ANTHROPOLOGY 124T

“EVOLUTION OF PERSONALITY”
https://moodle2.sscnet.ucla.edu/course/view/18F-ANTHRO124T-1

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UCLA
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Fowler A139
MWF 10:00-10:50

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Personality traits are patterns of thought, emotion and behavior that are relatively consistent within individuals over time and across situations, but that differ between individuals. The descriptive and explanatory study of personality variation has enjoyed a robust renaissance during the past 25 years. Several promising lines of inquiry have used evolutionary (adaptationist) theory to generate hypotheses about (1) the ultimate sources of personality variation and (2) the adaptive (i.e. biological fitness) consequences of different personality configurations in different environments. These theoretical perspectives have been applied to both human, and nonhuman animal, personality variation. In this course, we will first cover the fundamentals of evolutionary theory, including evolutionary psychology. Then we’ll review basic concepts in personality psychology. Next, we will review an evolutionary model of human personality variation, based on the Five Factor structure (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness and Openness to Experience), that proposes that the optimal levels of each factor have varied over time and across space throughout human evolution. The remainder of the course will consist of a set of elaborations on, critiques of, and alternatives to this “Fluctuating Selection” model. Topics will include an alternative evolutionarily-informed personality structure, the six-factor HEXACO model; sex differences in personality; and how natural selection acts on personality variation in nonhuman animals. Returning to human personality variation, we will delve more deeply into the behavior genetics of human personality, and the strengths and weakness of various personality assessment methods. We will consider the extent to which human personality structure is culture-specific, and we will review three proposed theoretical alternatives (life history strategy, mutation-selection balance, and facultative calibration) to fluctuating selection as a mechanism by which personality variation persists in human populations. Finally, we will review evolutionary hypotheses about the so-called “Dark Triad” of personality traits (narcissism, Machiavellianism, and subclinical psychopathy).

COURSE COMPONENTS

1. The readings include (a) a set of chapters from a textbook (Social Evolution by Robert Trivers) (b) a book written for general audiences (Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are by Daniel Nettle), and (c) a set of scholarly articles. Please do the readings before the class meetings with which they’re associated. The textbook excerpts (as a
course reader) and the book by Nettle are available from the UCLA Bookstore. The articles are posted on the CCLE page, under the appropriate week.

2. Class meetings will be a mix of lecture and discussion. I will post outlines of each lecture on the course website (organized by week) during the 24 hours after the lecture. The rationale for this is to leave some questions unanswered for you to grapple with in discussions during the class meetings.

3. Grades will be based on (1) two midterms (each 20% of your grade), (2) a final exam (35%), and (3) a term paper (25%). The exams will consist of a mix of short essay, short answer, and multiple choice questions. The term paper assignment is to use one of the personality structures presented in class to describe the characters in a novel, movie or TV series of your choice (see separate document on the course web site). Although class discussion participation will not count as a specific portion of your grade, I will take it into account when assigning the final grades of students whose point totals are slightly less than the cut-off point for the next highest grade.

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 0, Sep. 28: Introduction: What is personality and why is it important? No readings.

Week 1, Oct. 1, 3, and 5: Evolution by natural selection; evolution of social behavior.

Readings:

Week 2, Oct. 8, 10, and 12: Evolutionary psychology.

Readings:


Week 3, Oct. 15, 17, and 19: Basic concepts in personality psychology; theory of fluctuating selection

Readings:

FIRST MIDTERM EXAM: FRIDAY, OCT. 19.
Week 4, Oct. 22, 24, and 26: The Big Five personality structure from the fluctuating selection perspective

Readings:

TERM PAPER PROPOSAL DUE: FRIDAY, OCT. 26 AT 11:59pm.

Week 5, Oct. 29, 31, and Nov. 2: The HEXACO model of personality; sex differences in personality.

Readings:


Week 6, Nov. 5, 7, and 9: Personality in nonhuman animals

Readings:


SECOND MIDTERM EXAM: FRIDAY, NOV. 9

Week 7, Nov. 14 and 16: Measuring personality: beyond the self-report questionnaire.

Monday November 12: Veterans’ Day holiday

Readings:


Week 8, Nov. 19 & 21: Genetics of personality; evolution, culture, and personality structure

Readings:


Friday November 23: Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 9: Nov. 26, 28, & 30: Life History approaches to personality variation; the General Factor of Personality

Readings:


Week 10: Dec. 3, 5, & 7: Rethinking evolutionary personality psychology; the “Dark Triad” of personality; course summary and prospects

Readings:
Lukaszewski, A.W. in press. Evolutionary perspectives on the mechanistic underpinnings of personality.


TERM PAPER DUE: WEDNESDAY, DEC. 5 AT 11:59pm.

