



USC Dornsife

Dana and David Dornsife
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

HBIO 300: EVOLUTION, ECOLOGY, AND CULTURE

4 units

Mon., 4–6:50 PM

Instructor: Dr. Trond Sigurdson

Office: AHF 139

Office Hours: TBA (or email me for appointment)

Contact Info: Email: sigurdse@usc.edu

Lecture Hall: SGM 601

Required Literature (available in the USC Bookstore):

Dawkins: The Selfish Gene

Lieberman: Story of the human body

Stanford: Hunting Apes

Low: Why Sex Matters

Diamond: Guns germs and steel

Marlowe: The Hadza

Pinker: The Blank Slate

Additional readings will be provided in class (PDFs).

Course Description

In this course we will study how human biological evolution and cultural development affect our bodies, the environment, and the way we interact with each other. This course provides a comprehensive overview of how biological and cultural influences interface and make us human. It considers the extent to which we can use Darwinian theory to achieve a better understanding of human behavior and cultural development. We begin with a fundamental premise: that human social behavior is the outcome of a complex interplay between our biology, molded by millennia of natural selection, mediated by the environment to which we were adapted during our evolution, and filtered through a complex web of cultural factors. We cannot truly separate the intricate braid of human biology and human culture. We can, however, ask what the causes and consequences of this interplay may be. This can be done not only for people living in traditional hunter-gatherer societies, but also for ourselves in western culture. We will consider the biological and cultural underpinnings of such topics as the human diet, the human mind, and the development of human civilization.

Another major goal of the course is to teach students how to create and present professional academic papers as well as presentations (PowerPoint or similar). These are skills that are useful in any career, particularly in academics. The time requirements for this course will be substantial because students will be reading and presenting on the class readings, and will also engage in producing a major research review paper and an oral presentation. A heavy emphasis will be placed on daily class attendance, participation in discussions, and the student's efforts to make written and oral works interesting and clear. Each group will work on a book discussion (preferably with PP slides prepared), AND each individual student should write a term paper based on the same subject, or a related topic subject to approval. The paper should be about 4-6 pages long, and should primarily be based on original research papers on a subject that is related to topics discussed in class. The paper can give reference to the book that was presented, but should also contain references to at least three peer reviewed papers. The term paper does not have to come to the same conclusions as the books used. The paper will be presented by the individual student towards the end of the class.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the course, students will:

- know key concepts of the interactions of human biology, social interactions, and environment
- understand how changing human environments may affect our health
- know basics of how human societies evolve and diverge
- have basic knowledge on the biological underpinnings of the human mind, including modules such as aggression, sexuality, and cooperation
- be able to discuss, make presentations, and write papers on the topics above

Recommended Preparation: HBIO 200

Course Notes

Each lecture is a combination of topics presented by the Instructor, as well as a seminar-type discussion. Students are expected to take active part in these discussions. Lectures will not be recorded, but any Powerpoint slides used will be posted on Brightspace. However, these do not contain all the information needed, so it is very important to take part in the lectures, take notes, and participate in class.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Homework/Preparedness	20%
Moderation of Book Discussion	10%
Book Presentation	20%
Quizzes/ Short tests	25%
Individual Topic Presentation	25%

Course Schedule (Mondays at 4 pm):

<i>Time:</i>	<i>Topic:</i>	<i>Readings/Due:</i>
Aug 26	Introduction of topics and books	
Sep 2	Labor Day (no classes)	
Sep 9	Human evolution	Skim books, pick topics and groups
Sep 16	Human evolution and cultural evolution	Quiz
Sep 23	Human aggression, cooperation and sexuality	Assigned papers
Sep 30	Students present book: Why Sex Matters New topic: Evolution and cultural evolution	Quiz, Low
Oct 7	Students present book: The Selfish Gene New topic: Violence and warfare	Dawkins
Oct 14	Students present book: The Blank Slate New topic: Hunter-gatherers	Quiz, Pinker
Oct 21	Students present book: The Hadza New topic: The human mind; nature/nurture	Marlowe
Oct 28	Students present book: Story of the human body New topic: Culture and geography	Quiz, Lieberman
Nov 4	Students present book: Guns, Germs & Steel New topic: Civilizations	Diamond
Nov 11	Veterans Day, no lecture	
Nov 18	Papers: Q and A, Student Presentations of papers	Final Quiz, Paper draft
Nov 25	Student Presentations of papers	Final paper due
Dec 2	Student Presentations of papers	

Grading Timeline

The graded assignments will be handed back to the student after one week. Final grades will be set four days after the end of the course.

Course Policies

- 1) No special assignments for extra credit are permitted.
- 2) Academic integrity policies of the University will be strictly followed (see below). Infractions can result in severe penalties. There may be assigned seating for exams. No student may be admitted to an exam after the first student has left the exam.
- 3) It may be necessary to make adjustments to the syllabus during the semester. Check the course website for updates.

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: sarc.usc.edu

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. equity.usc.edu

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, and hate crimes need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <https://osas.usc.edu/about/contact-location-hours/>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu