

## Evolutionary Psychology

Spring 2013

M \*\*\* 6:00-8:40 \*\*\* BSB 108

Subject to change \*\* come to class and check Sakai for updates \*\*

### Instructor Information

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and by appt.

### Course Overview

Why do people think, act and feel the way they do? These questions have occupied psychologists since the birth of the field. More recently, researchers in a number of fields (including psychology, biology, genetics, neuroscience, psychiatry, and physiology) have examined whether the same evolutionary forces that selected for our anatomy and physiology also shaped our basic psychological traits. In this course, we will examine many facets of human behavior through an evolutionary lens, asking such questions as whether our basic emotional and intuitive responses to the environment and to other human beings can be explained as adaptations that maximize reproductive potential of our ancestors over the course of evolutionary history. Some specific topics of discussion include: mutation, kin selection, inclusive fitness, altruism, parental investment, short-term and long-term mating strategies, mate guarding tactics, attractiveness, gender differences in sexual expression, sexual coercion, gender differences in empathizing, gender differences in systematizing, depression, evolutionary purposes of art and other distinctly human pleasures.

### Readings

1. **Required.** Lance Workman and Will Reader. *Evolutionary Psychology: An Introduction*. Second Edition. 2008. Cambridge University Press. The textbook is available from the bookstore, online at various booksellers (Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Borders) and online through the publisher. Try to find the paperback version, as it is half the list price of the hardcover (\$55 vs \$139 on Amazon).
2. **Required:** *The Selfish Gene*, by Richard Dawkins (available online or at most bookstores).
3. **Required:** *Mothers and Others* by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (available online or at most bookstores).
4. **Required:** *The Moral Animal* by Robert Wright (available online or at most bookstores).
5. **Required.** Original research articles, provided as pdfs or brick and mortar versions during class periods.
6. **Required.** Chapters from books, provided as pdfs or brick and mortar versions during class periods.

### Course Rules

We will be discussing topics of a controversial nature in this class. Some of these topics may induce strong emotional responses. It is important to engage in responsible academic discourse even if you have strong opinions or feelings about the topic. It is acceptable to use intuition and introspection as points of departure for conversation, but introspection and intuition should be labeled as such. Although we will be discussing the evolutionary basis of instinctive beliefs about human behavior, do not confuse intuition with empirical data. Using intuition to introduce a claim about human behavior is acceptable; however, empirical data are required to establish or refute that claim.

## Course Requirements

This class will only function as designed if everyone stays on top of the reading and is able to participate in class discussions. I am going to ensure that in a couple of ways. First, you will need to write a brief (1-2 paragraphs) summary of the reading and turn it in electronically before class (see below for details). Second, each of you will need to pick two class topics for which you will become the resident class experts (see below for details).

1. **Attendance and class participation / preparation:** Complete the required reading: For each class period, you need to turn in a 1-2 paragraph summary of the most important points of the reading. This is due on SAKAI before class starts (6:00 pm). You will not be graded on grammar or style; the purpose of this exercise is to verify that you have completed your reading. If you attend class and turn in this summary, and if it is clear from the summary that you actually read the course material, you will receive full points for this portion of your grade. Exceptional in-class participation may improve your grade if you fail to complete some assigned reading. You are also required to bring to class at least one outstanding question you have, which you will turn in at the beginning of the class period (with your name). I will use these questions as part of class discussion (without your name, although you can claim the question as yours if you so desire).
2. **Student presentations:** Each student will sign up for two of the eleven topics listed in the course schedule as requiring student presenters. As a student presenter, you will research (at least two external sources) a question about EP related to that day's topic, and you will present your findings to the class. Your presentation should have: (1) Summary of the question and how it is related to the day's topic; (2) Explanation of why you were interested (3) Data or answer(s) to the question(s). (4) Analysis of the answer in the light of either different EP explanations or alternative theory (e.g. SSSM) explanations. At each step you are encouraged to get class participation. You should have enough material for 5-10 minutes. In practice, your presentation may last from 5 minutes to 45 minutes, depending on class involvement and how much your presentation overlaps with what I wanted to say for the day.

To help you, and to ensure the discussions are on-topic, you need to clear your topic with me the week *before* your topic is scheduled to be discussed. In other words, if you are presenting on March 12th, you should have cleared your topic with me by March 5th. You can do this in person or via email. In terms of outside sources, you can come up with your own or I can help. Many of the topics covered in this course involve specific claims about human behavior or mental states, and some of these ideas/claims are controversial. As you seek to answer your question from an EP perspective, it is perfectly acceptable to find sources that disagree with the EP perspective.

**Grading.** In addition to the oral presentation, graduate students are also required to turn in a 2-5 page paper (due the day of the presentation, in class) that follows the points outlined above. The paper should be written clearly and concisely, with appropriate citations. Graduate students will receive separate grades for both parts. Undergraduates will be graded on their oral presentation. Undergraduates who are worried that their oral presentation might not sufficiently reflect their understanding have the option of turning in a written outline or paper in addition to their grade, but this is not required.

**You have the option of working on this with a partner.** If you are a grad student, you need to turn in your own paper.

3. **Student follow-ups:** As we discuss the material each week, we will run into questions for which none of us has the answer. Each student will sign up for two of these follow-ups, and research the answer to the question. For the next class period, you should write up your response (1-2 pages), and be prepared to briefly summarize this for the class (about 2 -5 minutes; no slides required).

4. **Exams:** There are two exams in this course, one mid-term and a final. The mid-term will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions. Many of them will be difficult questions. The exam will be worth 100 points and there will be approximately 150 total points. You choose which questions you want to answer, so long as they add up to 100 points. Questions answered beyond the 100 points will not be graded. You will be permitted to bring one 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper to the mid-term. This sheet of paper can contain any written material that you wish to include.

The final exam will take 1 of 2 forms, depending on how prepared and involved the class has been over the semester. I will let you know the final form of the exam by the 12th week of class. The final exam will either be the same format as the mid-term OR: The final exam will consist of six short essay questions. It will aim to address your understanding of the principles of evolutionary psychology. Of these six essay questions, you will choose three to answer. I will hand out the exam at the beginning of the final exam time. At the end of the three hours you need to turn in your answers. In the intervening time, you may go where you wish and consult any resource you wish to complete this exam. Ideas for useful resources include, but are not limited to, your textbook, your classmates, your friends and the internet. Although you may consult with each other, each student must turn in their own exam. Your exam may be handwritten or typed (and submitted to me via email or thumb drive).

## Grading

There are 500 points possible in this course. Points are distributed as follows:

Attendance and participation	130 points, 26%
Student expert 1	60 points, 12%
Student expert 2	60 points, 12%
Student follow-up 1	25 points, 5%
Student follow-up 2	25 points, 5%
Mid-term	100 points, 20%
Final exam	100 points, 20%