

Evolution, Society, and Policy
Course Syllabus
PUP 4506 -- Spring 2008 12564
Tuesday and Thursday, 12:15-1:30 p.m.; Bldg. 42/1111

Instructor Information

INSTRUCTOR: Associate Professor [J. Patrick Plumlee](#)
OFFICE: Social Sciences Building 51/2402
OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday 4:30-6 p.m, Wednesday, 10-11:30 a.m. and 2:00-4:30 p.m., or by appointment
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Course Texts

Brian and Deborah Charlesworth. *Evolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Robin Dunbar, Louise Barrett, and John Lycett. *Evolutionary Psychology, A Beginner's Guide: Human Behavior, Evolution, and the Mind*. Oneworld Publications: 2005

Other material, Internet sites, handouts, etc. as assigned. Much of this material will be available on the course Blackboard.

Catalog Description

"Prerequisites: POS 2041, or consent of instructor. This course explores the relationship of humankind's evolutionary origins to present social and political behavior, particularly the emergence of state power and institutions. The course surveys key questions, issues, and controversies encountered in biological explanations of political phenomena. Additionally, the course examines some contemporary policy issues associated with developments in biotechnology."

Course Content

For thousands of years, people have wondered about the place of human beings in the world. Where did we come from? Why are we like what we are? What purposes do humans exist to serve? Philosophy and religion, and more recently, the sciences, have long sought answers to these perennial questions. Although there is by no means an accord among the many diverse viewpoints, in recent years new theories have been developed that hold forth the prospect of providing an integrated understanding of human nature. This understanding is based on the Darwinian view of evolution via natural selection, the process through which individual variations that lead to relatively greater success in reproduction are passed on to descendants. The accumulation of such variations produces adaptations that account, in turn, for the great number and diversity of living forms. Since behavior, as well as morphology, reflects adaptation, behavior can be also considered as a product of evolution. In humans, viewing the brain and mind as products of our evolutionary past forms a basis for a new understanding of the human

mind and human behavior under a unified theoretical framework.⁽¹⁾

Unfortunately, many of the implications attendant upon this revolution in the understanding of human behavior are not well understood; traditional perspectives on social life have been slow to accommodate this evolutionary paradigm, which for convenience in this course we will call the "selectionist" model. Nowhere is this more true than in the relationship of the biological sciences to the social sciences. The Darwinian view of life, the cornerstone of modern biology, is largely unintegrated into the social sciences.⁽²⁾ This is unfortunate, as the selectionist perspective has significant implications for traditional areas of social inquiry such as psychology, marriage and family, economics, politics, and even religion. Moreover, the social consequences of technical developments, such as cloning, in the biological sciences will be increasingly problematic in the coming decades. Consequently, social thinking must consider how societies will accommodate the ethical, political, and economic dimensions of these new developments.

This course investigates the impact of the Darwinian revolution in biology on the contemporary understanding of human social life. We will explore how Darwinian principles are being used to explain not only the evolutionary development of the human phenotype, but the evolution of the human mind and human behavior as well. In short, we will enter the realm of evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, human behavioral ecology--all terms that suggest human behavior has significant functional or adaptive aspects, and therefore can at least partially be understood or explained as a product of natural selection.

We examine a number of theories of human nature in this course, and consider some of the objections to the selectionist approach to understanding human behavior. There is no question that biological ideas (many of them erroneous) were used in the past as justification for racism, oppression, and, in the case of Nazi Germany, even extermination of those considered biologically unfit or "inferior." Modern evolutionary approaches reject such dangerous interpretations, but many people still confuse contemporary evolutionary ideas with older theories based on crude biological determinism. As we will see, proponents of the selectionist perspective insist that this model does not lead to a deterministic view of human behavior. Nor, incidentally, does it necessarily or inevitably deny the existence of God.

More positively, our course will consider contemporary applications of biological ideas to human behavior. We will be particularly interested in what biology may offer in better understanding aspects of human political behavior. A significant challenge facing the application of evolutionary principles to politics is understanding of how large-scale cooperative enterprises, such as states, emerge and persist even when they conflict with individual self-interest. Conversely, we will consider what political science has to offer biology. An understanding of public policy will help biologists and other natural scientists become more aware of the political environment surrounding their work, and why governments become involved in the support, regulation, and oversight of basic and applied research.

When our course is ended, you may find that your view of the world has changed in some significant ways; at the very least, you will have been exposed to an arsenal of concepts that will be of considerable value to you as intellectual currency not only for the remainder of your time at UNF, but in whatever career you pursue after leaving here as well.

