

Syllabus Psy 307; Geher; Spring 2018
Evolutionary Psychology
SUNY New Paltz
Professor: Glenn Geher

• Office: WH 347

Office Hours:

(starting Friday, 1/19; through Wednesday, 5/16):
Tuesdays, 200-400 Wednesdays, 1230-230 Fridays, 200-350

• Office phone number: 257-3091 • E-mail: geherg@newpaltz.edu • Web address:
<http://www.glenngeher.com>

Required reading materials:

[Geher, G. \(2014\). Evolutionary Psychology 101. New York: Springer.](#)

Course Background and Objectives:

Welcome to Evolutionary Psychology! Are human beings products of evolutionary forces such as natural and sexual selection? Is the human nervous system, thus, a product of organic evolution? Is human behavior a product of the workings of the nervous system?

Evolutionary psychologists answer *yes* to all these questions. Further, we believe that understanding the intricacies of evolution has the potential to advance our understanding of psychology by leaps and bounds. Understanding behavior from this perspective, as I see it, allows for a deeper and more coherent understanding of psychology than is afforded by alternative perspectives on psychology.

The ideas included herein have the potential to radically improve our understanding of each and every domain of psychology. As I see it, there is simply no kind of psychology that is NOT, ultimately, evolutionary in nature. This course has extraordinary potential to open minds to new ways of understanding behavior (across species).

Given how important this course is to me, I put a ton into it. Further, I expect a ton out of my students in this class. This class may be the most rigorous of the courses I teach. The readings are many – and they are not easy. Further, it is essential that all students do all the readings on time. I want the students in this class to be 100% dedicated. If you feel that this kind of experience, for whatever reason, is not something for which

you are currently prepared, I recommend that you drop the course (I won't be offended!).

The primary goal of this course is to expose you to the basic premises of evolutionary psychology. In moving toward this goal, you will complete several readings dedicated to the basics of evolutionary psychology.

An additional goal is for you to learn the content of evolutionary psychology (including ideas and research on topics of parenting, mating, altruism, sexual orientation, aggression, and more).

Further, you will learn about major controversies that surround the field – as well as the likely future of evolutionary psychology.

The material in this course is often considered controversial for a variety of reasons. Evolutionary explanations have been criticized from multiple perspectives. Some critics have claimed that such explanations are tautological, and ultimately non-explanatory in nature. Others have suggested that evolutionary psychology serves to promote a male-biased world-view. Still others have argued that evolutionary psychology is tantamount to genetic determinism. While several evolutionary scholars have addressed such concerns, it is important for students to be exposed to such criticisms. As such, a core part of this course will address criticisms of evolutionary psychology. Such controversial issues that we will address include:

- A. Is EP sexist?
- B. Is EP a biologically defensible doctrine?
- C. Is EP eugenicist in nature?
- D. Is EP evil?
- E. Do the basic ideas of EP necessitate a *massively modularistic* view of the human mind?
- F. Can you believe in evolution and believe in true altruism concurrently?
- G. Can an evolutionary psychologist believe in group selection?
- H. Is EP relevant to individual differences between people?

Like every last one of us, my understanding of human nature is in progress. I expect that will be true for the rest of my days. I am excited about the controversies that surround EP and I always try to keep an open mind when presented with new, challenging ideas regarding the nature of human nature.

An additional, practical goal of this course is for you to express ideas about evolutionary explanations of behavior in your writing. Thus, this class will require that you engage in writing. This expression-of-ideas goal is based largely on my philosophy that knowing things without being able to express them to other people is akin to not knowing anything at all.

Each and every class you take should change your worldview – if even slightly – in some way. This class should be no exception. The journey will not be easy – the many readings will be high-level – the writing assignments will be graded with a critical eye – and the exams will be no joke. If all goes right, the successful student in this class will be rewarded intellectually for his or her hard work – and will carry with him or her important insights into human nature for years to come. I want that to be you. Welcome.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Demonstrate an understanding of basic evolutionary principles
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history of the evolution and behavior interface in academia
- Summarize key research findings in the field related to parenting, mating, altruism, and religion
- Discuss and describe applications of work in the field of evolutionary psychology to various social issues (such as education)
- Describe and discuss points of controversy related to the field

Course Requirements:

1. Examinations (2; 35 points each): Each exam will include essay questions and/or multiple-choice questions. Study guides will be posted ahead of time – students will be encouraged to go over the study guides with me (GG) and/or the course assistants ahead of the exams.

2. PAPER - BRIEF Research Proposal (20 points):

Evolutionary psychology is a research-based enterprise. And learning about evolutionary psychology tends to lead people to develop hypotheses about human nature. For this assignment, you are to write a brief paper that does the following:

1. Articulates a hypothesis based on evolutionary reasoning.
2. Describes methods that would test this hypothesis.
3. Predicted outcomes and implications.

