

Course Information Sheet for entry in 2025-26: MPhil in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology



Course facts

Mode of study	Full Time Only
Expected length	21 months

About the course

The MPhil in Visual, Material and Museum Anthropology (VMMA) acts as a terminal degree but will also prepare you for doctoral research by introducing a wide range of theories and perspectives on museum anthropology, visual anthropology, and material culture theory, as well as practical field- and museum-based research methodologies. It is intended both as a standalone degree and as a broader and deeper preparation for doctoral research than is possible with the MSc.

In addition to the teaching provided specifically for the VMMA programme, you will also be able to attend lectures in social anthropology to link your work to broader trends in the discipline. A programme of research seminars is available, some specifically for research students and others featuring talks by invited speakers, often from outside the university. The principal event in this programme is the departmental seminar, run weekly during term time.

First year

The first year of the MPhil consists of a structured programme of lectures, classes, and tutorials from October to June. You will then start the research for their MPhil thesis over the summer. You should expect to spend six to eight hours per week in term time in formal teaching contexts (lectures, seminar groups, tutorials, classes), which can be supplemented with attendance of the many research and visiting speaker seminars on offer; the remainder of your time (ie around 30 hours per week) should be spent on independent study and preparation of submitted work.

The first year is structured around teaching for four papers:

1. Contemporary themes in visual, material and museum anthropology

This paper focuses on topics such as visual and material cultures; photography; digital anthropology; art and aesthetics; film and cinema; museums, colonialism, collecting, and contemporary debates; ethics and relationships with 'source communities'; production and consumption; transnational cultural flows and the wider issues of cross-cultural investigation.

2. Option paper

You will select one option paper from those taught each year for students in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (SAME). Titles of options available will be made known at the beginning of each academic year.

3. Research methods in visual, material and museum anthropology

This paper consists of two parts. Paper 3a is an outline research proposal. Paper 3b is a methods portfolio consisting of a report on trials of a research method in visual, material, and museum anthropology.

4. Fundamental concepts in visual, material, and museum anthropology

This paper focuses on key issues and themes in visual, material and museum anthropology, including current anthropological debates relating to materials, bodies, environments, museums, photography, film, art, archives, and the digital.

Second year

You will spend the summer conducting preliminary research. You will then focus principally on research and writing for your thesis in the second year, so the emphasis is on independent study. However, you will still be expected to spend three to four hours per week in term time in formal teaching contexts, including a writing-up seminar and field research training, as well as regular meetings with your thesis supervisor, again supplemented by attendance of research seminars and lectures as you choose.

Fieldwork is not expected as a basis for the MPhil thesis, but it can be conducted, and you will be encouraged to make use of the extensive visual and material cultural resources available in the department and the museum in selecting and researching dissertation and thesis topics.

You will also take another option paper, again selected from any of the options offered within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography.

Attendance

The course is full-time and requires attendance in Oxford. Full-time students are subject to the University's Residence requirements.

The School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography takes the view that full-time degrees require full-time study (ie equivalent to typical employment, around 40 hours per week, throughout the year).

The periods outside term time are considered to be opportunities for further independent study, consolidating and supplementing the knowledge gained during the preceding term and preparing work for examination, as well as for an appropriate break from study.

Resources to support your study

As a graduate student, you will have access to the University's wide range of world-class resources including libraries, museums, galleries, digital resources and IT services.

The Bodleian Libraries is the largest library system in the UK. It includes the main Bodleian Library and libraries across Oxford, including major research libraries and faculty, department and institute libraries. Together, the Libraries hold more than 13 million printed items, provide access to e-journals, and contain outstanding special collections including rare books and manuscripts, classical papyri, maps, music, art and printed ephemera.

The University's IT Services is available to all students to support with core university IT systems and tools, as well as many other services and facilities. IT Services also offers a range of IT learning courses for students, to support with learning and research.

Workspaces are available in the school on a first-come, first-served basis. Laboratory and other dedicated workspaces and equipment for methods teaching will be provided where required. All students receive an email account.

