

# Anthropology and UAP: Questions of Humanity, Culture and the Unknown

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This course explores the ways in which the UAP conversation is informed by the culture and history of both the topic itself and the people who are engaging with it. *Anthropology and UAP* challenges students to explore not just what UAP are and what they can do, but the ways in which people discuss, conceptualize, and know the phenomena.

It appears that the phenomena encompassed in the acronym UAP (“UFOs,” “USOs,” “ghosts,” “spirits,” “visitors,” “extraterrestrials,” “foo fighters,” “faeries,” “angels,” etc.) have been with humankind from the very start. The meaning assigned to the phenomena, however, is far from universal. In some cultural contexts this meaning is an open question fraught with worry, secrecy and even alarm, while in other contexts the meaning is totally settled.

This course explores the cultural dimensions of UAP. This includes Indigenous knowledge of what we call UAP, including how the discussion around UAP and space exploration can mirror the ideals of settler colonialism. We will also discuss the emerging academic study of UAP, and how our fascination with the unknown can push science forward. We will also talk about the politics of knowledge creation, and explore what UAP means for the future of humanity.

The course consists of weekly readings and seminar discussions. Synchronous classes will be held each week, using the readings as a framing for the course discussion. Readings for this course are based in the subfield of sociocultural anthropology.

1. What is Anthropology? Anthropological Perspectives on UAP
  - a. Nelson, Katie, and Laura Braff. “Introduction to Anthropology,” in *Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd Edition. <https://pressbooks.pub/perspectives/chapter/introduction-to-anthropology/>
  - b. Choy, Timothy K., Lieba Faier, Michael J. Hathaway, Miyako Inoue, Shiho Satsuka, and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. 2009. “A New Form of Collaboration in Cultural Anthropology: Matsutake Worlds.” *American Ethnologist* 36 (2): 380–403. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2009.01141.x>.
  - c. Nader, Laura. n.d. “Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up.” ERIC Clearinghouse.
  - d. Tsing, Anna. 2004. “Introduction,” in *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
2. Ontology, Ways of Knowing, and Nonhuman Intelligence
  - a. Menzies, Charles. 2013. “Standing on the Shore with Saaban: An Anthropological Rapprochement with an Indigenous Intellectual Tradition.” *Collaborative Anthropologies* 6: 172–99.

- b. Descola, Philippe. 2009. "Human Natures." *Social Anthropology* 17 (2): 145–57. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1111/j.1469-8676.2009.00063.x>.
  - c. Fians, Guilherme. 2023. "The Others' Others: When Taking Our Natives Seriously Is Not Enough." *Critique of Anthropology* 43 (2): 167–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X231175982>.
  - d. Verran, Helen. 2013. "Engagements Between Disparate Knowledge Traditions: Toward Doing Difference Generatively and In Good Faith." In *Contested Ecologies: Dialogues in the South on Nature and Knowledge*, edited by Lesley Green. Cape Town, South Africa: HSBC Press.
3. Indigenous Knowledge and UAP
- a. Atalay, Sonya, William Lempert, David Delgado Shorter, and Kim TallBear. 2021. "Indigenous Studies Working Group Statement." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 45 (1): 9–18. [https://doi.org/10.17953/AICRJ.45.1.ATALAY\\_ETAL](https://doi.org/10.17953/AICRJ.45.1.ATALAY_ETAL).
  - b. Sixkiller Clarke, Ardy. 2012. *Encounters with Star People: Untold Stories of American Indians*. San Antonio: Anomalist Books.
    - i. Abductions of a Different Kind
    - ii. The Little People are the Star People
    - iii. The Story of a Traveling Marble
    - iv. American Indians and the Cosmic Connection
  - c. Shorter, David Delgado, and Kim TallBear. 2021. "An Introduction to Settler Science and the Ethics of Contact." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 45 (1): 1–8. [https://doi.org/10.17953/AICRJ.45.1.SHORTER\\_TALLBEAR](https://doi.org/10.17953/AICRJ.45.1.SHORTER_TALLBEAR).
4. Space, Otherness and Cultural Metaphors
- a. Dumit, Joseph. 2005. "'Come on, People . . . We \*are\* the Aliens. We Seem to Be Suffering from Host-Planet Rejection Syndrome': Liminal Illnesses, Structural Damnation, and Social Creativity." In *E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces*, edited by Debora Battaglia. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822387015>.
  - b. Roth, Christopher F. 2005. "Ufology as Anthropology: Race, Extraterrestrials, and the Occult." In *E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces*, edited by Debora Battaglia. Duke University Press.
  - c. Zimmerman, Michael E. 2003. "Encountering Alien Otherness." In *The Concept of the Foreign: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by Rebecca Saunders, 153–77. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
  - d. Reno, Joshua. 2019. "The Wrong Stuff," in *Military Waste: The Unexpected Consequences of Permanent War Readiness*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
5. Anthropology and Experiences with the Unknown
- a. Escolar, Diego. 2012. "Boundaries of Anthropology: Empirics and Ontological Relativism in a Field Experience with Anomalous Luminous Entities in Argentina."

