

**PROGRAMME REPORT: FIELDWORK METHODS IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2026**

Programme Title	Student Research Project – AMU3248 ATS3248 APG4248 Field Methods in Anthropology and International Development Discussion Topic: Traditional Medicine: How do women aged 45+ in Segamat use traditional medicine to treat and manage the physical and psychological changes associated with menopause?
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Date	12–15 July 2026
Students	Chong Zi Yan He Jin Li Shaman Louisa Lazar Xiaohui Guo Yangrui Cheng Ziheng Zeng
Facilitators	Mohd Roshidi bin Ismail Muhammad Rafi bin Murphy Norliza binti Mat (translator for two sessions) Nur Farhin Nabila binti Hassan (translator for one other session)

2. Background

The Field Methods in Anthropology and International Development (FMA) 2026 is an annual collaborative programme between Monash University Australia (MUA), Monash University Malaysia (MUM), and the South East Asia Community Observatory (SEACO). Each year, SEACO at Monash University Malaysia hosts approximately 40 to 45 students from Monash University Australia and Monash University Malaysia to participate in the programme.

For the FMA 2026 programme, a total of 29 students from Monash University Australia (MUA) and 11 students from Monash University Malaysia (MUM) participated. The programme was led by two Academic Coordinators, Professor Narelle Warren and Dr Stefan Bächtold, with the support of 12 SEACO staff members who served as facilitators and field coordinators to ensure the smooth implementation of all fieldwork activities.

SEACO served as the programme implementation partner by providing coordination and logistical support for fieldwork activities, participant recruitment, data collection, and community and stakeholder engagement throughout the programme.

Participants were invited to take part in the research because they were existing SEACO participants and members of the Segamat community. The project aimed to gather community perspectives and experiences on several key research themes, including:

1. Human and non-human relationships (animals, environments, and objects)
2. Household structure and everyday life management in Malaysia
3. Sustainability, the environment, and climate change
4. Community engagement: understanding voices and representation
5. Religion and cosmology
6. Traditional medicine practices

Participation in the study involved either a focus group discussion (FGD) or an in-depth interview, each lasting approximately one to two hours and focusing on one of the designated research themes. Each FGD consisted of 7 to 10 participants and was conducted during either a morning or afternoon session. In-depth interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed time and location that was convenient for the participants.

Data collection was carried out between 12 July 2026 and 15 July 2026. During the discussions and interviews, participants shared their perspectives on their communities, social and cultural practices, personal beliefs, and, where relevant, information about objects or places of significance related to the research topics. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis commenced on 16 July 2026.

3. Objectives

The academic programme comprising the units AMU3248, ATS3248, and APG4248 is a strategic initiative aimed at developing a new generation of researchers equipped with skills in anthropological field methods and international development. Through this programme, Monash University students are provided with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom in real and dynamic community settings, thereby bridging the gap between academic learning and empirical practice.

The programme ensures that learning extends beyond theoretical concepts by providing students with hands-on field experience while contributing to the development of a broader research ecosystem.

The primary objective of the programme is to provide students with practical experience in research methods through fieldwork.

4. Activities during the sessions

Session with Chinese Practitioner (Acupuncture)

The session began with a brief presentation by the practitioner introducing acupuncture, followed by an in-depth interview conducted by the students with the practitioner and his assistant.

The session was conducted in Mandarin, as this was the practitioner's primary language. Six out of seven students were able to speak and understand Mandarin. The student who was not proficient in Mandarin used an AI-based recording and automated translation tool to support her understanding of the discussion. The other students also assisted by providing explanations and translations when necessary.

The session proceeded smoothly without any significant issues. At the end of the session, the students reviewed the interview questions to ensure that all relevant questions had been addressed.

Session with Chinese Community

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted entirely in Mandarin, with participants demonstrating a high level of responsiveness and cooperation. As in the previous session, six out of seven students were able to facilitate the discussion directly, while the student who was not proficient in Mandarin used an AI-based translation tool to support her participation and understanding.

Professor Narelle Warren joined and observed the session and commended the students for their initiative and effort in facilitating the discussion. She also provided valuable input, feedback, and recommendations to support improvements for subsequent sessions.

Session with Indian Community

The FGD was conducted in Malay, as the participants were able to communicate comfortably in the language. The participants were highly responsive and actively contributed throughout the discussion.

