Human Nature – Fall 2013 – GN HON 2243H-03

Professor: Karthik Panchanathan  Email: panchanathank@missouri.edu
Class Location: Center Hall 1220  Class Time: TuTh 11:00 am–12:15 pm
Office Location: 105 Swallow Hall  Office Hours: Tu 2–3 pm, Th 9:30–10:30 am, & by appt.

Course description. In this course, we will investigate the topic of human nature. What are we like? Why do we behave the way we do? Are we inherently selfish or social? Do we have a unitary “self” or are we made up of many (and sometimes contradictory) selves? Is there a single “human” nature or are there distinct “male” and “female” natures? Does human nature vary across cultures? Insights to these kinds of questions come from fields ranging from genetics to literature. The concept of “human nature” is fiercely contested and debated both within and between academic disciplines. We will be focusing on the scientific study of human nature, seeking naturalistic explanations by formulating and testing hypotheses. In particular, we will use evolutionary theory to unify explanations from disparate disciplines like biology, psychology, and anthropology. During each meeting, we will discuss one specific topic like sex or violence and seek to make sense of it from both the proximate level (how does the behavior develop and manifest?) and the ultimate level (why did our evolutionary history imbue us with this capacity?).

Course objectives
• To develop a scientific mindset, the ability to ask good questions, and the ability to argue rationally
• To learn the basic concepts and controversies surrounding evolutionary theory and its use in explaining behavior
• To learn how to carefully read and critically evaluate primary and secondary academic literature

Readings. You do not need to purchase anything for this course. I will post readings to the Blackboard site (see the reading list below). Read articles in the order in which they are posted. Read before coming to class, take class, and come prepared to discuss. Some of the readings will be challenging. You may want to read them again after class.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading discussion</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Writing advice. If you need help, talk to me or visit the Writing Center in the Student Success Center. Through the Writing Center, you can meet with a tutor or submit online. Appointments are available Monday–Friday from 9–5 and some evenings. For more information please visit the Writing Center at http://writery.missouri.edu. You can also read a guide book. I like The Uses of Argument by Toulmin for building an argument, Economical Writing by McCloskey for writing well, and Clear and Simple As the Truth by Thomas and Turner for writing in classic style.

Students with disabilities. Please let me know as soon as possible if you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, you have emergency medical information to share with me, or you need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated. If you require disability-related accommodations (such as a notetaker, extended time on exams or captioning), please register with the Office of Disability Services (http://disabilityservices.missouri.edu, S5 Memorial Union, 573-882–4696). After you have registered, please notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other MU resources for students with disabilities, click on “Disability Resources” on the bottom of the MU homepage (http://missouri.edu).

Academic Integrity. Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person’s work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult me or the University’s policy and procedures at http://osrr.missouri.edu/guidelines/procedure.html.
Course Requirements

Participation. Attendance is mandatory. You will be evaluated on how well you participate. This means doing the readings before class and contributing to the discussions. To facilitate active discussion, cell phones and laptops are not permitted in class. Take notes the old fashion way, on paper.

Leading discussion. Each of you will lead one session’s discussion. Below are some tips for discussion leaders.

• Read the assignments extra carefully, preferably more than once.
• Think about what you want to get across. What are the main points? How do the readings relate to one another?
• Think about how you want to lead discussion. Do you want to divide the class into small discussion groups? Do you want to give a short introduction and then moderate a large-group discussion?
• When leading discussion remember not to answer your own questions before you ask them (e.g., “I thought Dawkins did a bad job when discussing the evolution of behavior. What did you think?”). Avoid “yes”/”no” questions. Ask open-ended questions that will get people to share their own ideas about the readings.
• Be organized. Sketch out a general map of how you think the discussion might go. Work from organized notes.
• Don’t expect to follow the map exactly. And don’t force it! Often, the best part of discussions are the unexpected turns. Be flexible. Allow a few minutes here and there to see where tangents might go. Bring the discussion back to the plan when the tangents seem to be going nowhere.
• Don’t get nervous. You won’t be alone. I will be lecturing on some topics during each meeting. And, I will facilitate discussion by asking some questions and answering others.
• Have fun!

