Anthropology 124B: Evolutionary Psychology

Spring 2013
TR 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM
FOWLER A103B
Professor Clark Barrett

Syllabus

Contact information

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Course overview

Cake: why does it taste so good? Monsters: why were they so scary when you were a kid? Why do some people seem attractive to you, while others don’t? Why are some things fun, and others boring? Why are some things so easy to remember, and other things so hard – and why are the hard ones always the things your teachers want you to know? Why do some things make you mad? Why do you care so much about what other people think of you? Why do people spend so much time and money deciding which pieces of colored cloth to put on their bodies? And why do you always have to visit your grandma at Thanksgiving?

The key to these mysteries of life, and many others, lies in our minds. The fact that cake tastes good isn’t a fact of the universe; it’s a fact of your mind. That girl or boy sitting next to you might be attractive to you, but probably wouldn’t be to a squirrel, or to an octopus. And while neither squirrels nor octopi bother to visit their grandparents, humans do. The reason for all these things lies in how your brain is organized. And that, in turn, has to do with evolution. You are a mammal, a primate, and a very special kind of primate: a bipedal ape whose ancestors evolved in Africa and migrated out to populate the rest of the world several hundred thousand years ago. Believe it or not, understanding how and why our minds evolved as they did – and why they produce things like culture and language, and allow us to learn from each other – holds the key to answering all of the questions above.

This course will show you how evolutionary theory holds the key to answering the questions above, and more. It is an introduction to the field of evolutionary psychology, which asks how evolution shaped the mechanisms in our brains that give rise to our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In this class, you will learn the basics of evolutionary psychological theory and how it can be used to understand diverse phenomena from perception, emotion, and childhood development to social cognition, decision-making, language, culture, consciousness, and even aging and death. Along the way you will learn about state-of-the-art research in psychology, anthropology, genetics, neuroscience, primatology, and many other fields as well. When you are done, cake will still be delicious – but you will never think about it the same way again.
Course requirements and enrollment

This is an upper division course that assumes some background in the basics of evolution, either Anthropology 7 or Life Sciences 1. First priority is given to Anthropology majors and minors on the priority and first enrollment passes. Non-majors may enroll on the second pass, space permitting. If instructor consent is required, students must obtain consent before enrollment, regardless of major. Enrollment is limited to space available.

Grading basis

Because of the size of the class, grading is based on two multiple choice only exams. The midterm counts for 45% of your grade, and the final exam counts for 55%. There are no make-up exams and no other grading options are offered. If you are uncomfortable with multiple choice tests as a form of evaluation, you are encouraged to consider selecting a different course.

Course texts (required)

- Supplementary readings to be made available as PDF files on the course website.
- See weekly schedule (below) for details on the weekly reading load.

Course requirements

- **Readings.** Each week we will read 1 or 2 chapters from Gaulin and McBurney (G&M). Some weeks there will be supplementary readings, available on the course website. Do the readings before class.
- **Attendance.** You are encouraged to attend lecture each week. You are responsible for all material in the lectures and readings. Not everything is on the lecture slides, and there is no substitute for learning in person.
- **Exams.** There will be an in-class midterm and an in-class final.
- There are no discussion sections for this course.

Online materials

- Course website: [https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/13S-ANTHRO124B-1](https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/13S-ANTHRO124B-1)
- Course announcements will be made on website and sent to you via email: make sure you have access to the site and your email address is current.
- Supplementary readings (required).
- Lecture slides will be posted as PDF files.
Schedule of weekly lectures and readings
Note: schedule is subject to revision depending on weekly progress

Week 1  What is evolutionary psychology?
April 2  Introduction to evolutionary psychology
Reading: G&M Chapter 1
April 4  Evolution and natural selection
Reading: G&M Chapter 2

Week 2  From genes to perception
April 9  Genetics and development
Reading: G&M Chapter 3
April 11 Sensation and perception
Reading: G&M Chapter 4

Week 3  Awareness and action
April 16 Consciousness
Reading: G&M Chapter 5
April 18 Motivation and emotion
Reading: G&M Chapter 6

Week 4  Learning and cognition
April 23 Learning
Reading: G&M Chapter 8
April 25 Cognition
Reading: G&M Chapter 7

Week 5  Cognition con’t
April 30 Cognition continued, and Q&A for midtem
Reading: G&M Chapter 7

May 2  IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

Week 6  Social cognition and cognitive development
May 7  Social cognition & theory of mind
No additional reading this week
May 9  Cognitive development

Week 7  Mating
May 14  The evolution of sex
Reading: G&M Chapter 12
May 16  Mate choice
Reading: G&M Chapter 12

Week 8  Family
May 21  Sex and mating, Part 3
Reading: G&M Chapter 12
May 23  Kinship and the family
Reading: G&M Chapter 13

Week 9  The human lifespan
May 28  The human lifespan
Reading: G&M Chapter 10
May 30  The human lifespan
Reading: G&M Chapter 10

Week 10  Summing up
June 4  Wrap-up and review

June 6  IN-CLASS FINAL EXAM

Disability policy

If you wish to request an accommodation due to a suspected or documented disability, please inform your instructor and contact the Office for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible at A255 Murphy Hall, (310) 825-1501, (310) 206-6083 (telephone device for the deaf). Website: www.osd.ucla.edu. I very much appreciate getting at least two weeks notice that you will be needing special accommodations, to give me time to prepare. Thanks!

Cheating

This course has a zero-tolerance cheating policy. Students found cheating on either exam will receive a zero on that exam, with no exceptions.

Updated 6/2/13