

Human Behavioral Ecology and Cultural Evolution

Fall 2017

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COGS 269-03

CRN: 36042

Time: Wednesday, 1:30–4:20pm

Location: TBA

We can learn a lot about human behavior and culture by applying the behavioral biologist's toolkit—the theories and methods of ecology and evolution. But *Homo sapiens* is a peculiar sort of animal. We cooperate with non-kin on a vast scale. We learn from one another both during and after our extensive childhoods. We communicate complex ideas and accumulate cultural innovations. Our approach to studying these aspects of human behavior must therefore be slightly different from one employed to study the behavior of other species. In this course, we will discuss foundational and cutting edge topics in two complementary approaches: *human behavioral ecology* and *cultural evolution*. Our goal is to begin to develop a more nuanced understanding of human behavioral ecology and cultural evolution, including some of the methodological approaches involved in their study. This graduate-level, discussion-based course lies at the intersection of several disciplines, and is open to anyone interested in human behavior, evolution, and culture.

Topics include:

Gene-culture coevolution

Psychological adaptations for culture

Cultural adaptations to environment

The evolution of language

The evolution of technology

The evolution of religion

Large-scale human cooperation

Norms and institutions

Signals and group identity

Human mate choice

Childrearing and development

Culture in non-human species

Technical advisory: Formal approaches are essential when theorizing about complex systems. Therefore, many of our discussions will include papers employing mathematical and computational modeling.