- Anthropology and Humanism 37 (1): 27–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1409.2012.01106.x>.
- b. Dewan, William J. 2006. “‘A Saucerful of Secrets’: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of UFO Experiences.” *Journal of American Folklore* 119 (472): 184–202. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaf.2006.0020>.
  - c. Santo, Diana Espírito, and Alejandra Vergara. 2020. “The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology\*.” *Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, October. <https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda41.2020.06>.
  - d. Bartholomew, Robert E. 1991. “The Quest for Transcendence: An Ethnography of UFOs in America.” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 2 (1–2): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ac.1991.2.1-2.1>.
6. Religion and UAP
- a. Henninger, Sashur. “Religion,” in *Perspectives: An Open Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd Edition <https://pressbooks.pub/perspectives/chapter/religion/>
  - b. Pasulka, Diana Walsh. 2019. “Real and Imaginary: Tyler D’s Spiritual Conversion in Rome,” in *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
  - c. Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2021. “Secularity, Synchronicity, and Uncanny Science: Considerations and Challenges.” *Zygon* 56 (2): 395–415. <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12671>.
  - d. Jeffrey J. Kripal. 2019. “The Future (Politics) of Knowledge,” in *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge*. Vol. First edition. New York: Bellevue Literary Press. <http://proxy.binghamton.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=2030192&site=ehost-live>.
7. UAP, Academia, and Cultures of Expertise
- a. Helmreich, Stefan. 2009. “The Message from the Mud: Making Meaning Out of Microbes in Monterey Bay” in *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
  - b. Jeffrey J. Kripal. 2019. “Flipped Scientists,” in *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge*. Vol. First edition. New York: Bellevue Literary Press. <http://proxy.binghamton.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=2030192&site=ehost-live>.
  - c. Watters, Wesley Andrés, Abraham Loeb, Frank Laukien, Richard Cloete, Alex Delacroix, Sergei Dobroshinsky, Benjamin Horvath, et al. 2023. “The Scientific Investigation of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP) Using Multimodal Ground-Based Observatories.” *Journal of Astronomical Instrumentation* 12 (1): 2340006. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2251171723400068>.
  - d. Lembeck, Michael F., Dan Heimerdinger, Ryan Graves, Marty Snow, and Peter Reali. n.d. “Detection, Characterization, and Evaluation of Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena.” In *AIAA AVIATION 2023 Forum*. American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. Accessed January 18, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2514/6.2023-4322>.

8. Human Futures/Future Humans

- a. Jung, Carl. 1978. "Introductory," and "UFOs Considered in a Non-Psychological Light," in *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Bollingen Series. Princeton University Press.
- b. Pels, Peter. 2015. "Modern Times: Seven Steps toward an Anthropology of the Future." *Current Anthropology* 56 (6): 779–96. <https://doi.org/10.1086/684047>.
- c. Kripal, Jeffrey J. 2019. "The Cosmic Human," in *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press.  
<http://proxy.binghamton.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=2030192&site=ehost-live>.
- d. Messeri, Lisa. 2016. "Inhabiting Other Earths," in *Placing Outer Space: An Earthly Ethnography of Other Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.