

SPECIAL REPORT: POSTGRADUATE & MASTER'S DEGREES



Studying anthropology helps students analyse social, cultural and political issues and broadens their understanding of cultural and social diversity. Photo: AFP

New insights into criminal minds

The Master of Social Sciences in Criminology course offered by the department of sociology at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) offers students an all-round view on the study of crime, order and social control.

Programme leader Professor Karen Joe Laidler says the course is designed for people who work with criminals. "The police, people from the correctional services, social workers and teachers are the major applicants for the programme," she says.

Gavin Brown, a graduate of the programme and a former police chief superintendent, had always wanted a better understanding of why people commit crime, having dealt with so many criminals, victims and witnesses throughout his career.

"I had a firm belief that as an experienced policeman, a thorough theoretical grounding in criminology would help me develop more effective policing practices," says Brown, who retired in 2012. "I had worked in the force since 1982, but my work schedule did not allow me to take two days every week to attend lectures. It was not until 2007, when I moved to Kowloon West Regional Headquarters, that I could spare the time to go to school."

The course helped Brown gain a better understanding of his work. "I learned that law enforcement practitioners' work can be enhanced by taking theoretical ideas and incorporating them into professional practice. I also met a lot of very interesting people through the programme, who came from many walks of life and not just from disciplined services," he says.

During his studies, Brown realised that limited attention had been given to the study of policing in Hong Kong, even though policing is widely researched and studied in English-speaking countries. "This inspired me to undertake PhD studies at HKU on contemporary police work in Hong Kong. I started on a part-time basis in 2010 and hope to finish by the end of 2014," he says.

For Brown, having to balance career and study has never been a concern, because he embraces the concept of lifelong learning.

"In the mid-1990s, the Hong Kong Police Force introduced what they called 'healthy lifestyles' and encouraged

officers to take up meaningful pursuits such as sports and lifelong learning. I think academic self-improvement would be in line with the healthy lifestyles suggested by the force. My advice to those thinking of taking [the criminology] course is to make sure you attend all the lectures on time and with an open mind, and come to class having read the relevant materials so that you can actively participate in discussions," he says.

Founded in 1986, the course has a long history of helping students like Brown who work with crime prevention. Laidler says she has seen a growing number of students in recent years who do not work directly in crime fighting.

"There are bankers who study the programme because they want to learn more about why people commit crime so that they have a better understanding of how to build up the bank's security system. There is also an increase in students who take the programme out of interest. For example, medical doctors attend the programme. This definitely makes the classroom more diverse," she says.

The programme has also become popular among fresh graduates who want to further upgrade their academic profile before hitting the job market.

"We used to offer only a part-time mode for students who are working full time, but recently we started offering a full-time mode," Laidler says.

In order to graduate, students need to complete eight subjects and a dissertation. Full-time students finish the programme in one year, while completing the programme part time takes two years. Classes are conducted during evenings and occasional weekends. *Wong Yat-hei*

People watching

An MA in anthropology helps sharpen a range of learning skills, writes Wong Yat-hei

The Master of Arts in Anthropology offered by Chinese University (CUHK) takes a flexible approach towards educating students.

"CUHK is the only institution in Hong Kong offering comprehensive training in the subject," says programme director associate professor Joseph Bosco. "We focus on cultural anthropology, but have a strong emphasis on archaeology and heritage studies as well."

A key feature and major advantage of the programme is that students are able to take courses that fit their background and interests.

"Students need to complete eight courses to graduate and only two of the courses are compulsory. They select six elective courses, giving them many different ways to build up their knowledge of anthropology," Bosco says.

"For example, foreign students can concentrate on Chinese society and culture, while students working in museums can concentrate on the anthropology of tourism, museums, archaeology, and other areas relevant to their work."

The programme is designed for people who have not majored in anthropology but are keen to receive a formal education in the discipline.

"The goal of our programme is to teach students the basic theories and methods of social and cultural anthropology and to give them a broad understanding of anthropology's different topics. Students will develop their abilities in critical, independent and creative thinking in analysing contemporary social, cultural and political issues, and their understanding of human cultural and social diversity," Bosco says.

Students come from a variety of ages and national backgrounds. "The diversity of the class adds to the learning because students can share their different experiences and perspectives to add to everyone's understanding," Bosco says.

Dora Choi Toi-ling, who is currently studying the programme, is a documentary producer. "As a fervent traveller, I am very interested in learning about different aspects of cultures," she says.

"Anthropology is the study of human behaviour and it suits my interest. It amazes me how diversified our world is. Moreover, after working in the media industry for quite some time, I feel like it's time to consolidate my knowledge and experience with the help of academic frameworks."

Choi learned a lot more from the programme than just

interesting facts about different cultures and customs. "Anthropology teaches me to look at things from the



perspective of the disadvantaged. It helps me to eliminate the bias we all acquire from our upbringing. It is also a subject imbued with humanistic values, while the contemporary world tries to commercialise everything," she says.

"In the last semester, I had a great class studying domestic workers on the mainland. I have learned how we used to look at domestic workers from the

biased point of view of city dwellers. We tend to look at this group of people in terms of monetary value, instead of looking at them as real people with hopes and frustrations in life. I would say that I have learned to be more humble."

Clarice Cheung graduated from the programme in 2013 and is a medical doctor working in an accident and emergency department. "It has long been

one of my dreams to study anthropology because I believe it offers a unique perspective on understanding the world we live in," he says. "Studying the programme has made me a better physician as I have learned to see the world from different perspectives, and it has helped enhance my communication with different people."

Classes consist of two-hour lectures and a one-hour tutorial for 14 weeks each semester. Students take exams and write research papers for evaluation.

"Part-time students should have some flexibility in their work schedule, as some of our classes are taught during business hours," Bosco says.



Students develop abilities in critical, independent and creative thinking

JOSEPH BOSCO, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, CUHK



Karen Joe Laidler

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For registration, enquiries or to arrange a one-on-one consultation, please call: 2774 8585 (Ms Carol Wong) / 2774 8534 (Ms Wai Ng) www.hkma.org.hk/mgsm

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