Importantly, this paper is to be no more than two pages – printed on two sides of a single page. And it should be double-spaced.

This kind of assignment, forcing you to get your ideas reduced in a small space matches the kinds of assignments that professionals have all the time – this assignment will help prepare you for this kind of assignment in your future.

A sample research proposal is linked from the course website, and is found here:

<https://faculty.newpaltz.edu/glenngeher/evolutionary-psychology-sample-research-proposal/>

Note that you are strongly encouraged to bring drafts to my office hours (or to the hours of one of our course assistants) to go over this work before it's due. We want to help!

3. Blackboard postings (10 total points; 1 point for each successful posting – for grading, the total number of points will be converted to a percentage (e.g., if you have completed 7 postings, you will get a 70% on this component of the course)).

You will be assigned to one blackboard group overseen by one of the course assistants for this course. For 10 specified weeks (corresponding to the 10 book chapters), a blackboard forum will be created by your course assistant. You will be required to post at least ONE content-oriented posting in the specified time period (based on the dates in the course calendar). Acceptable postings will be written in full sentences and will accurately cite specific ideas/findings from the readings (e.g., “I think that Miller’s ideas on altruism as resulting from sexual selection are fascinating – and I have seen several examples of altruistic behavior that seem to relate to courtship in people I know ...”). In questionable cases, the course assistants will consult with me (GG) regarding whether a posting fits the criteria.

Importantly, the postings must be submitted PRIOR TO MIDNIGHT OF THE DAY OF THE SUBSEQUENT WEEK’s class period to count. See details in course calendar section of this syllabus.

Grading: Grades for all assignments will be converted to percentages. The following equation will be used to determine your final grade:

• Final grade =

$(\text{Exam1} * .35) + (\text{Exam2} * .35) + (\text{Paper} * .20) + (\text{BlackBoard postings} * .10)$

Your final grade will be on a scale from 0 to 100. Final grades will be converted to letter grades using the following criteria:

94 – 100 = A

90 – 93 = A-

87 – 89 = B+

84 – 86 = B

80 – 83 = B-

77 – 79 = C+

74 – 76 = C

70 – 73 = C-

67 – 69 = D+

64 – 66 = D

60 – 63 = D-

Below 60 = F

Course Calendar

DATE	TOPIC / READING	ASSIGNMENT
1/25	Welcome to class; SYLLABUS	
2/1 (Glenn's birthday!)	Chapter 1; Basics of EP	
2/8	Chapter 2; Evolutionary Developmental Psychology	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 1 due before midnight
2/15	Chapter 3; Courtship	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 2 due before midnight
2/22	Chapter 4; Human Sexuality	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 3 due before midnight
3/1	Chapter 5; Pairbonding	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 4 due before midnight
3/8	EXAM 1 (Chs. 1-5)	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 5 due before midnight
3/15	Chapter 6; Altruism	
3/22	Spring Break - get silly!	
3/29	Chapter 7; Aggression	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 6 due before midnight
4/5	Chapter 8; EP and issues of humanity and Chapter 9; Controversies surrounding EP	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 7 due before midnight
4/12	Chapter 10; The future of EP; Positive Evolutionary Psychology	BlackBoard posting for Ch. 8 due before midnight; BlackBoard posting for Ch. 9 due before midnight; PAPER IS DUE at START of class

4/19	NEEPS PREVIEW!!! (special guest: Doug Kenrick, and more!!!)	CHAPTER 10; BB due before Midnight
4/19-4/22	12th annual meeting of NEEPS	Free admission for student volunteers!
4/26	Evolutionary Psychology Independent Conference (EPIC) III	
5/3	Capstone / Review	
5/5	Questionable Authorities at Snugs - 10pm - STUDY BREAK ...	
5/17	Final exam (Chapters 6-10 AND content from NEEPS Preview AND EPIC); 5-7pm	

Course policies:

1. **Cheating.** DO NOT CHEAT. Any student caught cheating on an exam will automatically fail that exam and, perhaps, the course. Possible penalties include failing said examination and/or having an academic dishonesty complaint filed against the student in question. Failure of the entire class is also possible.

2A. **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism occurs when material is taken from a source without proper citation. If you quote something directly (i.e., if you use another author's EXACT WORDS), you **must** use quotation marks. If you borrow an idea and reword it, you **must** report your source. Possible penalties include failing said assignment and/or having an academic dishonesty complaint filed against the student in question. Failure of the entire class is also possible. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE.

