

Evolutionary Psychology, Cognitive Archaeology, and Psychological Prehistory

Course Description: This course is PSY 640, Evolutionary Psychology, as offered online in the Fall of 2026

OPTIONAL Text: If you would like a traditional comprehensive textbook then hit up Ebay or Amazon for a used edition of either Buss or Rossano. Both of those are excellent, and a cheap out of print past edition should be fine. There are others beyond those two, but they are problematically “hit and miss” across the span of topics we will cover and just not as good as Buss or Rossano...

*Note – There will be some **required** readings – but those will be freely available via D2L*

The Basics:

- All assignments have firm closing dates. That said, if you need extra time let me know and we can likely work something out.
- Plagiarism and cheating (broadly defined) is not allowed. Or, as the university likes me to say: "All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct)" If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating (including inappropriate uses of AI) please contact me.
- Also, note that “Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee. For more information, please contact the Director of Disability Resources & Services.”
- As we are online I am not sure this applies, but if you come to campus: Be advised that only qualified law enforcement officers or those who are otherwise authorized to carry a concealed handgun in the State of Texas are permitted to do so. Pursuant to Penal Code (PC) 46.035 and East Texas A&M Rule 34.06.02.R1, even licensed holders may not carry a concealed handgun in restricted locations.

Course Format: This is an online course organized around 15 primary units – one per week. Think of each unit as a “project.” That is, there are weekly learning objectives to be accomplished and you should likely be able to complete those in a couple of pages. Most weeks will have suggested readings/resources for answering the week’s questions. As you are graduate students, I leave it to you to find and secure additional appropriate sources as required.

There is an undergrad face-to-face section that I think several of you plan to attend, and that is fantastic. We will cover the same material. If practical and appropriate I may also do an online lecture each week via Zoom. This will be optional to you.

Assignments: There are no tests. The weekly responses/projects are the bulk of your grade. Beyond those, students need to write a “glorified book report.” This assignment can either be done as a traditional “10 page-ish” narrative, or as a recorded “voice-over PowerPoint” running ~20 minutes.

The book should be from the list below:

Readings to Pick From

- Boyd, B. (2009). *On the Origin of Stories*.
Boyer, P. (2018). *Minds make Societies*.
Brown, D. (1991). *Human Universals*.
Cauvin, J. (2000). *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*.
Clark, A. (2008). *Supersizing the Mind*.
Donald, M. (1991). *Origins of the Modern Mind*.
Donald, M. (2001). *A Mind so Rare*.
Dunbar, R. (2010) *How Many Friends Does One Person Need?*
Gamble, C., Gowlett, J & Dunbar, R. (2014). *Thinking Big: How the Evolution of Social Life Shaped the Human Mind*.
Gottschall, J. (2012). *The Storytelling Animal*.
Graeber, D. & Wengrow, D. (2021). *The Dawn of History*.
Hayden, B. (2018). *The Power of Ritual in Prehistory*.
Henrich, J. (2016). *The Secret of Our Success*
Hodder, I. (2010). *Religion in the Emergence of Civilization*.
Hodder, I. (2020). *Consciousness, Creativity, and Self at the Dawn of Settled Life*
Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the Wild*.
LeDoux, J. (2019). *The Deep History of Ourselves*.
Malafouris, L. (2013). *How Things Shape the Mind*.
Mithen, S. (2003). *After the Ice: A Global Human History 20000-5000 BC*.
Mithen, S. (1996). *The Prehistory of the Mind*.
Norenzayan, A. (2013). *Big Gods*.
Renfrew, C. (2007). *Prehistory*.
Renfrew, C & Zubrow, E. (1994). *The Ancient Mind*.
Sterelny, K. (2021). *The Pleistocene Social Contract*.
Sterelny, K. (2012). *The Evolved Apprentice*.
Watkins, T. (2023). *Becoming Neolithic*.
Wynn, T. & Coolidge, F. (2022). *An Introduction to Evolutionary Cognitive Archaeology*.
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Note – Most of these books are actually fairly inexpensive, but they can also be obtained through the library

Grades: Everybody starts with an A. Do what is asked each week and you will surely keep it.
Failing that, I will use a percentage based system to allocate grades below an A.

The Instructor: Dr. Tracy B. Henley

I will be on campus MWF or you can contact me at tracy.henley@etamu.edu

Schedule of Events:

I. Foundations

0 Big Picture Questions

What is Evolutionary Psychology, Cognitive Archaeology and Psychological Pre-History?
Evolution and Religion – Must there actually be a conflict?
Evolution and Culture – Competing or complimentary accounts of humanity?

1 History and Theory

Darwin and Wallace
After Darwin: Other Key Figures to Know
Core Concepts of Evolutionary Psychology

Criticisms: Just So Stories and the overuse of animal and “modern” examples

2 Evolutionary Basics

The Basics of Evolution and Genetics

Kinship and Kin Selection

Altruism and Cooperation

Reciprocity and The Prisoner’s Dilemma

II. Human Evolution and Cognitive Archaeology

3 Hominid Evolution

Ages, Apes, and Hominids

Out of Africa vs Multiregionalism

Hands, Brains, and Bi-Pedalism

4 What makes us, us?

When did we become Human?

The notion of Modernity

A first look at the Neolithic Revolution

III. Evolutionary Psychology Basics: Human Nature

5 Theory of Mind, Personality and Psychopathology

Theory of Mind and Machiavellian Intelligence

The Expression of Emotion

The Evolution of Morality

The Self

Personality and Pathology from an Evolutionary Perspective

6 Sociality

Social Organization and Cooperation basics

Behaving Badly... Selfishness, Loafing, Cheating, etc

Behaving Really Badly... Aggression, Warfare, and Homicide

7 Sexuality

The Red Queen...

Primate Sexuality and Society

Human Mate Selection and Sexuality

The Male Perspective

The Female Perspective

8 Gender and Development

Gender and Society

An aside on Amazons

Lifespan Development from an Evolutionary Perspective

Grandparents and why we live to get old...

Families from an Evolutionary Perspective

IV. The Essential Element: Human Social Organization

9 Social Behavior – A Closer Look

Primate Social Organization

Social Groups: Tajfel and Turner

The Evolutionary Psychology of Friendship

Ritual

10 Beyond Hunter-Gatherers

Göbekli Tepe and Dunbar's Number

Dominance

How Leaders Emerge

V. The Evolution of Cognition

11 Learning and Cognition

Rationalist Epistemology

Gibson and Beyond: Embodied and Cognition

Associative Learning

The Evolution of Thinking

The Evolution of Language

Extended Cognition

12 Symbolic Representations

Art and Symbolic Representation

Burials

The Emergence of Writing

VI. Later Cognitive Archaeology

13 The Advent of Religion

Cauvin: The Neolithic Revolution Reconsidered

The Evolution of Religion: Norenzayan and Big Gods

From Shamen to Ghosts

Göbekli Tepe

Gods

14 Human Universals

Human Universals

Why we have them...

What they seem to be...

15 A game of Civilization?

Later Prehistory and Psychology: From Göbekli Tepe to Thales

Implications of the Past for the Future