Research paper. Choose a fictional character (not too obscure, please) who exhibits some behavior you would like to better understand. Write a 10–15 page research paper aimed at a smart reader (but not a specialist) that explains this behavior from an evolutionary perspective. This is a research paper, not a creative writing assignment! You should read broadly to understand your topic, mostly research articles, not newspapers or websites. Your final paper should have at least five high-quality citations, but preferably more. Document your citations following the MLA formatting guidelines (http://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/col/bruinsuccess/files/mlaguide.pdf). Your assignment isn’t necessarily to come up with a novel evolutionary explanation; since there is plenty of bad science, you can criticize existing explanations. You have complete freedom to choose the character and behavior. Example essays are posted on the course website. If you need help coming up with a question or finding sources, don’t hesitate to contact me. At the end of the semester, with your permission, I will compile the essays into a book called The Science of Fiction, Volume IV, and distribute copies to everyone in the class. Below are the deadlines for the paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep 3</td>
<td>Bring in a (vague) research question and fictional character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep 17</td>
<td>Annotated bibliography – a detailed summary of at least 3 articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Bring in a one-page research proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 22</td>
<td>Rough draft due – Bring in a paper copy for me and each of your peer reviewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 3</td>
<td>Turn in research documentation worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 3–5</td>
<td>In-class presentations – email me powerpoint files by 5 pm the night before (if using)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec 12</td>
<td>Final draft of the research paper due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feb 1 Optional: Submit your paper for consideration in the MU Libraries Undergraduate Research Paper Contest with cash prizes of $250 for 2nd place and $500 for 1st place. For more information, visit the website: http://libraryguides.missouri.edu/researchcontest

In-class presentation. On December 3 and 5, each of you will present a summary of your research paper to the class. Oral presentations are fine. I’ll have a projector if you need one. Keep the presentation about 5–7 minutes (3–4 slides) so that we can accommodate all the students in the class.

Journal. Keep a journal to observe your study species, Homo sapiens. Good science begins with good questions, and good questions often arise from careful observation. Spend time each week watching people and write down what you see. This journal is also a good place to work through problems arising from the course readings and your research paper. Your journal is for you; I will not read it. Bring your journals to class though, so you’ll have discussion material.
## Discussion Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Discussion leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 20</td>
<td>Course introduction</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 22</td>
<td>The scientific method</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 27</td>
<td>Adaptation and natural selection</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 29</td>
<td>Biology and behavior 1: Theory</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 3</td>
<td>Biology and behavior 2: Misconceptions</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 5</td>
<td>Cognition 1: Is there a “me” inside me?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 10</td>
<td>Cognition 2: In what way are we “rational”?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 12</td>
<td>Library day – Meet in Ellis Library Room 213</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>Learning 1: Why are some things easier to learn than others?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 19</td>
<td>Learning 2: Social learning and adaptation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 24</td>
<td>Life history 1: Why do some live fast and die young and others slow and old?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 26</td>
<td>Life history 2: Why do we grow old and die? Why menopause?</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1</td>
<td>Sex 1: Mate competition and mate choice</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3</td>
<td>Sex 2: Mate preferences, the evolution of same-sex behavior</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 8</td>
<td>Parenting 1: Parental investment theory, infanticide, the naturalistic fallacy</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 10</td>
<td>Parenting 2: Parent-offspring conflict, intra-genomic conflict</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 15</td>
<td>Culture 1: Cultural universals</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 17</td>
<td>Culture 2: Cultural variation</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 22</td>
<td>Culture 3: Cultural evolution, gene-culture coevolution</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24</td>
<td>Marriage 1: Marriage</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29</td>
<td>Marriage 2: Different forms of marriage</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31</td>
<td><strong>In-class peer review</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 5</td>
<td>Conflict 1: Risk-taking, intra-sexual competition, inequality and violence</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 7</td>
<td>Conflict 2: Warfare</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>Cooperation 1: Ultimate causes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 14</td>
<td>Cooperation 2: Developmental, phylogenetic, and proximate causes</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 19</td>
<td>Morality and religion 1: The psychology and function of morality</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 21</td>
<td>Morality and religion 2: The psychology and function of religious beliefs</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 3</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 5</td>
<td><strong>Student presentations</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Schedule

August 22. The scientific method

August 27. Adaptation and natural selection

Aug 29. Biology and behavior 1

Sep 3. Biology and behavior 2

Sep 5. Cognition 1

Sep 10. Cognition 2

Sep 17. Learning 1

Sep 19. Learning 2

Sep 24. Life history 1

Sep 26. Life history 2

Oct 1. Sex 1

Oct 3. Sex 2

Oct 8. Parenting 1

Oct 10. Parenting 2

Oct 15. Culture 1

Oct 17. Culture 2

Oct 22. Culture 3

Oct 24. Marriage 1

Oct 29. Marriage 2

Nov 5. Conflict 1

Nov 7. Conflict 2

Nov 12. Cooperation 1

Nov 14. Cooperation 2

Nov 19. Morality and religion 1

Nov 21. Morality and religion 2