Scientific research pertaining to evolution that has been going on for over a century and a half. Nevertheless, various aspects of evolutionary theory remain controversial in today's political and cultural climate. In light of the continuing controversy, I want to make it clear that in this course I am not asking or expecting you to alter any religious or spiritual beliefs you may have. You do not have to become a "believer" in evolution to be successful in this course. However, you will be held responsible in this course for becoming familiar with the arguments and evidence regarding the neo-Darwinian model of evolution and its applicability to human behavior. **If you cannot accept the idea of evolution of humankind via natural selection as at least a working hypothesis, then this course is probably not for you.**

Course Objectives

This course is intended to introduce students to the basic ideas underlying a evolutionary biological approach to human social behavior. The course develops the essential elements composing the intellectual perspective known as neo-Darwinism, which is the dominant paradigm in the sciences today for explaining the historical evolution of all life on earth. We will deal particularly with the evolution of human beings, the existence of behavioral and cognitive universals that seem to constitute a shared human nature, and how this unique nature is posited as a unified explanatory tool that can be applied to a whole range of social behaviors. On a parallel track, we will follow the social history of Darwinism and discover why and how have biological ideas have been often misunderstood and misapplied to achieve political purposes. Finally, depending on how much time we have left, we will consider to what extent selectionist ideas have been integrated into political science and other social sciences.

Specific Learning Objectives

- Build a basic vocabulary of terms and concepts relating to the Darwinian approach to human evolution and behavior;
- Differentiate between scientific and non-scientific approaches to knowledge;
- Use the concepts of science and non-science to better understand the controversy over creationism and "intelligent design;"
- Understand the basic concepts of evolutionary theory (neo-Darwinism) and how they were developed;
- Review the evidence for human evolution and the relationship of humans to other

species;

- Become familiar with arguments for and against the use of Darwinian ideas to understand and explain human behavior;
- Understand the basic concepts of human behavioral ecology, sociobiology, evolutionary psychology, and gene-culture interaction and their relationships;
- Become familiar with developments in the neurosciences in understanding the workings of the brain and mind and human behavior, and how these developments bear on issues of public policy;
- Become aware of the past misuse of biological concepts in attempting to achieve political purposes;
- Gain insight into the application of Darwinian ideas to issues traditionally considered to be part of the discipline of political science;
- Demonstrate a grasp of course content through recall of factual material, integrative oral and written presentation, and applied analysis of current events/issues pertaining to the Darwinian approach to understanding and explaining human behavior.

Course Requirements

We will have **two in-class exams (mid-term and final)** that will cover the basic terms and concepts introduced in the course. We will also have a **weekly quiz**, consisting of no more than 5 questions concerning that week's readings, assignments or points from the previous week's classes. These quizzes are to insure that you are keeping up with the assignments and will be averaged with the course grade. Generally, approximately 5-10 minutes will be devoted to this quiz at the beginning of the class. Quizzes that are not turned in because you are late for class will receive a grade of F. Weekly quizzes will start during the the second week of class.

In addition to the exams and quizzes, you will be assigned a number of short papers. These will be based on essay topics that I will develop. These papers will be due as indicated in the schedule and should be no more than 3-5 pages (1 page=approximately 300 words) in length. At least 5 such papers will be assigned. I may also ask you to post excerpts from your essays as material for Blackboard discussions, or to use your essays as a basis for class discussion. The two exams will count about 25 percent each (total = 50 percent) and the papers as a group about 35 percent. Approximately 10 percent will come from weekly quizzes. The remaining percentage will be based on **participation**, particularly participation on the Blackboard Discussion Board for the class and **attendance**(which I record).

Grading Policy

Written assignments in the course will be based on topics developed and assigned by the instructor. Each assignment will provide specific guidelines for that assignment. Grading of these assignments will be based on the general expectations for student papers listed under Course Information on the course Blackboard. Each paper will be returned with a set of rubrics indicating in general the basis for the grade received. Specific comments will also be provided for each paper.

Assignments that are scored with letter grades, such as B or C+, will be converted to numerical scores for purposes of averaging the grades in the course. The specific scale for translating letter grades into numerical scores is as follows: A, 95; A-, 91.5 ; B+, 88.5; B, 85; B-, 81.5; C+, 78.5; C, 75; C-, 71.5; D+, 68.5; D, 65; D-, 61.5; F, 55. This scale is built into the Blackboard gradebook and automatically converts letter grades into their numeric value.

Assignments, such as exams, will be scored via numerical grades, for example 87. Actual scores made on these assignments will be used to calculate course averages. In other words, if you make an 85 on the midterm and an A- on one of the essay assignments, your scores on these assignments for course average purposes would be 85 and 91.5, respectively. These will be weighted by the percentage portion each contributes to the final overall grade. You can access your current standing in the course in the Gradebook section of the course Blackboard.

Grading Scale for Course Average: A, 94+; A-, 90-93; B+, 87-89; B, 83-86; B-, 80-82; C+, 77-79; C, 69-76; D, 59-68; F, 58 or below. (UNF does not permit A+, C-, D+, or D- as course grades, therefore these grades are not shown on the course average grading scale).