Participatory and Co-creation Engagement (PCE) tools were implemented, including listing and ranking activities as well as body mapping to identify symptoms.

As the discussion involved sensitive topics, one female staff member, Norliza, assisted with translation between Malay and English to facilitate communication between the participants and students. The students appeared comfortable conducting the session using the group discussion approach, while the student moderator facilitated the session smoothly using clear and direct questions.

Session with Hindu Monk

The session was conducted primarily in Malay, using an in-depth interview approach to explore the relevant topics.

The students successfully covered all the required questions and received relevant and informative responses from the participant. The session was conducted at the community house and proceeded smoothly.

The participant, a monk from India, had limited proficiency in Malay. Therefore, a member of the local community assisted with translation throughout the session. In addition to providing translation, the community member also contributed to the discussion, particularly on questions related to religious rituals that were within their own knowledge and experience.

Session with Malay Community

The FGD was conducted in Malay, with participants demonstrating active participation and cooperation throughout the session. PCE tools were implemented, including listing and ranking activities and body mapping to identify symptoms.

Participants shared extensive information and personal experiences, particularly as the discussion topics were closely related to their everyday lives. As the discussion involved sensitive topics, one female staff member, Farhin, assisted with translation between Malay and English to facilitate communication between the participants and students.

The students appeared comfortable conducting the session using the group discussion approach. The student moderator facilitated the discussion smoothly by presenting clear and direct questions. The community also warmly welcomed the students by preparing traditional kuih, tea, and coffee for the session.

Session with Representative from the Segamat District Health Office

The session was conducted in English with a Family Medicine Specialist (FMS) from the Segamat District Health Office. An in-depth interview was conducted to obtain relevant information and professional insights from the participant.

The students successfully covered all the required questions and received relevant and informative responses. The session was conducted at the SEACO office and proceeded smoothly without any significant issues.

All discussion and interview venues were clean, comfortable, and suitable for the respective sessions, with no significant venue-related issues reported.

Field Visit

A field visit was conducted to Sungai Bantang, Bekok, to provide the students with an opportunity to gain practical exposure to the local community and fieldwork environment.

Six out of seven students participated in the field visit, while one student was unable to attend due to other commitments.

5. Reflection

The programme provided students with valuable practical exposure to anthropological fieldwork and community-based research. Through interviews, FGDs, field visits, and direct engagement with community participants, students were able to apply research methods and concepts learned in the classroom to real-world community settings. Despite some research topics involving sensitive questions, participants were generally cooperative and willing to share their experiences and perspectives, which contributed positively to the data collection process.

The students demonstrated good cooperation, adaptability, and willingness to engage throughout the fieldwork activities. The use of consistent research methods and guidelines across different sessions helped ensure a smoother and more organised data collection process, making it easier for facilitators to coordinate and support the students. The willingness of SEACO staff to provide additional support also contributed significantly to the smooth implementation of the fieldwork. In particular, several female staff members voluntarily assisted other groups when needed, despite having their own assigned groups and responsibilities. This demonstrated strong teamwork, commitment, and flexibility among the fieldwork team.

The fieldwork experience further enhanced students' confidence, communication, teamwork, and practical research skills. It also provided meaningful opportunities to build respectful relationships with community participants and understand the importance of conducting research in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner.

6. Recommendations

For future programme implementation, it is recommended that male and female students be paired, where appropriate, when conducting research involving sensitive topics such as religion, personal beliefs, traditional medicine, bodily practices, and other personal or culturally sensitive matters. Having both male and female students involved may help participants feel more comfortable when sharing their personal experiences and perspectives, while also supporting more appropriate and respectful engagement during interviews and FGDs. In addition, the research questions, participant selection criteria, and interview/FGD guidelines should be finalised prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Early finalisation would provide students with a clearer understanding of the research objectives, the types of participants required, and the key areas to be explored. This would also help ensure greater consistency in the data collection process and allow students to be better prepared before engaging with the community.



Figure 1: Session with Chinese Medicine Practitioner and Chinese Community



Figure 2: Session with Indian Community and Hindu Monk



Figure 3: Session with Malay Community and Family Medicine Specialist (FMS)



Figure 4: Visit to a Historic Place and Reflexology Footpath