

Anth 303 - Issues in Human Evolutionary Theory
McBrearty, Fall, 1999
Wednesday, 2-5 p.m., Beach 428

This course addresses issues of evolutionary theory, some “classic,” all current and relevant to our condition as humans with an evolutionary history. It is not necessary to have much background in the study of human evolution to get something out of the course, though it helps! Topics addressed should have application to problems in social anthropology, biological anthropology, archaeology, and organismal biology.

Organization & requirements

The course will be conducted as a seminar. You will attend class meetings having done all the readings and will participate in class discussion. Each week you will sign up to be particularly responsible for one or more papers from the total assigned reading. You will write a brief abstract of this paper and you will be prepared to lead a critical discussion of it. You may also (with adequate warning) be asked to make a short presentation to the class. You will hand in your abstracts to me on the Tuesday prior to our class meeting. Please have them in my mailbox no later than 5 p.m., or you may fax them to me at home on Tuesday evening (860-659-1242). Please don't send your abstracts by email. You will write three short essays (10-15 pages) during the course of the semester on topics related to the course material. I will suggest a range of topics from which you may choose, or you may come up with a topic independently, but you *must* consult with me on the topics of your essays. Your grade will be based on the quality of these essays, your weekly written abstracts, your class presentation (if any), and your level of participation in class discussion.

- 1 1-Sep Organizational meeting.
- 2 8-Sep The species concept.
- 3 15-Sep Why study primate behavior?
- 4 22-Sep Systematic principles & practice.
- 5 29-Sep Diet & human evolution. (Paper due.)
- 6 6-Oct Critique of the adaptationist paradigm.
- 7 13-Oct An evolutionary view of human reproductive behavior.
- 8 20-Oct The units of selection.
- 9 27-Oct The evolution of size & shape.
- 10 3-Nov Cooperation, competition, and group living. (Paper due.)
- 11 10-Nov Tempo & mode in evolution.
- 12 17-Nov An evolutionary perspective on human disease.
- 13 24-Nov Thanksgiving holiday.
- 14 1-Dec Trends in evolution.
- 15 8-Dec Your choice: a) Who or what is a human race? b) A critique of "creation science." c) The evolution of intelligence. d) Do cultures evolve?

Issues in Human Evolutionary Theory
Anthropology 305-14
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Suggested topics for first essay

Please discuss any one of the following questions or topics in 10-15 typewritten doublespaced pages, not including references. These topics are suggestions only; if you wish, you may write about another topic of relevance to the course material. In either case please consult with me on the topics of your essays. The articles we have discussed in class and the references listed in these articles are good places to begin your research, but feel free to ask me to suggest additional sources. Strive to be concise and specific in your writing, give details, cite relevant literature, and cite carefully the relevant literature. Your essays are due on Oct. 6th.

1. Discuss the biological species concept and its use in reconstructing aspects of human evolution.
2. In what sense are biological species real entities?
3. Are hybrids or subspecies useful biological concepts?
4. What are the problems in applying the biological species concept to extinct populations?
5. What is the unit of selection in evolution? (gene, trait, individual, population, etc.)
6. Is the study of nonhuman primates relevant to understanding past or present human behavior?
7. Evaluate Zihlman et al's contention that the pygmy chimpanzee is a good model of a hominid ancestor.
8. Critique Wrangham's comparative method for reconstructing the behavior of the common ancestor of African apes and humans. Can you suggest a better approach?
9. Critique Foley & Lee's scenario for the evolution of primate social behavior.
10. Has the cladistic approach to phylogeny reconstruction aided our understanding of human evolution? If so, how so?
11. Should taxonomy reflect phylogeny? Why or why not?
12. Discuss the evidence for the evolutionary relationships among human, the African apes, and the orangutan.
13. Discuss seasonal scarcity and its evolutionary implications for human diet.
14. What are the failings of the adaptationist paradigm?
15. Is the idea of adaptation teleological?
16. Does the idea of adaptation assume that an organism and its environment are in equilibrium? Is this a problem in applying it to the real world? Can you reconcile this with Van Valen's "Red Queen" model?
17. How does interspecific competition affect adaptation?