FINAL EXAM: Monday December 10, 3:00-6:00pm
COURSE MECHANICS AND COURSE POLICIES

Class Meetings

I will lecture for part of each class meeting, but I will also open the floor for discussion by asking focused questions. If no one cares to answer a question, I may randomly select someone to call on. The questions will usually be based on research results that I’ll present in PowerPoint. So, I will typically describe the methods used in a published study (one that you haven’t read about), show graphs or tables of the results, and then ask, “Based on what you’ve read for today, and what we’ve gone over so far in today’s meeting, how would you interpret these results?” After that topic has been treated sufficiently, I might ask “What questions remained unanswered by these results?” and “What other kinds of data could answer those questions?”

I will post a file of PowerPoint slides from each class meeting during the 24 hours after it.

Please don’t text, surf the web, or divert your attention in any other way during class meetings.

Office hours

I will have two regularly scheduled office hours each week, Wednesday 9:00-9:40am and Thursday 10:30am-12 noon. You are more than welcome to stop by (Haines 389) during those times; don’t worry that you’re “bothering” me – those hours are your time. You are also welcome to email me to set up an appointment at other times.

Exams

The midterms will consist of a mix of short essay, short answer, and multiple choice questions. I will provide fairly detailed study guides before the midterms and the final exam. These study guides will be your only indication of “what’s going to be on the exam.”

No make-up exams will be given. If you know that you will not be able to be present at either of the midterms (Oct. 19 and Nov. 9, during the regular class time) or the final exam (Monday December 10, 3:00-6:00pm), this course isn’t for you.

Term Paper

A term paper, due on Wednesday of Week 10 (Dec. 5), will determine 25% of your grade. The goal of the assignment is to inspire you to think about a topic associated with the humanities (literature) using concepts from the scientific study of personality. Specifically, you will describe four characters from a work of fiction (a novel, play, opera, film or TV series) using the Five Factor Model or HEXACO model of human personality variation. For one of these characters, you’ll formulate an argument for the
costs and benefits that this character experiences from having an extreme value on one or more personality dimensions.

**Grading**

Course grades will be based entirely and exclusively on exam scores, the term paper, and (to a much lesser extent) class participation. These tasks are meant to measure your knowledge of, and engagement with, the subject matter. Final grades are intended to reflect your mastery of the course material — not the amount of effort you put into the course. A few moments of reflection should clarify why I cannot assign grades based on students’ work effort. First, I cannot measure it. Self-reports of effort are obviously unreliable. Remote monitoring of students’ study habits is obviously not feasible, either ethically or practically. Second, when grade reports are used in decisions made both inside and outside the university (e.g. admission to an impacted major, or to graduate school), the decision-makers presume that a high grade signifies mastery of the subject matter — not merely a high level of effort. When I review the transcript of an applicant to UCLA Anthropology’s graduate program, I trust that the applicant’s undergraduate professors assigned grades based on knowledge, not just effort. As a matter of integrity, I must abide by the same standard.

Students rightly expect grading to be fair, but what constitutes fairness is not always clear. Here’s what I mean by fairness: every student’s work is graded using the same criteria. You may not like these criteria in all cases, but you can be sure that I’m applying the same criteria to every other student. This standard of fairness has several implications.

For one thing, I do not allow “extra credit” work. If only those who asked for such work were allowed to do it, this would be unfair to the students who didn’t ask. But if every student in the class were given the opportunity to do “extra credit,” it would no longer really be “extra” – it’d be just another course assignment. And I have already determined that I’m assigning the proper amount of work for this course.

Furthermore, in assigning grades I cannot take into account a student’s personal circumstances (e.g. the “need” for a particular grade to keep a scholarship or get into a graduate school, or a distracting family crisis or financial crisis) – however much I may personally sympathize with a student’s difficulties. (If you are having personal problems that interfere with your academic work, I can refer you to appropriate on-campus counseling and other resources.) If I were to consider one student’s personal circumstances in assigning his or her grade, to be fair I would need to consider every student’s personal circumstances – again, an ethical and practical impossibility. (Actually this is a moot point, because the UCLA Faculty Code of Conduct prohibits basing grades on any consideration other than course work).

Course policy regarding midterm re-grade requests also reflects this standard of fairness. Re-grade requests are strongly discouraged. They must be submitted in writing. The regrading process will consider only whether the standards for grading the question were
correctly applied in the exam being re-graded. Under no circumstances will the grading standards themselves be retroactively changed – this would be unfair to some of the students who did not receive full credit for their answer yet did not request a re-grade of that question. More details on re-grade requests will be provided at the time of the first midterm. Requests for re-grades of the final exam are even more strongly discouraged. The likelihood of such a request being granted is very close to zero.

Also, I will not change the course grading scheme (e.g. the relative weights of the midterm and the final in determining the final grade) for particular students.

**Academic integrity**

If you haven’t already, I suggest that you visit the Dean of Students’ website, which includes a guide to academic integrity:

http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/integrity.html

Instances of suspected academic dishonesty (e.g. consulting notes during exams) will be immediately reported to the Dean of Students. UCLA’s rules require this.

**Center for Accessible Education**

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310)825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.