Elaborated plagiarism policy is here:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/darwins-subterranean-world/201512/how-not-plagiarize>

2B. **AVOID turn-of-phrase plagiarism!** Paraphrasing ideas of others is not the same as rewriting all of their sentences with substituted words or structural changes. For instance, suppose that you find an article that says the following: **"The stimulus in this study was very**

large and the environment was highly controlled." It would be totally plagiarizing if you changed this to either:

- **"The stimulus in this research was enormous and the context was highly stabilized."** or
- **"In this study, the environment was highly controlled and the stimulus in this study was very large."**

In paraphrasing, you need to look AWAY from what you have read when you write your summary - and describe the ideas as you would as if you were describing them to a lay person. That's best writing - and will help you avoid getting called out on plagiarism.

3. **Missing exams.** A Make-up exam may be given **if** there are extenuating circumstances AND it (the make-up exam) is (ideally) officially **scheduled before** the scheduled examination. If such circumstances are shown to exist, you may be able to take a make-up exam. Special arrangements will be made as to the time and place of any make-up exams. If a student requests a make-up exam after the scheduled examination, and especially extenuating circumstances (e.g., a serious illness) are demonstrated to exist, scheduling of a make-up exam might be considered.

4. **Feedback on paper.**

You are encouraged to meet with me (GG) and/or the course assistants to obtain feedback on ideas or a draft of your paper before it's due. For me, it would be best if you could bring me a hard copy of your work directly to my office hours.

5. **LATE PAPERS.** ABSOLUTELY NO PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE LAST DAY OF CLASS (NOT THE FINAL EXAM). Further, any such late papers must be handed in **at** the meeting of the last class (not through a friend, etc.).

6. **Course conflicts.** If you have a regular scheduling conflict with this course (e.g., you will have to leave every class before the end of class because of work, you have another course scheduled that overlaps with this course, or you will be going to Rome for 2 weeks during the term) you should **not** take this course.

7. **Your paper for this class may NOT be based on a paper you have written for another class.**

8. **NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES** (including, but not limited to: cell phones, text-messaging devices, Sony Playstations, etc.) may be turned on **during class or during examinations**. Possible penalties include failing an examination and/or having an academic dishonesty complaint filed against the student in question. Further, such items are NOT to be USED during class (**notetaking with a laptop is only acceptable**

with my expressed written permission – and note that surfing the web during class is just all wrong!).

9. **Attendance policy.** You are encouraged to attend this class. Doing so can only help your grade. Attendance is not mandatory.

10. *SUNY New Paltz's ADA Policy Statement*

Students with documented physical, learning, psychological and other disabilities are entitled to receive reasonable accommodations. If you need classroom or testing accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center (Student Union Building, Room 205, 257-3020). The DRC will provide forms verifying the need for accommodation. As soon as the instructor receives the form, you will be provided with the appropriate accommodations. Students are encouraged to request accommodations as close to the beginning of the semester as possible.

As a teacher I feel that my role is to help you learn, not to grade you, so please feel free to come see me or call me throughout the term if you have any concerns or questions. I mean it. Have a great semester.

Glenn's Writing Tips

No papers with an abundance of the following errors will receive a grade of an A.

1. USUALLY *affect* is a verb and *effect* is a noun.

e.g., This variable *affects* several things.

e.g., That other variable produced a very large *effect*.

2. If the subject of your sentence is singular, the verb and subsequent pronouns referring to the subject must be also.

e.g., The participant then provided *his or her* (not *their*) background information.

e.g., The point of these studies *was* (not *were*) to find if blah, blah, blah ... (*point* is singular).

3. Never use the word *prove* in a psychology paper. While psychologists do many things, proving is virtually never one of them.

INCORRECT: These results prove that Schmedley's hypothesis was correct.

BETTER: These results support Schmedley's hypothesis.

BETTER STILL: These results support the hypothesis that Schmedley should change his name ... just kidding.

4. Be succinct. Do not use a lot of words to make a point if you can make the same point with fewer words. If two papers make the same points, the one with fewer words is, to my mind, better.

BAD: Asch's research on conformity is very interesting because it includes interesting research and has important ideas that are very meaningful.

BETTER: Asch's research on conformity is interesting for several reasons.

5. AVOID 1st person (when possible) and, especially, opinions (unless they are asked for).

BAD: I am writing a paper on conformity. In this paper, I will talk about how social psychologists have studied conformity and why I am so interested in this interesting topic.

BETTER: This paper will address conformity as it has been studied in social psychology.

6. Do not use contractions.

BAD: Subjects were asked if they'd administer an electric shock.

BETTER: Subjects were asked if they would administer an electric shock.

7. *Its* vs. *It's*. *It's* means it is (but you should not be using contractions anyway). *Its* is a possessive pronoun referring to a noun that possesses something.

e.g., The frog grabbed the fly with its tongue. (here *its* means *the frog's*)

8. Punctuation marks go inside quotation marks.

BAD: Then the experimenter said, "Oh Boy".

