selection in Bengali Hindi arranged marriages
- how globalization has affected the system of production of one particular Amazonian tribe.

The focus on popular culture or cultural consumption, or those essays addressing social problems continue to produce varied results. Too often these essays lack an anthropological approach, describing only superficial research attempts, and in some cases they assert value judgments and lay out prescription. However, examiners this session are reporting that this is less of a tendency than in previous sessions.

A significant proportion of essays though, should either have been submitted under a different subject or appear to have been submitted with the assumption that Social and Cultural Anthropology is a catch-all category for essays that would have a difficult time fitting anywhere else. Social and Cultural Anthropology is a discipline with its own goals, methods and ways of posing questions, and common sense is no substitute for a background knowledge on the subject. Though the above-mentioned is a recurring difficulty, it is also worth mentioning that there has been an improvement in the quality of extended essays, clearly resulting from some schools working more closely with the guide and offering excellent supervision.