

**Psyc 373: Evolutionary Psychology
Summer 2013: Online**

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Textbooks

Buss, D. M. (2008). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Other readings

There will be a lot of readings besides the textbook. I will post articles and chapters on D2L. I will post the readings for each assignment at the same time that I post the assignment.

Course description and objectives

This is an introductory course for students with little or no experience with evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology is a rapidly expanding area in psychology. Its theoretical roots are in Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection. Evolutionary psychologists aim to understand human nature by proposing and studying the psychological adaptations that may have evolved as solutions to the survival and reproductive challenges that humans faced over the long expanse of evolutionary history. In this course we will begin with readings on the status of evolutionary theory in mainstream psychology; we will then move on to readings on basic evolutionary processes (e.g., natural and sexual selection). We will then discuss a number of areas of active research in evolutionary psychology, and evaluate the scientific and theoretical merit of the research we discuss. We will read and discuss research and theory on topics such as human mating strategies and preferences, friendship, parental investment, infants' knowledge of the physical world, jealousy, and aggression and warfare. We will discuss research and theory on several topics that have spurred intense controversy among psychologists and laypersons alike: rape; jealousy; homicide; women in the military; and stereotyping and discrimination. The primary objective of this course is to familiarize you with the basic logic of the process of evolution by selection, with which you should be able to judge its relative value for shedding light on human motives, desires, and behaviors.

Regardless of your major, interests in psychology, and eventual career goals, my intent is to offer you interesting, useful, and thought-provoking course material. Upon successful completion of this course, you should 1) understand well the concept of adaptation and the process of evolution by natural and sexual selection, 2) be able to think critically about some of the major theories, research methods, and empirical findings in evolutionary psychology, and 3) be able to apply your knowledge of evolutionary psychology to your everyday relationships and decision-making.

Intellectual endeavor warnings

This course includes detailed readings and assignments about emotionally charged topics such as sexual desire, infidelity, rape, jealousy, violence, warfare, family conflict, mental illness, parasites, stereotyping, etc. Please try to remember that the more emotionally intense a human behavior is, the more important it is to understand scientifically – especially if we want to improve our society. If you are not comfortable thinking about and analyzing human violence, sexuality, and conflict, this may be a hard-to-stomach course for you. Also, this course may be personally challenging if you have a strong literal belief in the creation stories of the Old Testament, the Koran, the Native American cultures, or other traditions. Evolutionary psychology is based on evolutionary biology, the fossil evidence for human evolution, our behavioral similarities to other primates, and other theories and facts that can be hard to reconcile with Creationism or the 'Intelligent Design'

movement. If you have Creationist beliefs, you'll have to make your own decision about whether this course is right for you. Regardless of your religious beliefs or views, you will need to master the course material as it is presented. Dawkins and Buss are formidable opponents in this regard.

This course may also be challenging if you have strong post-modernist, relativist beliefs about the role of parents, culture, ideology, or gender roles in shaping human behavior. If you've taken typical introductory courses in women's studies, cultural anthropology, literary theory, sociology, or even developmental psychology, you may face some interesting challenges in trying to reconcile those viewpoints with this course's content. On the other hand, you may be pleasantly surprised by some of evolutionary psychology's insights.

UWEC learning goals

UWEC has established five goals of a liberal education, and they are promoted in this course. We should...

- Communicate effectively
- Demonstrate knowledge of human culture and the natural world
- Think creatively and critically
- Show individual and social responsibility
- Respect diversity

Goals in Psychology

The American Psychological Association has adopted 10 broad goals of the undergraduate major/minor in psychology, and we will attempt to pursue some of those in here, as well. Below, I link your course activities with the goals.

Your assignments (reading guides) will assess your daily understanding of the readings and your ability to apply the principles of evolution to understand human relationships, judgment, attitudes, and behaviors. For example, you will be asked to...

- Understand the breadth of evidence in support of evolution
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Reflect on and describe evolutionary psychologists' take on how nature and nurture interact (and on the difference between *influence* and *determine*)
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Use the logic of selection to account for psychological phenomena
(Goal 1: Knowledge Base of Psychology);
- Articulate strengths and limitations of various research designs and evaluate the validity of conclusions inferred from data
(Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology);
- Interpret visual displays of research findings
(Goal 2: Research Methods in Psychology);
- Distinguish between assumptions and evidence
(Goal 3: Critical Thinking Skills in Psychology);
- Identify applications of an evolutionary perspective to the origins of problems, such as interpersonal conflict, as well as their amelioration
(Goal 4: Application of Psychology);
- Recognize the ethical dangers of misunderstandings of selection or misuse of evolutionary principles
(Goal 5: Values in Psychology)
- Recognize the universal commonalities of all humans as well as the commonalities between humans and all other living organisms
(Goal 8: Sociocultural and International Awareness)

The assignments/reading guides

The questions I ask you will pertain to (1) the textbook and (2) the articles that, if I were in a live classroom, I would be telling you about.

So...there will be a lot of reading.

To make grading possible and *objective*, there will be a lot of closed-ended questions.

However, closed-ended does not mean mindless! I take pride in developing questions that force you to think or look carefully at a table or graph. Some of the questions will require *careful reading, critical thinking*, and a *willingness to apply the course content* to new situations.

I like a lot of assignments rather than just a few.

Completing lots of little assignments rather than two or three big exams provides a more accurate, reliable assessment of how well you really know the material. With two big exams, if you happen to break up with a boyfriend/girlfriend the night before the midterm, and get a cold before the final exam, you might do poorly (and for good reason). With lots of assignments, you might feel rotten for a few of them, but all the other students will too on some of them, so it all evens out more fairly.

Students requiring special accommodations

If you are a student with a disability that will require some form of accommodation, please contact Services for Students with Disabilities, Old Library 2136 (836-4542), for requisite documentation. I will make accommodations for you as necessary.

Academic dishonesty

I do not tolerate scholastic dishonesty of any kind, and I will act immediately on my own suspicions if they are strong. Sample violations include: (a) using student homework, papers, or ideas from other students or from previous semesters, unless approved by instructor; (b) asking for or giving information about the content of my assignments; and (c) representing work done by someone else – either a **fellow student** or a published researcher -- as your own (i.e., plagiarism). If you are concerned that an activity you are considering **might** fall into the dishonest category, please ask me about it.

Grading

- Your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on the reading guides. Some will be longer than others. There will be 29 in total – 2 or 3 each day.
- I will track your scores in D2L, so you will always be able to see how you are doing.
- I will either provide feedback directly on your assignment, or I will post a key to each review sheet (assignment) when I have graded it, so you can review the correct answers. PLEASE DO NOT SAVE THE ANSWER KEYS THAT I POST. If I ever want to re-use my questions, I have to trust you to not download the answer keys and pass them on to others. THAT IS ACADEMICALLY DISHONEST and helps NOBODY intellectually, so please do not do it. Likewise, please TELL me if you find out that anyone is doing it.

Final grades will be based on total points. I will use the plus/minus system. I will post scores on the D2L course website. I encourage you, however, to keep track of your own scores so that you can always have an estimate of how well you are performing in the course, and so that you can inquire about any discrepancies between your records and mine. If you think I made an entry error, please write me a note with your name and a brief explanation of the problem; I will check it out and get back to you as soon as possible.

	B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%	
A	93-100%	B	83-86%	C	73-76%	D	63-66%
A-	90-92%	B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	D-	60-62%
						F	<60%