BETTER: Then the experimenter said, "Oh Boy."

BETTER STILL: Then the experimenter said, "Golly!"

9. Always follow the word *this* with a specific noun. Otherwise, your writing will be unclear.
 BAD: Changes will be made at all levels of management. The impact of this will be enormous.
 BETTER: Changes will be made at all levels of management. The impact of this restructuring will be enormous.

10. *i.e.*, means “in other words.” *e.g.*, means “for example.”

e.g., These people are thought to be cerebral in nature (*i.e.*, they tend to think a lot).

e.g., Their diet includes several kinds of flowers (*e.g.*, roses).

11. Some helpful word substitutions:

Change

<i>looked at</i>	to	<i>examined</i>
<i>got</i>	to	<i>obtained</i>
<i>did</i>	to	<i>conducted</i>

12. Only use the word “correlation” if you are referring to a specific relationship between two different continuous variables. Do not just throw this word around because it sounds good.

GOOD: A positive correlation was observed between number of hamburgers eaten and the size of one’s bellyache.

BAD: A correlation between these different ideas can be found. (This sentence simply does not mean anything).

13. AVOID turn-of-phrase plagiarism! Paraphrasing ideas of others is not the same as rewriting all of their sentences with substituted words or structural changes. For instance, suppose that you find an article that says the following: “The stimulus in this study was very large and the environment was highly controlled.” It would be totally plagiarizing if you changed this to either:

“The stimulus in this research was enormous and the context was highly stabilized.” or: “In this study, the environment was highly controlled and the stimulus in this study was very large.”

In paraphrasing, you need to look AWAY from what you have read when you write your summary — and describe the ideas as you would as if you were describing them to a lay person. That’s best writing — and will help you avoid getting called out on plagiarism.

14. Compound adjectives are clusters of words that, in combination, describe some noun.

Unless the first word in the cluster is an adverb ending in “ly” (random rule), the words in the cluster need to be hyphenated to make it clear that they act as a unit. For instance:

Change: *The student was well read* to: *The student was well-read*. (here, well and read work together to make a single adjective)

Change: *The tip of the tongue phenomenon is really cool* to *The tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon is really cool* (here tip and of and the and tongue work together to make a single adjective).

15. Technical terms should be demarcated by italics and defined on first use.

Change: Evolutionary mismatch may play a role in terms of why people now overeat unhealthy foods.

To: *Evolutionary mismatch*, which corresponds to situations in which modern environments do not match ancestral conditions that were common during evolution, may play a role in terms of why people now overeat unhealthy foods.

16. "Data," meaning *pieces of information*, is plural for "datum," meaning *a single piece of information*. Thus, *data* is a plural word - and it needs to be used in writing as such!

Incorrect: This data has an interesting implication.

Correct: These data have an interesting implication.

OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS!

The successful completion of either of the following two options (and **ONLY** these two options) will lead to having 10 points added to a student's final exam grade. A student may only get credit for completing one of these two options.

OPTION A: The Ancestor's Trail: USA!!! (PENDING FORMAL APPROVAL OF THIS INITIATIVE - I will let you know!)

This semester is a special time to be taking this class - as this class will connect with opening celebration for the Ancestor's Trail - a set of hiking trails in the Gunks that will map onto lineages of the evolution of various life forms - to create an educational resource for science educators regarding the nature of evolution. The opening ceremony of the Trail will take place on a Saturday in April (4/28). On this date, all SUNY New Paltz students will be welcome to hike in the Mohonk Preserve for free!

Further, students in this class have an option of participating as a docent. If you choose to serve as a *docent* (fancy word for volunteer for the experience), you'll be contributing to the manual for the trail by writing a one-page summary regarding the evolutionary origins of a particular species (that will be represented on the trail). ***You will also be required (if you choose this option) to attend at least one planning meeting regarding the event and to volunteer as a trail guide at the event itself (4/28, Saturday).*** And if you choose this option, it better be good as it is expected to make it into the formal manual of the Ancestor's Trail! The written piece will be due prior to 3/15, submitted by email (to me geherg@newpaltz.edu) website: <http://evostudies.org/the-ancestors-trail-usa/>

If interested, meet with Olivia Jewell - WH 317, Thursdays, 11-1. .

OPTION B: Another research proposal!

In the spirit of making sure that all students have equal opportunities, I'm providing an additional option. Successful completion of this option will also lead to 10 points being added to one's final exam grade. The assignment here would be to complete the research proposal assignment (named above – it is the non-writing-intensive option for the paper). Note that the version submitted for this “additional options” component will be graded on a pass/fail basis – and a pass would lead to the 10 points being added to your final exam grade. **This is due at the start of the final class period (NOT the final exam).** It must be submitted in hard-copy (paper format).