Paper Styles and Format

Even though this course does not require the traditional term paper, the essays assigned are intended to have an academic component. Where citations are appropriate, I prefer that papers be submitted using the APA format. A brief overview of how to cite various kinds of publications in this format is provided by the UNF Library and can be accessed here: [Style Guide](#) .

Attendance Policy

I do keep attendance (each student will be required to sign in during each class period), and a pattern of unexcused absences (generally, more than 3) during the semester can lead to a penalty on your final average. Excused absences include medical problems verified by a doctor, university sanctioned events, or military deployments or assignments. All other absences will be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is in your interest to attend class.

Unless you have an excused absence for one of the reasons listed above, **I do not permit make-up examinations**. If you think that you might miss an exam, you should make every effort to contact me before the date of the exam. Any written assignments that are turned in after the announced due date will be penalized by one grade point per day. For example, a paper that

would have otherwise earned an "A," if turned in two days late, would earn a "B+," three days late a "B," and so forth.

Blackboard Information

Blackboard is a course delivery system that provides faculty and students the opportunity to access the Internet in a consistent and user-friendly way. The system provides extensive communications capability for conducting coursework outside of normal class times, and for sharing work. We will be using the Blackboard system in this course to a significant extent. However, the complete course will not be available on Blackboard. This is not a distance-learning course: you must attend class regularly to meet all of the requirements of the course.

If you have not used Blackboard in any previous classes, a self-paced online tutorial and other help is available. Go to [the UNF Blackboard Student Guide](#) . For additional assistance in accessing Blackboard or other problems, students may call the UNF Computing Service's Help Desk at UNF ext. 4357.

Academic Integrity

In all of your assignments, you must avoid the academic felony of PLAGIARISM, which is defined "as the act of taking someone else's words or ideas and putting them in your writing as if they were your own--without giving credit to the source" (UNF Department of Language and Literature, "Policy Statement," undated, p. 1). Definitions of plagiarism are also given in the UNF Student Handbook and in the printed schedule for each semester's courses. Plagiarism may be deliberate or unintentional, but it is the responsibility of every student to avoid it by doing your own work and providing attribution for material provided by others. Do not borrow another student's work and copy it. This is cheating! Any student who cheats on exams or submits work that I find to be plagiaristic will fail automatically that assignment, and possibly the course as well. Claiming ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an acceptable defense--if you are not sure, ask me!

In addition to plagiarism, other violations of academic integrity include: **cheating, fabrication and falsification, multiple submissions, abuse of academic materials, and complicity in academic dishonesty.** The full UNF Academic Integrity Code, including definitions of the above offenses, can be found in the current UNF [Student Handbook](#).

ADA Notice

The University of North Florida is committed to making reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities. If you need such accommodations for this course, please inform the instructor prior to the first assignment. Students should not expect to be able to claim a disability after they do poorly on an assignment. Only students who have a disability verified by the UNF

Disability Resource Center may claim an ADA accommodation in this class. The instructor will strictly follow the guidelines established by the Resource Center for accommodation of such students.

Classroom Courtesy

The classroom is a learning environment. A learning environment is one in which attention and effort by persons who presumably have an interest in learning is dedicated to the subject at hand. The classroom is not your living room or a movie theater or the inside of your personal vehicle. Because we are in a classroom, participants in the class will be expected to observe some common courtesies, as follows:

- **No eating during the class;**
- **Arrive on time; do not leave before the class is over;**
- **Do not leave the classroom and then come back in.** Leaving class to talk on your cell phone is not a valid reason for going in and out. If this becomes a problem in the course, I will lock the door to prevent re-entry;
- **Turn off cell phones or other electronics.** If you need to transact personal business during class time, then you have selected a course that is obviously incongruous with your personal schedule. Consider adjusting your schedule
- **Do not sleep during the class.** If you need to nap, you should do so outside the classroom;
- **Do not read newspapers, etc. or listen to music, etc.** through headphones during class;
- **Do not carry on private conversations with others** in the classroom while someone else is speaking (particularly when the instructor is speaking);
- **You may operate personal computers for taking notes or related purposes.** Do not use them to play games, watch DVD's, do homework, etc.;
- **Be courteous to your fellow students--respect their views, comments, or questions as you expect them to respect yours.**

Please go to the **Course Schedule** in the Course Information section of Blackboard for the schedule for the course. The Course Schedule shows the assigned readings and approximate dates for the topics we will cover, and dates for the exams.

1. David M. Buss. Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind. Allyn and

Bacon, 1999, p. 4.

2. Albert Somit and Steven Peterson, "Rational Choice and Biopolitics: A (Darwinian) Tale of Two Theories," PS: Political Science and Politics , 32, March, 1999, pp. 39-44.

The above schedule, policies, and assignments in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances or by mutual agreement between the instructor and the students.