1. Instructors

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Dr. Tybur will be responsible for maintaining the Blackboard site (blackboard.vu.nl) and will be the point of contact for course inquiries. Please contact him via the email address listed above if you have questions regarding Blackboard, scheduling, etc.

2. Introduction

Every species has a “nature,” and humans are no different. But what is human nature, and how can we use the marvelous scientific advances of the past century to better understand human nature? How can an understanding of human nature help us better understand basic parts of life, such as cooperation and conflict, love and sex, and cultural universals and differences?

The course is designed to address these issues. It begins with broad overviews of the theories from evolutionary biology that have revolutionized the study of animal behavior, and it continues by explaining how these theories have been applied to understanding human cognition and culture. Lectures are centered around an edited volume that contains brief chapters, each of which discusses some of the critical issues underlying evolutionary perspectives on human behavior.

Across nine lectures, Dr. Tybur, a social psychologist, and Dr. Thomese, a sociologist, will lead students through these issues. Additionally, guest lecturers with expertise in evolutionary biology, human cooperation, experimental techniques that manipulate facial features, and mating and risk taking will give guest lectures.
Students will also give group presentations at the end of the last three lectures. In these presentations, students will discuss a modern problem or puzzle in society and explain how evolutionary approaches can be used to generate and test hypotheses for better understanding these problems.

3. **At the end of the course, students will be able to**

- Analyze and understand human behavior, culture and society from an evolutionary perspective
- Use an evolutionary perspective to develop novel hypotheses about human social behavior
- Understand and distinguish biological and cultural evolution

4. **Main course elements and concepts**

In nine meetings we discuss evolutionary themes and topics through mini-lectures, class assignments and group discussions. The literature for this course consists of the book *The Evolution of Mind: Fundamental Questions and Controversies*, edited by Steven Gangestad and Jeffry Simpson (The Guilford Press, 2007). Students will also read some additional literature offering further elaborations of contemporary issues in evolutionary psychology and cultural evolution. These additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

5. **Working formats and activities**

Each class period will consist of a lecture that covers the reading material and introduces and discusses related material. We will have expert guest lecturers present their research that relates to the reading material.

For each of the last two class meetings, four groups of students will give 10 minute presentations explaining a contemporary societal puzzle or problem from an evolutionary perspective. Two groups will each present on the same topic on the same day, and they will engage in a 10 minute debate after their presentations.

6. **Assessment methods**

**Quizzes (20% of total grade):**

Each class period will begin with a quiz that is based on the assigned readings for that class. The quizzes will be multiple choice. The quiz component of the final grade will drop the lowest grade (so, either a zero, if a student has missed a quiz due to illness or other emergency, or their lowest performance on a quiz, if they have taken all eight quizzes). If you arrive late to class, or if you are absent from class, you will receive a zero for that quiz. Hence, to receive a good grade in this course, it is absolutely essential that you keep up with the course readings and that you attend every class and arrive to class on time.

**Class Projects (30% of total grade):**

All students will, as a group, give a presentation and write a short paper (between 2000 and 3000 words) on a topic, which will be assigned by 2 March. Each groups will include
approximately four students (some groups might have five). Two students from each group will give a presentation during either Week 14 or 16, and the remaining students should put more effort into the paper. The presentation and paper should have roughly similar content. Each group will decide which two group members will speak. We suggest that the remaining group members take more effort in preparing the paper. Note: grades will be given to the groups, so it is important that all group members contribute to the paper and presentation content (e.g., Powerpoint slides). Additionally, students within groups will evaluate each other – these peer evaluations will make up one-sixth of each individual’s grade for the class project, with the remaining being determined by the group average.

Each presentation and paper should, briefly:

1. Explain how a societal issue might be viewed through an evolutionary lens (e.g., what an evolutionary perspective might add toward understanding the issue)

2. Propose either an adaptationist explanation for the phenomenon (that is, an explanation claiming that the phenomenon has an underlying functional basis) or a byproduct hypothesis (that is, an explanation claiming that the phenomenon is a byproduct of other adaptations). Note – for each topic, one group of four will argue for an adaptationist explanation, and the other group will argue for a byproduct explanation

3. Each group, in the presentation and paper, should provide two arguments supporting their perspective and two arguments arguing against the opposing perspective

4. Finally, each group should propose at least two testable hypotheses, with suggestions of how to test the hypotheses.

Presentations must be in Powerpoint.

Following each group’s presentation, the two groups will have a 10 minute debate, which will be moderated by the instructor.

Topic choices will be provided to students by 16 February, and students will then list their preferred topics. The instructors will then assign students to a topic based on their preferences. Students will know their topic no later than 2 March.

Final exam (50% of total grade):

The final exam will include a mix of multiple choice questions, open response questions, and essay questions. Note – since reading material is covered in the quizzes, many (most) of the multiple choice questions will concern material emphasized in lectures and discussed by guest speakers.
7. Timetable with reading agenda

Note – all classes are in BelleVU room 1H-26

| Monday Week 6 | 2 February 18:00 – 21:00 | Course overview, background on evolutionary theory, and assumptions of evolutionary approaches to human behavior
Main Lecturer: Josh Tybur
Guest Lecturer: Nico van Stralen |
|---|---|---|
| Monday Week 7 | 9 February 18:00 – 21:00 | What do we know about our ancestors? The concept of the EEA.
Readings: Text pages 38-44, 45-52, 60-66, 97-102, 103-110, 111-120
Main Lecturer: Josh Tybur |
| Monday Week 8 | 16 February 18:00 – 21:00 | Thinking in terms of costs and benefits: The example of cooperation
Reading: Text pages 121-129, 130-136, 137-144
Main Lecturer: Josh Tybur
Guest Lecturer: Daniel Balliet |
| Monday Week 9 | 23 February 18:00 – 21:00 | Measuring current fitness and reproductive success – what can this tell us about evolution and human nature?
Reading: Text pages 69-77, 78-85, 86-94
Main Lecturer: Fleur Thomese |
| Monday Week 10 | 2 March 18:00 – 21:00 | Culture and evolution 1
Reading: Text pages 327-331, 332-338, 348-356
Main Lecturer: Fleur Thomese
Student presentations |
| Monday Week 11 | 9 March 18:00 – 21:00 | Evolutionary approaches to human psychology and the modularity of mind
Readings: Text pages 1-18, 153-160, 161-167
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**Additional recommended readings:**
These readings are *not required* and you will *not be tested on them*. They are listed for your benefit, in case you are especially interested in the material covered in this course and want to know more. These include:

- This is a witty take on how modular perspectives on psychology can help explain topics such as moral hypocrisy, self-deception, and self-control

- This is a lucidly written book discussing about sexual selection and human psychology

- This is the best popular science treatment of modularity and evolutionary psychology

- This is the book that motivated Dr. Tybur to pursue graduate studies in psychology

*Please talk with your instructors if you are interested in additional optional readings.*