The Pitt Rivers Museum has its own library, the Balfour Library. The Pitt Rivers Museum also has an online catalogue of its entire collections and a number of dedicated collections-based and research-related websites.

A student-run society, the Oxford University Anthropology Society, runs coffee mornings, talks and other social and academic events throughout the year.

Supervision

You will receive all or most of your academic supervision in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. You will have a named supervisor, possibly two, who will have overall responsibility for the direction of your work from inception to submission.

The allocation of graduate supervision for this course is the responsibility of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and it is not always possible to accommodate the preferences of incoming graduate students to work with a particular member of staff. Under exceptional circumstances a supervisor may be found outside the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography.

Assessment

First year

During the second term, you will be examined on one core paper. In the third term, you will be examined by two core papers, and a Research Methods assessment consisting of a methods portfolio and a research proposal. Core and option papers usually take the form of an essay or an unseen timed examination.

The examination of these papers in the first year constitutes the 'qualifying' examination for continuation to the second year.

Second year

In addition to the thesis in the second year, you will also be examined in your second-year option course, and the long essay.

Changes to this course

The University will seek to deliver this course in accordance with the description set out above. However, there may be situations in which it is desirable or necessary for the University to make changes in course provision, either before or after you commence your course. These might include significant changes made necessary by any pandemic, epidemic or local health emergency. For further information, please see the University's Terms and Conditions (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms>) and our page on changes to courses (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges>).

Costs

Annual fees for entry in 2025-26

Fee status	Annual Course fees
Home	£23,930
Overseas	£39,040

Information about course fees

Course fees are payable each year, for the duration of your fee liability (your fee liability is the length of time for which you are required to pay course fees). For courses lasting longer than one year, please be aware that fees will usually increase annually. Information about how much fees and other costs may increase is set out in the University's Terms and Conditions (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/terms>).

Course fees cover your teaching as well as other academic services and facilities provided to support your studies. Unless specified in the additional cost information (below), course fees do not cover your accommodation, residential costs or other living costs. They also don't cover any additional costs and charges that are outlined in the additional cost information.

Additional cost information

There are no compulsory elements of this course that entail additional costs beyond fees and living costs. However, as part of your course requirements, you may need to choose a dissertation, a project or a thesis topic. Please note that, depending on your choice of topic and the research required to complete it, you may incur additional expenses, such as travel expenses, research expenses, and field trips. You will need to meet these additional costs, although you may be able to apply for small grants from your department and/or college to help you cover some of these expenses. Standard travel insurance can be provided by the University. However, students may be required to pay any additional insurance premiums associated with travel to areas with an increased level of risk, and should factor this into their planning for fieldwork.

Living costs

In addition to your course fees and any additional course-specific costs, you will need to ensure that you have adequate funds to support your living costs for the duration of your course.

The likely living costs for the 2025-26 academic year are published below. These costs are based on a single, full-time graduate student, with no dependants, living in Oxford. We provide the cost per month so you can multiply up by the number of months you expect to live in Oxford.

Likely living costs for one month

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£330	£515
Accommodation	£790	£955
Personal items	£200	£335
Social activities	£45	£100
Study costs	£40	£90
Other	£20	£40
Total	£1,425	£2,035

Likely living costs for nine months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£2,970	£4,635
Accommodation	£7,110	£8,595
Personal items	£1,800	£3,015
Social activities	£405	£900
Study costs	£360	£810
Other	£180	£360
Total	£12,825	£18,315

Likely living costs for twelve months

	Lower range	Upper range
Food	£3,960	£6,180
Accommodation	£9,480	£11,460
Personal items	£2,400	£4,020
Social activities	£540	£1,200
Study costs	£480	£1,080
Other	£240	£480
Total	£17,100	£24,420

When planning your finances for any future years of study at Oxford beyond the 2025-26 academic year, it is suggested that you allow for potential increases in living expenses of 4% each year – although this rate may vary depending on the national economic situation.

More information about how these figures have been calculated is available at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/livingcosts.

Document accessibility

If you require a more accessible version of this document please contact Graduate Admissions and Recruitment by email (graduate.admissions@admin.ox.ac.uk) or via the online form (<http://www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/ask/form>).